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Impacts of an Online Learning Community on the Way Students Communicate

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Impacts of an Online Learning Community on the Way Students Communicate

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this action research study was to describe one advanced placement (AP) high school literature unit and student-participants' perceptions of technological communication in that English Language Arts (ELA) unit. The site of the research was West-Oak High School in Westminster, South Carolina. Student-participants are accustomed to electronic communication. The participant-researcher designed and implemented a blended AP ELA curriculum unit for Shakespearean Drama to combine an online learning discussion with face-to-face discussions aimed at observing whether these students are able to improve their ability to construct defensible verbal and written arguments. Data collections included a series of observations and questionnaires strategically placed throughout the unit, after altering the means of communication, as well as a Teacher Research Journal, added to after each class meeting. The findings indicate that there is an observable difference in person-to-person communication while the OLC is actively in use. An Action Plan for ELA high school teachers to implement blended technology units includes Likert-type scaled surveys, interviews, and teacher-researcher observations.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Modern technology has changed the way that people communicate with each other. With the constant improvements to smartphones and apps, and the ever-widening span of venues by which one can communicate on the Internet, it is becoming easier to communicate with people in ways that do not involve actually seeing or speaking directly to the person. A significant majority of graduating high school seniors use some sort of social media on a daily basis. According to a Niche.com (2014) survey of members of the high school class of 2014, almost 70% of graduating seniors use some sort of social media on a daily basis. Additionally, Bolkan (2014) reported a sharp decrease in browser-based usage, while texting and social apps have increased dramatically; however, use has not increased on desktop or laptop computers. This means that the majority of this usage is taking place on personal or handheld devices, such as smartphones or tablets. While researchers have sought to incorporate these devices into the classroom setting through apps like StudyBlue and Evernote, these devices remain more of a distraction to teachers than an ally.

Current educational methods are akin to forcing puzzle pieces into a portrait they are not intended to depict. The overlay of the current system in the United States is antiquated, and so dramatically weakened by appeasement that it has nearly made itself irrelevant. The changes that need to be made include a dramatic rethinking of the way we teach. While educators consider so many different aspects of what an all-encompassing plan for learning looks like, the world that students know is not the same

world in which today's educators grew up. School systems aim to prepare students for the 21st century workplace, but often do no more than have the students play typing games on 15-year-old desktop computers.

In the modern world, many individuals carry a device capable of instant access to almost any information required. Within seconds, an individual can have a sentence translated in French, learn how to factor a polynomial, and read a summary of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The modern student spends much time memorizing facts, but not learning why that information is valuable. What students need to learn are the fundamental skills of functioning in a society, such as reading for comprehension, developing an argument, communicating thoughts, and defending opinions.

According to the South Carolina Department of Education, English is a 4-year required course for students seeking a high school diploma. Consequently, Advanced Placement Literature and Composition is where the best and brightest Seniors typically end their high school English careers. In AP Lit, students read, analyze, and explicate a variety of literary pieces from different genres and schools of thought. Students are not, however, always able to formulate an opinion when there is no definite right or wrong answer.

Problem of Practice Statement

As technology has increased in usefulness and effectiveness, so too has society's reliance upon it. AP Literature students at West-Oak High School, a public high school in Westminster, SC, have never known a world without texting and/or Google, and so their reliance on the effort of individual research barely extends beyond using a smartphone. To that end, the way they communicate has altered and become far less

personal, which effects the way they talk to each other, and the way they think on their feet. The problem of practice of this dissertation, therefore, was to reverse the implementation of technology into the classroom setting, starting with a heavy reliance and gradually working to minimal reliance, observing how communication between these 24 students changes.

Research Question and Objectives

The question that the teacher-researcher sought to answer was, “What impact does the gradual elimination of technology have on interpersonal communication in the classroom setting?” The researcher aimed to determine if the incorporation of technological communication makes a difference in how the same students communicate with each other in the classroom setting.

Purpose of the Study

Horn, Staker, and Christensen (2015) argued that there are three main reasons why American schools have reached their tipping point: (a) desire for personalization, (b) desire for access, and (c) desire to control costs (p. 11). The simplified solution is the blended classroom, or a classroom that is partially personal and partially conducted via online means.

The framework of the current action research was such that the teacher-researcher intends to design and build a Web-based multimedia platform wherein students can present and discuss their ideas with each other online. The site was based through Google’s Blogger service, which allowed the students to access the site freely with their school email addresses. As reading assignments are scheduled and completed, students were asked to write two blog posts. The first was a 200-word analysis, where the student

made an assertion about a particular aspect of the piece. The second blog post was in response to a classmate's assertion, either in agreement and showing textual evidence to support the stated belief, or in disagreement and showing textual evidence that would discredit the claim.

Once students become comfortable with the technological aspect of the course, assignments became less reliant on technology and more reliant on the discussions held in the classroom. Students were eventually doing the same activity, but instead of typing the words out on a computer, they were speaking them out loud in front of their peers.

Scholarly Literature

Essentially, the theoretical framework for this action research was a push-pull between the teacher-centered classroom (Positivism) and the student-centered classroom (Constructivism). Additionally, the work of Lev Vygotsky and his Zone of Proximal Development played a major role in the foundation of the research. Vygotsky defined the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). It is this ZPD that the current researcher attempts to have the AP students reach, maintain, and flourish in.

