ARGUMENTS THAT MATTER: A PLACE-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING ARGUMENT WRITING TO RURAL STUDENTS

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"*My family's store needs help*," Beth explained to the rest of her sixth-grade class. *"For years and years—going back to my grandparents—my family's owned the general store a few miles from here over by the highway. We've always had people come in to shop—some are local people and some are people going by on the highway. We don't have as many shoppers now, though, because the new Wal-Mart can sell things for cheaper prices. I want to argue that the government should do something to help small stores. If they don't, small stores like my family's won't exist anymore."*

Beth recently made this statement during a discussion on argument writing at Henry Middle School, the rural middle school she attends in a southern state. (In this manuscript, pseudonyms are used for the school, students, and teachers described.) In accordance with the Common Core State Standards and other rigorous state standards, Henry Middle School has chosen to make argument writing a major instructional focus. While many schools have made this same choice, Henry Middle is unique because of its decision to use place-based pedagogy in combination with instruction focusing on argument writing. To further understand Henry Middle School's decision, we considered the importance of place-based pedagogy and the significance of argument writing.

Place-Based Pedagogy as Culturally Relevant Instruction

Place-based pedagogy is a form of culturally relevant instruction that connects the realities of place to students' learning. The curricular relevance facilitated by place-based pedagogy can be especially useful when working with rural students, whose educational experiences are fraught with challenges, such as funding inequities (Jimerson 211), limited access to educational resources (Gibbs 61), and rural poverty (Johnson and Strange 16). Culturally relevant pedagogy should be a hallmark of language arts instruction, but, in many cases, "culturally relevant" has become synonymous with or limited to multicultural literature. One way to expand thinking on "culturally relevant" is to consider the meaningful environments to which students have attachments and how those places and communities represent *cultural* opportunities for instruction. In other words, place-based literacy pedagogies afford teachers with even more instructional choices to make the language arts curriculum relevant and meaningful for young people. Place-based writing allows students to explore the connections they have with their natural environment and to their community. In a sense, place-based writing instruction provides the *culturally* relevant work to become *locally* relevant, exploring the various cultures experienced in a student's family and community. Place-based advocates contend that rural students are deeply tied to locality by their "sense of place," which David Hutchinson describes as a constructed reality "informed by the unique experiences, histories, motives, and goals that each of us brings to the spaces with which we identify" (11). By drawing on their students' "sense of place," teachers can infuse relevance and community into their instruction: a practice for which Jeff Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell advocate when they advise teachers to implement curricula relevant to students' lives (285).

In addition, place-based literacy practices designed to transform an element of one's community invoke Pablo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's discussion of the emancipatory power of literacy. Students who learn through place-based instruction can develop the ability

to read the "word" and "world," a skill that Freire and Macedo explain enables students to understand not only the texts they study but also the context in which they examine (or produce) those texts (186). Gloria Ladson-Billings asserts that effective culturally-relevant instruction values students' backgrounds and communities as well as academic content (which helps students maintain their sense of identity while still achieving academic success) (160). Place-based pedagogy in rural communities accomplishes this goal, as it emphasizes students' sense of place as well as their academic achievements.

The Significance of Argument Writing

While argument writing has garnered increased attention in recent years because of the emphasis that the Common Core State Standards and other revised state standards have placed on it, this is not the only reason to teach it: research identifies a number of benefits associated with teaching students argument writing. Students who learn to write argumentative essays are able to consider multiple sides of important issues (Lunsford & Ruszkiewicz 50), evaluate pieces of evidence (Wood 22), and develop strong understandings of logic (Hillocks 25). These skills are applicable not just to middle-school argument writing but also to numerous educational and professional situations. Combining the strategies of argument writing with material that is relevant to students' lives and communities can prepare students to advocate for issues that matter to them while also teaching them key cognitive strategies associated with college/career readiness and prioritized by the Common Core State Standards.

About this Inquiry

For a six-week period, Sean Ruday made weekly visits to a rural middle school in a southern state. This school, called Henry Middle School in this manuscript, focused a great deal of its English curriculum on argument writing due to the major role this genre plays in the state's English standards. Henry Middle School's teachers and administrators identified the issue of student disengagement as a challenge on which to focus and chose to use place-based instruction

to address that goal. Prior to this particular inquiry, Sean had previously conducted professional development sessions at the school on writing instruction, as well as place-based and culturally-relevant pedagogy. This inquiry was designed to address the following questions:

1. How does a rural middle school connect the principles of place-based learning to argument writing instruction?
2. What are students' and teachers' experiences with this instruction?