Students often lack interpersonal communication skills, and are more comfortable with is communication via technological means, such as social media or texting. It is in the area between these two that this action research seeks to do its work. Therefore, the classroom setting is initially Positivist, in that the teacher gives information and the student contemplates it, but rarely will make the situation interactive. The Online

Learning Community is thus Constructivist, in that a community is created and the roles of teacher and student are essentially equal, with the students being responsible for their own learning.

Key Words / Glossary

Assessment. An assessment is any activity or assignment within a classroom setting, used to measure the progress of individual students, and the speed at which the learning community is advancing and comprehending concepts. Palloff and Pratt (2007) wrote that an evaluation is “an ongoing process” and is useful to “surface gaps in course material or in learners’ ability to grasp that material” (p. 205).

Blended classroom. This refers to a class that meets regularly face-to-face, but continues outside via digital means. Students interact with each other on a regular basis, both in person, and via the Online Learning Community. Horn et al. (2015) wrote, “Blended learning is any formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace” (p 34).

Constructivism. Constructivism describes a hands-on approach to learning. According to the Educational Broadcasting Corporation (2004), this approach describes how “people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences” (para 1).

Explication. Explication is a type of literary analysis where students will break down a work, usually poetry, into smaller pieces, in an effort to derive a greater meaning.

Online collaboration. Online collaboration describes any activity where students must rely on each other, within the confines of the Online Learning Community, to

complete a task. For example, if students must work together to develop a response, or if students are asked to respond to the ideas of each other. According to Palloff and Pratt (2007), students “should be asked to assess their own performance and to receive feedback from each other throughout the course” (p. 212).

Online Learning Community (OLC). An OLC is an organized forum for a free exchange of ideas, within the confines of an electronic vessel, such as a bulletin board system, blog, or chat room. People will discuss ideas in an open way, where all communication is visible to all other members of the community, and all members will participate. Palloff and Pratt (2007) defined an Online Learning Community as a “virtual environment for participants in which these elements [honesty, responsiveness, relevance, respect, openness, an empowerment] are present, group members can feel safe in expressing themselves without fear of how they will be perceived, allowing for active, rich discussion” (p 22).

Positivism. Ganly (2009) wrote that Positivism is “a teacher centered philosophy that rejects intuition, matters of mind, essences, and inner causes. This philosophy relies on laws of matter and motion as valid, and bases truth on provable fact. It is also known as logical positivism” (para 3).

Potential Weaknesses

The study itself maintained credulity in design and implementation, but suffered from the narrowness and homogeneity of the sample. The class being comprised completely of Gifted and Talented students meant that the results could only show the impact on one kind of student. Additionally, the class was mostly female, rural, white

students. As such, it is possible that the consistency of the results was potentially caused by the consistency of the sample.

Socio-economic factors also presented a consideration in the study's weakness. The sample was comprised of entirely white students, at a majority white school. According to school records, most come from two-parent families, with only one student on free or reduced lunch. Therefore, the impact of technology may have been minimal because these students are already comfortable and technologically fluent. As Honors students, additionally, the sampled students are invested in their education, regardless of the method; therefore, their effort is theoretically greater than the majority of students.

Finally, the researcher considered the size of the sample and the length of the study as potential weaknesses. Using such a small group leaves little room for differentiation. Consequently, the length of the study made it potentially difficult for great change or growth to be evident. Being able to conduct the study on a larger, more varied group, could potentially produce more significant results.

Significance of the Study

The professional application of the study will be the ability of educators to use technology in their classrooms, and to manufacture more meaningful conversations in the classroom setting. Ideally, through a better understanding of how high school students are comfortable communicating with each other, educators will be able to better meet them where they are, easing them out of their own comfort zones, instead of the stark contrast between what the student knows and what the teacher expects.

Meyer (2010) presented the ideas of masculinity and described how the presupposed dominance of masculinity in males leaves those who don't fit inside of the

box as outcasts and lesser humans. This is an important aspect to address in the Gifted and Talented classroom, as they are predominately female in population. Additionally, their peers judge the male student who in the teenage years focuses more on academics than athletics and girls as abnormal, less manly, and even homosexual. Van Houtte (2004) concluded, “It has been shown that boys tend to achieve less than girls because they experience a culture that is far less study orientated than the culture that girls experience” (p. 409).

The idea for this study stemmed from a particular student in the teacher-researcher’s class who never participated in classroom discussions. She was one of the brightest in the class, but her quiet nature made whatever thoughts she had wholly irrelevant to her classmates, as she would never share them aloud. While her in-class demeanor was such, she would regularly email me after a class, explaining to me what she would have said, were she confident enough to have said it. When I mentioned to the class that a student was doing this, trying to coax her out of her shell, a couple of others started doing the exact same thing. It was not that they did not care, and it was not that they did not understand—it was simply that they were not confident enough or socially mature enough to share an idea in person and potentially have to defend it.

The majority of literature courses revolve heavily around in-class discussion and out-of-class essay writing. In Advanced Placement classes, the goal is to present the material in such a way that is similar, while keeping in mind that the effectiveness of such cannot stray too far from what a high school student is familiar with, and/or capable of. Teachers must also constantly focus on implementing improved classroom practices. As fast as information travels, and technology changes our world, so too must what we

do in the classroom. Reaching students in the same old way is not an effective use of classroom time. In fact, it is a hurdle for learning.

Conclusion

Students are more comfortable communicating via technological means than via interpersonal methods. This affects the learning process in a variety of ways, particularly in the ELA classroom, where the study and analysis of literature is involved. There is a great deal of literature that addresses the issue of technology in the classroom, and how it might be used to more effectively educate the modern student.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

It is imperative to any research project to begin with the acknowledgement that all learning takes place in the parameters of humanity's collective knowledge. Any new idea does not exist without being built on the shoulders of all ideas that have come before it. Therefore, whatever this project reveals will not be isolated learning, but will become a thread in the fabric of all knowledge.

To that end, for this idea to become more meaningful, it is crucial to consider as much knowledge as possible that is relevant to the idea, so that where it fits in with what is already believed and/or argued can be fully understood. To include a literature review in a study, therefore, means that the author has done an extensive amount of research on the subject they are investigating. This gives credibility to the author by proving that they are not just speaking of their findings, but they are speaking on the topic of their findings in the context of what is already known. It is also important that the literature review show some element of disagreement with the author, so that s/he can take their position against criticism, and defend it. This, too, strengthens any academic writings. The explication of literature, and the purpose of it, truly, is to understand the world from the perspectives of all people. It is only in a variety of perspectives that real truth can be determined.

The literature review also gives the author of a study the means by which to establish parameters for their work. By analyzing the work of others, in extensive fashion, authors can eliminate redundancy, while connecting their work with closely

associated pieces. In doing this, it allows one study to speak in many different directions. For example, if this study leads to a question that is answered in another study, including said study in the current literature review will build a bridge between the two ideas, allowing interested researchers the ability to see where this new knowledge exists in the context of other learning. This, in turn, could then lead to more new learning, and increased knowledge on this subject.

The idea for any research idea is the seed, but the literature review is the stalk. It is that which the branches and leaves of new learning will grow. The literature review will provide better context for a study to make sense, and will hopefully help make sense of the other works that it references. Ideally, a quality literature review will show a critical relationship in the framework of the subject. It will provide a research space, and show how through that connectivity, the current work will make more sense, eliminate redundancy, and provide a context for whatever new learning has taken place.

Themes and Ideas

The researcher selected the literature for this action research to examine the effectiveness of an Online Learning Community on a group of Gifted and Talented students. Specifically, the researcher sought information to assess the interactions of learners, educational theory and best practices, and statistical evidence to demonstrate and supplement the value of the research, itself. The main goal was the creation, maintenance, and usage of a learning community to foster both individual and collective learning. To that end, all research is intended to make that more successful, clearly analyze results, and conscientiously apply findings to the classroom.

Points of View

Tucker, Wycoff, and Green (2017) provided an important resource for any educator looking to initiate a more blended learning experience for their students. By giving practical examples of how such a classroom would look, and explaining the benefits of the blended classroom in the modern educational system, the authors presented the path down which educators ought to be walking. Specifically, Tucker et al. (2017) recommended that “as teachers move from a traditional classroom to a blended learning model, they must be mindful of selecting technology tools that allow the flow of information, communication, collaboration, and creation to begin in one learning medium—in class or online—and extend seamlessly into the other” (p. 49). Integrating the technology into the classroom, therefore, cannot be done simply for the sake of saying that technology has been integrated. This is an important consideration, and one that is often neglected. In modern education, technological purchases and computer labs are designed so that administrators can say they are available, despite the fact that the technology is not relevant or up-to-date enough to be useful.

Tucker et al. (2014) wrote that “the most successful schools and districts recognize these distinctions among teacher groups and provide professional development opportunities accordingly” (p. 43). It is the job of the administration, then, to make the move towards a more blended classroom. To move in this direction, which Tucker et al. called critical to schools today, there must be a seismic shift in fundamental belief amongst a faculty, and not simply a rumble in a few select classrooms.

Tucker et al. (2014) also discussed what they call the “Station Rotation Model” (p. 108). This model “offers a clear avenue for traditional schools and teachers to integrate online

learning into the classroom setting, even if they have limited access to technology” (Tucker et al., 2014, p. 109). This is important to the current research, as the location of the study is a lower socio-economic area located in rural South Carolina. The model itself allows for students to move as a group, using different skills, and in a variety of environments. It also allows for them to carry work done in class to the Online Learning Community. This is important because the bridge must go both ways. It is organic for the ideas on the Online Learning Community to carry over into the classroom; therefore, it is necessary to have a way to establish this connection in the other direction. Horn et al. (2015) argued that there are three main reasons why American schools have reached their tipping point: (a) desire for personalization, (b) desire for access, and (c) desire to control costs. The simplified solution is the blended classroom, or a classroom that is partially personal, and partially conducted via online means.