Data Generation

Sean collected the following data for this inquiry over six visits to Henry Middle School: six lesson observation transcripts, three student focus-group transcripts, and one teacher focus-group transcript. Each lesson observation and focus group was audio recorded and then transcribed by Sean. There were six total English classes at Henry Middle School at the time of this inquiry: two sixth grade classes, two seventh grade classes, and two eighth grade classes; Sean observed each of those classes once. In addition, he conducted focus groups with students from each grade; each focus group lasted approximately one hour and consisted of six students. The students in these focus groups were selected by the school's English teachers and were designed to represent a wide range of student ability levels. The teacher focus group was made up of Henry Middle School's three English teachers and lasted one hour.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data and reach a developed understanding of how the students and teachers at Henry Middle School experienced place-based argument writing, we used deductive coding informed by the various possible domains of a sense of place: the biophysical, psychological, sociocultural, and political/economic (Ardoin 113). We considered ways students can draw from these various dimensions as they develop their writing and how teachers can make use of these domains in their instruction. We analyzed the role place played

in students' constructions of arguments and in teachers' argument-writing instruction, reflecting on whether the "place" arguments students made and teachers facilitated were about the environmental aspects of a place (biophysical), personal experience in a place (psychological), the cultures/histories within a place (sociocultural), and politics/advocacy for a place (political/economic). In addition to coding for these place domains, we also analyzed the data for particular instructional practices such as conferring, modeling, mentor text use, and other components of writing instruction that emerged.

Overview

The structure of this manuscript emerges from our interest in providing readers with detailed understandings of students' and teachers' experiences with place-based argument writing while also sharing our findings and analyses. With these goals in mind, we have organized the piece in four sections:

- "Classroom Snapshots," descriptions of lessons taught by the English teachers of Henry Middle School that apply the idea of place-based instruction to argument writing. There are three snapshots in this section, one describing each of the school's English teachers.
- "Focus Group Snapshots," excerpts from the four focus groups conducted as part of this inquiry (one each with selected students from each grade and one with the school's English teachers).
- "Findings," the three findings that emerged from our analysis of the data.
- "Discussion," thoughts on the limitations and effects of this inquiry, including key takeaway ideas educators can apply to their instruction.

Classroom Snapshots

In this section, we present three classroom snapshots designed to help readers understand what place-based argument writing instruction can look like in action.

Snapshot One: Ms. Atkins, Sixth Grade Teacher

"You're going to love this next writing unit," Ms. Atkins exclaims to her students, beginning her lesson on argument writing with her sixth graders. "We're going to be working on argument writing." Her students nod attentively as she continues: "One of the first—and most important—parts of argument writing is thinking about what you might want to argue. Who here likes to argue?"

Most of the students in the class raise their hands, many of them smiling. "I thought so," continues Ms. Atkins. "We're going to spend a lot of time brainstorming possible topics and thinking about the features of a good argument essay. However, I want to start by thinking aloud and modeling for you an example of how someone might come up with an argument essay topic."

Several students sit up and track Ms. Atkins with their eyes, clearly engaged in this mini-lesson. "One topic that I'd like to argue about has to do with the Fall Festival (a yearly festival held each October in this community that features a parade, vendors, games, and activities). I saw a bunch of y'all at the Fall Festival last year."

Ms. Atkins writes "Fall Festival" on the whiteboard and then continues, "One thing that I noticed about this past year's Fall Festival was all of the big, national chains that had vending booths set up. Chick-Fil-A and Dominos had booths set up there last year. While Chick-Fil-A and Dominos both have good food, the Fall Festival is a local festival that celebrates our community, so I think the festival should do more to get more local vendors there. Maybe they could charge the local vendors less money or give them the first chance to reserve a booth. We have great restaurants in this community and I think it would be best if a local festival featured these local restaurants instead of national ones."

Next, Ms. Atkins writes "Argument: Help local restaurants Sell Food at Fall Festival instead of national chains" on the whiteboard.

She then asks the students, "What did you notice about the think-aloud I just did?"

"You talked about something that matters to you," responds a student.

"That's right," replies Ms. Atkins. "I talked about an issue that matters to me, one that's relevant to my life. Next, y'all are going to start brainstorming possible topics for your argument essays. While you do that, I want you to think about what matters to you—that's going to help you come up with good ideas for argument essays."