Horn and Staker (2011) stated that the United States has spent over \$100 billion on computers in recent decades, without many tangible results. Additionally, by the year 2019, 50% of high school credits will be earned online in some fashion. Horn et al. referenced many primarily online retailers, who in recent years have opened up brick and mortar stores to show off their goods. Consequently, many physical stores now also have significant online presences. Horn and Staker (2011) wrote, “If students are learning U.S. history in a blended way, the online and face-to-face components work together to deliver an integrated course” (p. 35).

Horn and Staker explained how to make the connections between an Online Learning Community and the actual classroom setting/physical learning community. Most useful for the current action research were the instructions on establishing an online

culture, and the design and implementation of an effective blended classroom. The different models of blended classrooms, additionally, served the current research as potential alternatives, should the findings be that the setup proves ineffective or only minimally useful. The information that these authors presented correlates perfectly with the current study's goal to validate the virtual learning community as means by which to enhance the physical learning community.

Arney (2015) wrote, "Blended learning offers defined opportunities and spaces for teachers to work with small groups of students to address learning goals (individualization), enhance or extend the curriculum (rigor), or spend time analyzing student data (monitoring)" (p. 2). It is, therefore, a way to incorporate the technological aspects of the 21st Century with the traditional and fundamental skills that students need to be successful. Arney provided lessons to use in the classroom setting, advice on purchasing useful technology, and a plan for engaging all stakeholders in a school community.

Arney's (2015) plan for nurturing buy-in is as follows:

1. Engage principals;
2. Have principals engage their leadership teams;
3. Decide whether you're moving forward;
4. Engage the rest of the staff, and establish parameters around your work. (pp. 58-59)

While the current study did not rely on getting the entire school to "buy in," it could lead to changes within the school if it is effective action research. As Arney (2015) posited, "we want teachers providing more individualized and small-group instruction,

which can pose challenges for teachers” (p. 155). Arney (2015) posited that blending learning is “still in its infancy” (p. 205); as such, there is no one way to say what is right. It is in this space that this action research is developed. Using the ideas of blended learning can potentially influence literacy in incredible ways.

Elliot and Carroll (2009) presented a variety of methods for presenting arguments and ideas in effective and meaningful ways are suggested, all of which would be useful tools for students to have in creating and presenting their own perspectives. With a variety of catch phrases like “Let the Zone Set the Tone” and “Gesticulate Already,” these authors aimed to show students how to convey complex thought in simple words. Allowing plain talk makes anything more understandable, and teaching this to the subject group would permit them to more freely exchange their thoughts within the context of the Online Learning Community.

Elliott and Carroll (2009) recommended “the diamond” approach, which is a specific organizational pattern that the authors claimed to be most effective (p. 79). This approach includes limiting arguments to a set number of points, beginning with an attention getter, and ending with some element of action, or a point that your readers will take away, and not soon forget. While no such strategy is completely effective, it served as a potential variable in this study to enhance or hinder the already established baseline communication that students are having.

Summaries of Literature

Wilhelm (2012) unpacked the idea of subject relevancy by discussing ways in which educators can share their expertise with students in a way that will make it seem more important to them. What will bridge this disconnect, according to Wilhelm, is the

Vygotskian idea that “cognitive tools...are cultural constructions and will not be discovered naturally, what a student learns depends upon the opportunities and assistance she is offered” (Wilhelm, 2012, p. 27)

To have students read something, comprehend it, and then formulate an opinion on said material is the most crucial skill an ELA teacher can teach. Wilhelm (2012) was also a pioneer in gender differences in the ELA classroom. According to Wilhelm (2012), “the widest current gender gap for learning achievement recorded by standardized measures is in the area of literacy” (p. 1). Wilhelm cited the ETS (Educational Testing Service), which reported that “the gap in writing between eighth-grade males and females is more than six times greater than the differences in mathematical reasoning,” adding that on the 1996 National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEPs), “females outperformed males on literacy measures by 25 points on a 500-point scale” (p. 1). Wilhelm found that many boys suffered from a relevancy issue in the texts selected by their teachers. By failing to make a connection with the material, their interest level suffers, decreasing motivation and effort, and leaving them farther and farther behind in their education.

If the statistics show that girls are on the whole doing better in the ELA classroom than boys, it is possible that the emphasis on a male dominated canon actually does not make a difference. Surely, if boys are already struggling, then putting an emphasis on people that are more difficult to relate to makes the comprehension an even more difficult task. If the majority of books on a syllabus feature strong male characters, then there has to be a reason why girls do better.

Variables or Themes

In this action research, the researcher assessed the educational technique known as project-based learning. According to Armstrong (2002), “in project-based learning, students investigate rich and challenging issues and topics, often in the context of real-world problems... Concrete, hand-on experiences come together with more abstract, intellectual tasks to explore complex issues” (p. 8). That is, when the Online Learning Community is actually up and running, students will begin to take on roles within the context of the OLC’s instructions. They will relate to each other, and a hierarchy will develop therein. In observing how they interact with each other in the online arena, where they might feel less inhibited than they will in the classroom setting, it will be possible to utilize findings to enhance that personal aspect of education, while they are in the company of the teacher-researcher.