Snapshot Two: Ms. Rhett, Seventh Grade Teacher

"Good morning, everyone," Ms. Rhett, Henry Middle School's seventh grade English teacher, greets her first-period class. In the previous day's class, Ms. Rhett and her students discussed the attributes of effective argument writing and how to identify strong and relevant argument writing topics. For homework, she asked the students to bring in some possible topics about which they'd like to argue. "Let's get started with some of the argument topics you wrote down for homework. Who wants to start with an example?"

Student hands shoot up around the room; Ms. Rhett calls on a young man towards the back of the class who says, "My topic's about the benefits of participating in football."

"Very interesting," responds Ms. Rhett. "Tell us more."

"Well," continues the student, "A bunch of people say that kids shouldn't play football anymore because it's too dangerous, and I get that some people think that way, but there are so many great things that come from playing football. I want to argue that football's a great sport with a bunch of benefits."

"Very well said," replies Ms. Rhett. "I love that you're picking a topic that you really care about. I also noticed that you mentioned what people who oppose football might say, such as safety issues. That's another important part of argument writing—acknowledging what people who oppose your argument might say—and you did a nice job there."

Another student in the class raises her hand and excitedly shares her argument writing topic: "My idea has to do with football, too, but kinda in a different way."

"Okay, tell us more," Ms. Rhett probes.

"I think the high school (there is one high school in the town where Henry Middle School is located) should expand its football stadium. The football stadium is like the meeting place for everyone who lives here. Even in middle school, we all meet each other at football games, and my brother, who's in college now, and his friends all meet up at the games when they're back home. The stadium's small, though, so I want to argue it should be bigger so people can meet there if they want to."

"An excellent idea," responds Ms. Rhett. "That's another great example of picking a topic you really care about and explaining how you'd argue for it. Really nice work, both of you who shared your ideas."

Snapshot Three: Ms. Bryan, Eighth Grade Teacher

"You guys have been doing great work in all of our discussions about argumentative essays," Ms. Bryan tells her eighth graders, "but today I get to really see what you've done and talk with you about your drafts. While you guys work on your drafts, I'm going to confer with you individually. I'll meet with as many of you as I can and talk with you about how you're doing up to this point. I'll ask you to tell me your topics and summarize what you've done so far. I'll probably ask you a few questions and make some suggestions."

The students take out their notebooks and continue working on the drafts of their argumentative essays, which they began writing in the previous day's class, as Ms. Bryan circulates the room. She sits down with a student named Rachel and checks in: "Rachel! How are things going so far?"

"Real good. I'm liking writing about the topic I picked."

"What topic did you decide on?"

"About the new highway they're talking about building, the one that would take out part of Taylor Park." Ms. Bryan asks Rachel to summarize her ideas and Rachel responds, "I'm arguing against it. I

think that park is important because kids love playing there and sometimes people have get-togethers in the little shelters they have. My cousin had a birthday party there last year and it was real nice."

"Great job of summarizing this argument," Ms. Bryan responds. "Have you thought about the counterarguments that your opposition might make?"

"Yeah, I have," replies Rachel. "I know people want this highway expanded so that it's easier to pass by this area on the way to other places, but those people need to also think about the people of this area. We matter, too, and the park is important to a lot of us."

"Awesome job," says Ms. Bryan. "That's a really nice job of thinking about a possible counterargument and how you'd respond to it. I love how strongly you advocate for the people of this area."

Focus Group Snapshots

In this section, we present snapshot descriptions of the four focus groups conducted at Henry Middle School as part of this inquiry. The first three snapshots highlight focus group conversations by the sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students, respectively, while the fourth identifies key focus group conversations by the school's English teachers. These focus group excerpts are included to provide further insight into the students' and teachers' experiences with place-based argument writing.

Sixth Grade Focus Group Snapshot

Sean: Thanks, all of you, for coming to this focus group. So, you've just finished writing argument essays. What did you notice about this writing unit?

Collin: Ms. Atkins talked a lot about us writing about things that we can care about.

Casey: Yeah, totally.

Sean: Does that usually happen?

Casey: Not this much. We did it a little before, but, like, this time, she really talked to us about arguing for things that matter to us.

Riley: Yeah, it was really cool. It felt like we were really talking about things that matter around here.

Sean: I'm interested in something you just said, "Around here." Can you say more about that?

Riley: Yeah, our teacher really was into us writing about things that relate to Henry Middle School or other things in Henderson County (a pseudonym for the county in which Henry Middle School is located).

Sean: Did you like writing about those things?

Riley: Yeah, I really did. It felt like we were really doing things that were important because we were talking about writing about real things. I really liked it.

Seventh Grade Focus Group Snapshot

Andrew: This assignment we did (referring to the argument essays the students wrote) isn't like normal English class stuff.

Sean: Can you expand on that?

Andrew: Yeah, to me, English class is supposed to be vocabulary quizzes, grammar tests, reading comprehension questions, that kind of thing. I never liked English, but I liked this.

Brittany: Me, too. This didn't feel like school, it felt relevant, current, like the opposite of what's usually done in school.

Sean: So, you see what's usually done in school as the opposite of relevant and current?

Brittany: Totally. Those [state standardized] tests they make us take—definitely not relevant and current. They're basically the opposite.

Sean: Do you all think students' experiences in school would be different if more of the work they did was current and relevant to their lives?

(All students in the group state agreement, some nod vigorously.)

Kayla: There's no doubt it would be different. School is usually school, and that's separate from home and things like that. Sometimes teachers try to make things relatable to our interests, but this assignment was the first time schoolwork really seemed to me similar to out-of-school.

Brittany: I'd love love love to do more things like this, where we think about what's going on in our community and our lives. Plus, I learned a lot too, much more than I do from the quizzes and tests and stuff. I think I'll remember a lot more about argument writing than the test we had on a book we read at the beginning of the year.

Eighth Grade Focus Group Snapshot

Jake: Two years ago, we wrote persuasive essays, but I didn't really like them as much as I liked doing these.

Sean: What was different?

Jake: The topics. For that one, our teacher—she doesn't work here anymore—she gave us a worksheet with a list of persuasive essay topics. Do y'all remember them?

Ashlee: Yeah, they just weren't real interesting. I think the one I did was about wearing hats in school. Sure, wearing hats in school would be cool, but I don't care that much.

Sean: So how are the topics of the essays you just finished different from those?

Bryan: The essays we wrote with Ms. Bryan, they were different because of how much she emphasized us writing about stuff we care about. When we did persuasive essays before, it was all, 'Write a persuasive essay because you're supposed to write a persuasive essay.' With this project we just did with Ms. Bryan, it was more like 'Write this argument essay because you have something to say. You have something to argue about. Just make sure it's something you care about.'

Rachel: I know! I loved how, with Ms. Bryan, she really wanted us to write about things we cared about. I wrote about how I don't want the highway that would take out Taylor Park to be built. The world isn't just about people trying to get through places like this to bigger cities. People who live here also matter. Ms. Bryan and this writing assignment gave me a chance to talk about this.

Teacher Focus Group Snapshot

Sean: Congrats, you all. You did a great job on this argument writing project. The students did great work and seemed to love it.

Ms. Atkins: I thought modeling for the students was so important. I don't think they've really done anything before with place-based writing and I felt that modeling for them what place-based argument writing can look like really helped them.

Ms. Bryan: That was my experience also. I've always been a fan of the whole gradual release in teaching, where you show the students something, do it with them, and then ask them to try it on their own. I don't do the gradual release as much as I should in general, but I was conscientious about doing it with this unit and it really helped.

Sean: I wonder what teaching argument writing would be like in a more diverse school. Would it be harder to model place-based argument writing in that kind of environment?

Ms. Rhett: Honestly, I don't think it would matter. Let me tell you why I think that. Even though our students are from the same area and a lot of them have similar backgrounds, they still have different things they're passionate about.

Ms. Bryan: I know what you mean. One thing that really stuck out to me was how many different things students wanted to write about in their argument essays. Even though they were all writing about topics that were relevant to them and had to do with place-based writing, they wrote about a diverse array of things. One student wrote about how much teachers here are paid and why it's important to pay teachers more, others wrote about the environment, another wrote about building a better emergency room at the local hospital because her dad had to go to the ER and it was small and understaffed. Our students are from the same community, but there are different things about the community that matter to each of them.

Findings

In this section, we present and describe the following findings that emerged from our analysis of the data collected during this inquiry (each of which is discussed below):

1. Students' arguments represented many domains of place.
2. The common thread among students' arguments was a sense of social activism.
3. Students' explorations of different domains of place were facilitated by the teachers' instruction.