Armstrong (2002) provided numerous useful descriptions of how technology has been effectively used in the classroom and gave context for these plans, which allowed the current researcher to apply these ideas in the current study. Armstrong also included extensive insight into how communication technology can redefine the relationship between educators and learners, and how progress can continue being made outside of the four walls of the schoolhouse. In the world of the blended classroom, project-based learning is an essential tool to allow students the freedom to find their own voice, and to encourage actual learning, and not the rote memorization of facts. Despite the fact that technology has changed so much since its publication, the information in this book was extremely useful to my study.

Brookfield and Preskill (2016) wrote a book on how to keep discussions moving, which may be applied in the educational context. In addition to activities such as Jigsaws and Think/Pair/Share, the authors provided research and explanatory notes on why these activities are sound, tried, and relevant. The greater benefit of these conversational activities lies in understanding why the activities actually work.

Primary and Secondary Sources

Bennett (2001) provided an elaborated modernization of English philosopher Michael Oakeshott's metaphorical notion that the fabric of education is indeed a conversation; with one's peers, with one's teachers, with the past, and with the vast abyss of knowledge our world holds within. Bennett acknowledged the antiquated nature of Oakeshott's ideas in the modern world, but notes that it ought to be critically applied, and we should then "incorporate it within a collegial ethic of hospitality" (Bennett, 2001, p. 1). To dismiss the lessons of the past, then, is to excuse oneself from the great story of our world. To immerse oneself in these lessons, then, is akin to, as Oakeshott calls it, "becoming human" (2001, p. 1).

If Bennett's (2001) call to push students to "becoming human" is accurate, than there is no higher calling than education (p. 1). Therefore, the ELA classroom must serve as a cornerstone of any complete education, must be relatable to all students, and must teach them not only the necessary reading skills for survival, but also the human skills of empathy, bravery, compassion, and responsibility. With an extensive history of Anglo Patriarchy, however, the element of diversity is not fairly represented on many syllabi or textbooks. This being the case, the values reflected in the literature that is being taught are not always applicable in the same ways to all students, and therefore, not as relevant.

As most classic authors are white males, so too are most Protagonists. Therefore, if these characters serve as role models for “becoming human,” then it isn’t equitable for young women and minorities to have to put so much extra effort into identifying parts of themselves in these characters.

Our efforts to avoid gender stereotypes, and make people human, as Bennett (2001) posited, are actually creating a world where we are overly sensitive, dismissive of differences, and armed with steady excuses for failure. Teenagers are naturally rebellious and reticent, and may search for any reason to refuse work or disregard an assignment. Educators must consider, then, that any well-intended and logical accommodation of gender differences would actually cripple the very people it is intended to help.

Benjamin and Irwin-DeVitis (1998) posited that the modern classroom promotes passivity in girls, and that “this self-censorship is a cultural expectation; women are defined by their relationships, not by their ideas and viewpoints...Being liked, maintaining relationships, and being perceived as ‘nice’ are central as women grow up, even at the cost of knowing and speaking and acting on their own dreams and ambitions” (p. 65).

Benjamin and Irwin-Devitas (1998) pointed out that the selection of male dominated literature leads to a feeling of inferiority in female students. It is possible that this “second-class status” is what drives girls to work so much more efficiently in the classroom; they feel like they have no other choice, while boys have a sense of entitlement. This grooming begins at a young age. According to the article, “female storybook characters typically attain their goals through the assistance of others, but males achieve as a result of their own efforts” (Benjamin & Irwin-Devitas, 1998, p. 69).

Moeller (2011) echoed this sentiment by saying, “Girls focused on the characters’ personalities and their like or dislike of the characters’ interactions with others. The boys focused on interpreting the characters’ actions, identifying what happened, why the action happened, and what should or could have happened instead” (p. 480).

Modern education takes the perspective, intentionally or not, that the 21st Century world is so fast paced, complex, and technologically reliant that anything beyond the last hundred years or so is completely obsolete, and not worth the time it would take to learn it. The black and white systematic approach of standardized testing has all but removed the element of personal responsibility from schools, and thereby weakened it dramatically in the culture.

According to a recent article in *The Economist* (2015), there are three main reasons why the reading proficiency of girls is so much higher than that of boys. These reasons are:

1. Girls read more than boys;
2. Girls spend more time on homework;
3. Peer pressure.

The article cited a study by the OECD of 15-year-old boys and girls, and their performance in reading, mathematics, and science. Their findings indicated that boys did better in math, and science was roughly equal (*The Economist*, 2015). In analyzing students who struggle academically, however, boys were 50% more likely to not meet baseline scores in the three academic areas. This implies that girls are more obedient, studious, and well-behaved, while boys are more interested in things outside of school, even during school hours.

The article reasserted Wilhelm's (2002) point that boys tend to do better with a reading list that leans heavily on non-fiction work, like newspapers. In the conclusion of the article, however, is the most interesting statement; that gender stereotypes are detrimental to all students. The article concluded, "Boys in countries with the best schools read much better than girls. And girls in Shanghai excel in mathematics. They outperform boys from anywhere else in the world" (*The Economist*, 2015, para 3).

Society dictates that girls need saving, and that boys are supposed to save them. Right or wrong, these are the traditional values in our culture. The archetypes of the Princess and the Hero are firmly planted in the collective consciousness, and a significant number of people have no problem with it being there. This is why boys tend to be more interested in comic books, because superheroes—even female superheroes—save people. While girls focus on the relationships and personalities, as Moeller (2011) indicated, these are not the focus of many comics. This places unnecessary pressure on male students, who are not always capable of saving themselves, much less anyone else. This is unfair for all sides.

According to Plucknette (2013):

By addressing gender, students can begin to deconstruct the gender roles and stereotypes that are perpetuated by the literature which is included in the standard secondary English curriculum. In addressing current gender roles, students can examine their preconceptions of gender and societal expectations, effectively resulting in a change of how students view their gender and the world around them. (p. 5)

Ultimately, it is the duty of educators to make the ELA classroom a safe space for all students, regardless of gender, race, or sexual preference. Even binary gender students should be equally considered in planning a syllabus. Reading materials, therefore, should reflect all students in positive and strong ways. The way a teacher teaches also matters, in the kinds of questions they ask students, and the way they treat them, as well. It is imperative that all perspectives are represented.

The ELA classroom is an essential part of an education, both in literacy skills, cultural inclusion, and the constructs of being human. Educators should not teach to tests, or teach only minimally impactful selections. They can, however, deviate from a mostly homogenous canon, and work to move forward, both academically, and culturally.

Rickford (1999) reported on the notion that using literature that portrays minority students allows minority students to more effectively gain the knowledge that is expected. Being cognizant of this in choosing the literature of a course will allow all students to have more of a vested interest in the content, because there will be a greater relatability.

While the majority of the students in the study were white, the usefulness of minority literature also served as a means by which to introduce rural students to cultures that they might not regularly encounter during their normal lives. In understanding more about different cultures and people, these students not only learned to analyze the literature, and communicate more effectively, but to potentially use these abilities to improve society on the whole, by serving as an ally between different peoples.

Swann, Shen, and Hiltz (2006) discussed the value of collaborative assessment, and the relevancy of utilizing the online setting for such. Swann et al. discussed the

importance of simply being able to collaborate with others as a skill in and of itself, by saying that the nature of a learning community helps the educator identify certain roles that particular students might fall into. This allows the instructor to more accurately see who their students are, thereby allowing them to more successfully reach them in future lessons.

In implementing a learning community, and most useful to this study, is what Swann et al. (2006) called developing a “sense of identity and community” (p. 52) among collaborators. In pushing a variety of personalities together, there will be immediate cohesion in some relationships, and immediate resistance in others. For all students to find the experience as valuable as possible, they must be able to learn to trust and respect all, even those they might not find themselves immediately attracted to as people.

Swann et al. (2006) cited others’ work on online collaborative examinations, saying “a collaborative exam is an online exam in which small groups of 3-5 students create questions; other individual students answer these questions; the small group grades the answers to the questions they created, using a set of detailed rubrics for grading; and then the instructor review the suggest grading and rationale and assigns the final grade” (p. 54). Members of the community constantly rely on each other to perform a specific task. Each step is dependent upon each other member doing their part, so no one can move on, unless everyone moves on. This keeps the community motivated, and the teacher becomes only a guide, and not a performer.

The most crucial point Swann et al. (2006) made is that educators must get past the antiquated idea of studying and testing. The reason why this is “traditional” is because it was the best that could be done, at a certain point in history. Today, educators

have access to much greater means and much more useful ways of teaching and learning, yet they tend to hang on to antiquated methods. Through the current study, the teacher-researcher hoped to become more open to a more widely accepting perspective.

Allen and Seaman (2013) performed a comprehensive analysis of trends in online education and learning. The two authors conducted this survey in cooperation with the College Board, which analyzes trends and opinions of academic administration in effort to answer fundamental questions about the relevance and acceptance of online education. In this report, Allen and Seaman showed that trends in online learning are moving upward. According to the study, more schools are offering online courses, and enrollment is up, as well. Additionally, the idea of online pedagogy is now widely regarded as a valid way to learn, with academic administration now deeply invested in the online offerings at institutions of higher learning. From 2003 – 2011, per the report, survey respondents were asked to compare the usefulness of online learning compared to face-to-face instruction. During that time period, rankings of “inferior” decreased from 10.7 to 5.3, while rankings of “superior” increased from 0.6 to 3.7. Most interestingly, the survey conveys that rankings of “Has faculty acceptance of online learning increased?” have been somewhat ambiguous, staying around 30% since 2003, fluctuating up and down between 27.6% to 33.5% since 2002 (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Methodologies

Paloff and Pratt (2007) posited, “In order to be successful, classes conducted in an online environment must create an equal playing field” (p. 21). These authors also discussed the learning implications of educational participation in an Online Learning Community, as well as the practical considerations for their implementation,

maintenance, and degree of success. Paloff and Pratt discussed “blended” courses, as mentioned in the previous selection, but used the term “hybrid” instead.

One of the most interesting passages in the book was regarding the debate between learner-centered education, and learner-directed. This debate manifests itself in the battle of traditional “sage on the stage” teaching, and simply guiding students to the space where they can learn on their own, and as part of a community from each other. This is what the current teacher-researcher sought to explore within the current study.