Finding One: Students' Arguments Represented Many Domains of Place

Instead of focusing solely on a particular feature of place such as biophysical, psychological, or socio-cultural, the students' place-based arguments represented a wide range of domains. In a focus group discussion, Ms. Bryan explained that this did not surprise her:

> Some people might think, 'Oh, all these students are rural, so they'd all do the same things for place-based argument writing,' but that's definitely not the case. They all wrote about different things, about different aspects of place. I expected this because of the different personalities, interests, and values they all have.

Students also acknowledged the various domains they and their peers addressed in their argument essays; in the eighth-grade focus group, Rachel discussed this phenomenon:

> *I loved how everyone wrote about different things on their argument essays. I wrote an argument against the new highway, someone else wrote about building a Civil War museum, and another person wrote that we should have more sports teams for girls in our school.*

Another student, an eighth grader named Danielle, expressed a similar sentiment:

> *I wrote my argument essay on how we need a bigger and better emergency room at [the local hospital], and I was the only one who wrote about anything like that. I thought that was very cool, because when people said what they were writing about, it was like they were showing what they were about. This project let all of those different ideas really shine through.*

All of these comments reveal the range of domains represented in the students' argument essays and suggest the importance of acknowledging the different forms that one's sense of place can take. As Ms. Bryan asserted, it would be easy to assume that rural students from the same community may all feel strongly about similar aspects of place, but reductionist thinking like this would be contrary to students' authentic selves—or, as Danielle explained, what individual students are "about." The specific domains and topics represented in the argument writing of Henry Middle School students speak to the diversity of their unique experiences, values, and perceptions.

This finding provides an important insight about the complexity and nuance embedded in these students' senses of engagement and cautions against teachers making generalizations in place-based and culturally relevant instruction. The most effective instruction that integrates students' out-of-school lives, home cultures, and individual identities does not assume that students have particular interests because they possess certain attributes or are from a particular location (Winn and Johnson 11), but rather gives students opportunities to explore aspects of their lives, interests, and cultures that are particularly meaningful to them.

The various domains of place that these students chose to address emphasizes the importance of guarding against assumptions and implicit biases, as well as the significance of ensuring that all students have opportunities to apply academic skills to aspects of their lives in ways that are personally relevant. Larry Ferlazzo (121) calls this concept a transfer of learning—an opportunity for students to apply

academic skills and strategies they learn in one setting to another. In the instructional context described in this article, students took the idea of argumentation and applied it to contexts that were meaningful and relevant to them. Such transfer-based practices provide students with opportunities to make their academic experiences personally meaningful and maximize the potential of place-based pedagogy. By giving students opportunities to explore the components of place that most resonated with them, the teachers in this study helped their students adapt the material to their individual identities and interests.

Finding Two: The Common Thread among Students' Arguments Was a Sense of Social Activism

While students at Henry Middle School explored a variety of place domains in their works, their argument essays were linked by their senses of social activism and desires to bring about actual change to some aspect of their communities. Ms. Rhett explained her belief that social activism was a unifying theme in her students' works:

> The common thread was definitely my students wanting to make a difference in some way in the community, wanting to make something better. I noticed some similarities in their topics, like some students writing about similar issues such as improving the funding to our schools or enhancing something about the appearance of the town, but there were so many unique distinctions to all of the students' essays as well. Nobody wrote about exactly the same thing, but everyone's essays were about enhancing something in this community.

Ms. Rhett's observation was echoed in the responses of many students who asserted that, while their particular topics were different, a desire to enhance some part of their communities was present in all of their works. For example, a seventh grader named Brittany noted, "*My classmates and I wrote about a lot of different topics, but all the topics had something in common: they all were about making things here [in the community] better*." Kayla, another seventh grader, expressed a

similar sentiment, "*I think we were all united in this [argument writing assignment] because we all argued for things that we think can make life better in our school or in this county. I thought that was really cool.*"

The emphasis on social activism that emerged in these students' argument essays echoes Randy Bomer and Katherine Bomer's call for curriculum that is more aligned with social issues and opportunities for activism than traditional educational practices that focus only on skills with no connection to real world issues (11). The students at Henry Middle School successfully valued their individual interests while also advocating for their community in general. The success that Henry Middle School's students had when combining students' individual interests and opportunities for personally relevant advocacy suggests that these two entities are important to student engagement and success. Student choice is an important component of effective, high-interest writing instruction (Fletcher and Portalupi 38), but, for these students, the combination of choice and the framework of community-based advocacy facilitated student engagement and success.