Palloff and Pratt (2007) put a great deal of emphasis on clear and detailed objectives and planning when establishing an Online Learning Community. The authors put forth instructions for how to create the community so that progress is easily identifiable, and so that protocol and expectations are abundantly clear to the students who will be participating. This reference gives a significant amount of data from case studies and anecdotes to reinforce its claim that Online Learning Communities can increase participation, student engagement, and most importantly, performance.

Paloff and Pratt (2007) unexpectedly differentiated between an online facilitator and an educator. These are typically discussed as two sides of the same coin, but these authors found differences between the two, saying that the gifts that make one a good teacher may not translate into an online world. The current researcher considered this difference when developing the current action research study. The current researcher believed that in order to make this action research as all encompassing and useful as possible, the researcher also needed some insight on the skills without the lens of technology.

As someone with an undergraduate and graduate degree in literature, the current researcher's primary motivation was appreciation for the subject matter, as well as desire to spread that affection to his students. But with that amount and depth of study comes a point where one takes for granted the skills that have taken them years to develop fully. Thus, it often seems simple to teach material that is not so easy to learn. Schilb and Clifford (2005) provided a step-by-step process for how to teach such material, beginning at the start with a section titled, simply, "Why Read Literature?"

The researcher aimed to observe how communication would change between students in the context of an Online Learning Community, but the subject matter was literary in purpose. The next step will be to apply these observations and find a way to enhance the physical classroom with what the researcher learns about his students through their use of the Online Learning Community.

Thompson (2012) sought to analyze the relationship between social interaction online, and social interaction face-to-face. Results indicated that 39% of Americans spend more time communicating online rather than face-to-face. Additionally, nearly 20% of participants prefer communicating online or by text, rather than face-to-face interaction or using voice calls on the telephone. The study was compiled from a sample of more than 6000, including participants in the United States, United Kingdom, and Germany.

Perhaps the most intriguing information is that 39% of participants admit to having shared some sort of bad news over social networks; including such news as death or divorce. This demonstrates a dramatic shift in social mores, as breaking such news in person is considered the polite or socially acceptable way to do things. This contrasts

with the resulting 62% who have shared important but good news, like pregnancy or engagement.

Carr (2011) presented a look at how dependency on the Internet has affected the ability to think for oneself. The benefits of the technological era, and the ability to access the Internet from mobile devices is certainly considered a benefit of modern technology by most people. Carr, however, argued that this causes a loss of basic response skills for conversation, problem-solving skills, and cognitive development. Essentially, Carr posited that the Internet revolution has come with tradeoffs, both in terms of method and skill. The skills required to use the Internet, Carr argued, actually dull one's ability to think and reason for oneself.

Carr (2011) described how major technological innovations influenced and altered the accepted thinking of the day. Carr argued, however, that the Internet is a more complicated revolution, in that its abilities far exceed what we have hitherto known. Carr cited that the Kindle allows one to “read digital newspapers and magazines, scan blogs, perform Google searches, listen to MP3s, and, through a specially made browser, surf other Web Sites” (p. 101), as well as other functions, like purchasing new books. Most impactful, you “can click on a word or phrase and be taken to a related dictionary entry, Wikipedia article, or list of Google search results” (Carr, 2011, 102). This capability makes it much more than simply a replacement for a paper book (Carr, 2011).

Carr's (2011) motivation was to warn society that while the Internet is an incredibly useful tool, and relying on its usefulness impacts life in many positive ways, it is also detrimentally affecting the human brain. The human experience is complicated,

and includes elements of creativity, compassion, and thoughtfulness; however, it is in this capacity that humans are suffering, thanks to the convenience of modern technology.

Conclusion

Researchers have given much thought and written much about classroom communication and the effect of technology on the modern school system. While the goal of public education is to prepare students for the 21st Century world and workplace, educators must consider many factors in order to define the most useful course of action for achieving this goal. In the current action research study, the researcher aimed to explain the divide between interpersonal communication and technological communication, and how to effectively bridge the gap between the two.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In Chapter Three, the researcher will provide: (a) an overview of the problem the researcher addressed through this dissertation, (b) an elaborate explanation of the methodology of the study, (b) a breakdown of how the researcher gathered and compiled the study's data, and (d) a conclusion. The teacher-researcher utilized action research to determine how modern students communicate via technological means, and attempted to use such means to enhance interpersonal communication. The general goal of the study was to determine if the implementation of an Online Learning Community, followed by the elimination of the OLC, would have any effect on the face-to-face communication and/or in-class discussions of an AP Literature high school classroom.

Action Research Design

This action research was designed to create and build a web-based multimedia platform where students can present, and discuss, their ideas with each other online. The site was based through Google's Blogger service, which allowed the students to access the site freely with their predetermined school email addresses. As reading assignments are scheduled and completed, students were asked to write two blog posts. The first was a 200-word analysis, where the student made an assertion about a particular aspect of the piece. The second blog post was in response to a classmate's assertion, either in agreement and showing textual evidence to support the belief, or in disagreement and showing textual evidence that would discredit the claim.

Once students become comfortable with the technological aspect of the course, assignments became less reliant on technology and more reliant on classroom discussion. Students were eventually doing the same activity, but instead of writing it on a computer, they were speaking it in front of their peers.