Writing experiences like these students had can help young people grasp the emancipatory power of literacy (Friere and Macedo 185) in a relevant and engaging way that helps them see their work in English class as meaningful to their individual lives. For an illustration of this, recall Brittany's comment from the seventh-grade focus group snapshot about place-based argument writing: "*this didn't feel like school, it felt relevant, current, like the opposite of what's usually done in school*."

These students' writing experiences speak to the importance of representation in the materials and activities with which students engage in school. In this project, the students at Henry Middle School felt like their identities and interests were represented through the instruction and assignments that called for them to advocate for issues of particular importance to them. The importance of students' backgrounds and cultures is often addressed in discussions of reading instruction, such as Rudine Sims Bishop's statement that "readers often seek their mirrors in books" (ix). While the literature that students encounter in school

is often taken to task for only representing dominant cultures (Tschida et al. 28), the experiences of the Henry Middle School students suggest that such a perspective should also be applied to writing instruction. The place-based pedagogy used to instruct these students gave them opportunities to see important, community-oriented issues in their instruction and provided them with support that helped them address important issues in their own lives and communities. It is also important to note that the origins of place-based instruction in environmental or outdoors education have long advanced the idea that lessons focused on community engender greater civic mindedness. This study suggests that, in addition to making the content more relevant, place-based writing tasks can also promote the principles of citizenship.

Finding Three: Students' Explorations of Different Domains of Place Were Facilitated by the Teachers' Instruction

The instruction delivered by English teachers Ms. Atkins, Ms. Rhett, and Ms. Bryan played a major role in the fact that the students of Henry Middle School explored distinct domains in their argument essays. Riley, a sixth grader, asserted that teacher modeling was important to her feeling empowered to explore place domains that mattered to her:

> *It was totally great that Ms. Atkins showed us examples of her argument essay while she talked to us about writing ours. She told us about her idea and then showed us examples of her first draft, her revisions, and her final draft. This made me feel like I could write a good argument essay, too. I saw her write about something that mattered to her and I was like, 'I can write about something that matters to me.'*

Ms. Atkins was pleased that Riley recognized this in her instruction and concurred that this was an important aspect of her approach:

> I'm thrilled that she noticed that and felt the way she did. That's exactly what I was going for, to help the students feel able to explore place domains they care about by showing them my work and my ideas.

Similarly, the other English teachers at Henry employed similar modeling strategies to help their students feel comfortable and able to explore meaningful place domains in their works; Ms. Bryan commented that she "noticed the students really liked seeing an example" of an argument essay because "it helped them think of all the different things they could write about. Seeing my example," she continued, "helped them realize they can go in so many ways with this." Ms. Rhett felt similarly, noting, "Sometimes kids think teachers are looking for just one topic, like there's a 'right' topic. I think showing the students an example of an argument essay helped them understand there are different topics you can pick."

However, the teachers also noted a caveat to modeling argument essays for students; Ms. Rhett explained:

> It was really important, though, for me to tell the students that they don't need to write about the same topic I was. I wanted to make sure they know that the topic I was showing them was an example, not an expectation.

Ms. Atkins's comments on the topic echoed this idea: "Yes, that's really important. I told my students that I was writing about something that matters to me and that, similarly, they should write about something that matters to them." Ms. Bryan agreed that it is important for teachers to be very clear when telling students to explore topics of their interest instead of replicating topics their teachers have modeled: "Sometimes kids see something a teacher has done and say, 'Oh, that's the topic [the teacher] wants me to write about. Because of this, it's definitely important that teachers tell students to explore their interests, not the teacher's interest."

These instructional practices that value students' unique and individualized place-based interests align with the idea of moving

beyond a single-story perspective in which only the perspectives of the dominant culture are shared and privileged (Adichie 2009). Up to this point, the idea of disrupting the single-story framework has been primarily applied to the materials students read (see Tschida, Ryan, and Ticknor). Through their instruction, Ms. Atkins, Ms. Rhett, and Ms. Bryan applied the idea of disrupting the single-story framework to writing pedagogy: these teachers showed their students that they could explore issues that mattered to them and that they were not limited to specific topics. A single-story framework that only privileges dominant cultural perspectives might communicate to rural students such as those described in this study that their unique experiences and identities are not encouraged in school; however, the modeling that these teachers provided ensured that such a perspective did not exist in their classrooms.

Ms. Atkins, Ms. Rhett, and Ms. Bryan's instructional practices successfully combined teacher modeling with instructions that students should explore topics of their own interests in their argument pieces, allowing for the students of Henry Middle School to benefit from both the clear expectations that accompany modeling and the engagement associated with exploring relevant, high-interest topics. The modeling these teachers provided facilitated their students' chances of success and their levels of engagement. By modeling what an effective argument essay looks like and how to successfully navigate the writing process, they gave their students clear expectations and understandings of what they would need to do to achieve similarly successful results. In addition, the fact that these teachers modeled what it looks like to select a high-interest, personally relevant writing topic conveyed to their students that they should also select topics that are meaningful and relevant to them, a practice that maximized student engagement and valued their individual identities and perceptions of place, thereby guarding against the presence of a single-story perspective.

Discussion

This inquiry into place-based argument writing, while modest in size and scope, provides promising results. Further work on this

topic can expand on our findings by conducting larger-scale studies that go beyond the scope of one instructional unit in a single school. It would be interesting to study how teachers adapt place-based argument writing activities over time, analyzing what adaptations they make based on what they identify as successful and problematic. Similarly, a study that follows students as they write place-based argumentative works in multiple grades and analyzes the ways their works develop could provide insights into not only their development as writers but also their increased understandings of what place-based argument writing is and can look like. In addition, a larger-scale study that analyzes how these instructional practices are enacted across a wider range of schools and students could further shed light on what educators can learn from these practices.

This inquiry makes important contributions to the growing body of literature on place-based learning because of the information it provides about the variety of topics represented in students' essays, the spirit of social activism present in all students, and the instructional practices used by the Henry Middle School teachers to facilitate students' explorations of distinct place domains while also providing them with clear expectations of both place-based writing and argument writing in general. Based on our findings related to the students and teachers of Henry Middle School, we recommend that teachers take advantage of the opportunities that place-based argument writing instruction provides. Argument writing instruction that allows students to explore the domains of place most relevant to them, integrates the principals of social action, and uses teacher modeling to demonstrate the possibilities and potential of place-based argument writing can result in the engaged students and meaningful work that took place at Henry Middle School.

We present two key takeaway ideas related to place-based writing instruction that address important ideas that we feel educators can glean from our inquiry:

1. Don't generalize students' interests.
   An essential component of our findings is the importance of acknowledging the diversity of student interests in a

specific setting. It can be easy for educators to approach a particular student population and make assumptions that those students would find a certain topic, idea, or practice relevant because the students possess certain attributes, but research advises against making those assumptions, noting the distinct natures of all students, even those appearing to possess many common attributes (Ruday and Azano 97). This inquiry further supports the importance of valuing students' individual backgrounds and interests and guarding against making generalizations about students' passions, experiences, and knowledge based on their locations and demographics. The idea of avoiding generalizations is especially relevant to teachers working with rural students: while it could be thought that rural communities, because of their smaller population and shared reference points, could primarily contain individuals with the same or similar interests, our work advises against this. Individuals, such as our students, can experience the domains of place in a variety of ways. The best instruction will account for and embrace this.

2. Combine choice with opportunities for advocacy.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of students' individual areas of interest, our study shows that the opportunity to advocate for the importance of those interests is an important aspect of student engagement and meaningful instruction. Place-based writing is a great vehicle for this combination of choice and advocacy, as it allows for students to identify topics in their communities that matter to them and argue for their importance to a wider audience. We encourage teachers to apply a place-based focus to argument writing instruction to maximize the effectiveness of both of these instructional components; in this inquiry, the students' place-based writing would not have been as meaningful without the opportunity for them to argue for its importance and would have lacked

a strong sense of purpose if not connected to their communities and backgrounds.

This case study provides not only insights into meaning making for rural students but also showcases how place or community can provide rich opportunities for argumentative writing. Yet, these examples are not limited to rural learners. Place-based pedagogies are applicable to students in any context. It is important for young people to consider the ecologies and economies, the communities and contexts in which they live and learn. Educators can take some key "next steps" based on this study by giving students opportunities to write for authentic audiences and purposes. For example, students could give TED-talk style presentations about the place-based topics most significant to them or capitalize on their new literacies by creating websites that include their argument essays and other supplementary information, such as relevant pictures and information about the author of the piece and why that individual is drawn to the topic.

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