At the end of each 10-class period, the teacher-researcher surveyed students for quantitative data via questionnaires. The questionnaires included statements that students ranked on a 5-point scale from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly.” During the first 10-day period, the researcher identified the students as either active or passive learners. This identification assisted in calculating the full impacts of the Online Learning Community on the class. Questions asked in the class revolved around literary analysis of important classical works. Questions from the instructor were either “guidance” or “progress” questions to push the class in a desired direction. “Guidance” questions push the class discussion in a certain way, and “Progress” questions change the subject. The purpose of this labeling was to increase the validity of the findings and not taint them with the manipulation of the instructor.

The teacher-researcher kept a journal after each class meeting, including direct quotes and personal observations. After gathering 10 classes worth of data, the teacher-researcher calculated the percentages of each type of questions versus each other and the percentage of teacher participation versus student participation. This quantitative data provided a baseline norm by which to measure how the online community and participation in it would effectively alter the course of classroom discussions.

As the units progress, the course became increasingly reliant on in-class discussion and increasingly less reliant on the OLC. As this transition occurs, students

were forced to adjust. The teacher-researcher noted the students' comfort with the transition via survey, class participation, and the observations of the teacher-researcher. The causal relationship between in-class communication and the usage of the Online Learning Community was evident through student participation, the degree of active learning out of students, and the level of student confidence in the ideas presented in the classroom setting. All data were quantitative in nature.

Researcher

The researcher was responsible for the creation of the Online Learning Community and the management of its use. The researcher produced quantitative data via observations over a 30-day period, with 10 days with significant use of the OLC, 10 days with a blended classroom approach, and 10 days with no OLC. The teacher-researcher designed, compiled, and analyzed the surveys. The teacher-researcher recorded the variety and frequency of students' input during every class meeting. The teacher-researcher was also responsible for the collection and calculation of the survey data.

At the end of each 10-day period, the researcher surveyed the students for further quantitative data via questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale from "disagree strongly" to "agree strongly." During the first 10-day period, the researcher identified the students as either active or passive learners based on observation. The researcher led all discussions and recorded all information, with other information recorded by a Teaching Assistant—a student not in the class, who is unaware of the full scope of the project. The teacher-researcher compiled, calculated, and compared all data.

After the 10 classes of measurement, students completed a survey regarding their participation in classroom discussion by the researcher. The causal relationship between improved in-class communication and the implementation of the Online Learning Community is evident through increased student participation, less passive learning from students, and improved confidence in the ideas presented in the classroom setting. This data were quantitative in nature, and the teacher-researcher derived this numerical data via a scaled survey of participants. The teacher-researcher compared the data from all three phases of using or not using the Online Learning Community against each other, and will then compare these against student survey responses.

Sample

The teacher-researcher conducted this study on Advanced Placement (AP) Literature and Composition students at West-Oak High School in Westminster, SC during the 2016-2017 school year. The number of students in the class is 24, and they are all Gifted and Talented high school seniors between the ages of 17-18 years old. Only one student is on free or reduced lunch, and only four come from single-parent families. All students in the class are white, and the majority is female, with only three students who identify as male. All students say they intend to attend a 4-year college or university after graduation.

Per accepted ethical standards, participation in the study is completely voluntary. The teacher-researcher obtained permission of both parent/guardian and student before the action research begins. The teacher-researcher maintained anonymity in final documents, with each participant being assigned a numerical identifier by the researcher. The teacher-researcher kept all information on a password-protected electronic device,

locked in a cabinet, accessible only by the researcher. The students and parent/guardians were free to withdraw themselves from the research at any time, without penalty. Any data collected via surveys and interviews were also be kept confidential and will remain on the same electronic device, or in the same locked cabinet, accessible only by the researcher.

Setting

According to the 2016 South Carolina Department of Education, West-Oak High School, located in Westminster, SC, is a school of just under 1,000 students. It is part of the School District of Oconee County; it is the westernmost school in the state, and is located in what is considered a rural area. West-Oak is consistently an underperforming school on standardized testing, and falls far below averages on college readiness exams (ACT, SAT).

The school's SC Report Card indicates that over 55% of the student population participates in Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF, indicating a high poverty index. As far as student conduct, WOHS is well behaved, falling far below State averages on discipline issues. Seven (7%) of students are enrolled in AP classes, though only 50.5% of these students are deemed "successful" by the College Board's standards. The school offers no online or blended classes, but does offer online credit recovery. Ninety-one to 100 percent of classrooms are listed as "wireless Internet ready," though service is regularly unreliable. Casual surveys conducted by the entire faculty have shown that nearly half of students do not have home Internet access, other than on their cellphones.

Instrumentation and Materials

The teacher-researcher produced quantitative data observations done over a 30-day period, with 10 days with significant use of the OLC, 10 days with a blended classroom approach, and 10 days with no OLC. Each 10-day period represented 7.5 hours of class time. The teacher-researcher calculated time spent using the Online Learning Community via questionnaire. The teacher-researcher recorded the variety and frequency of students' input during every class meeting.

At the end of each 10-day period, the teacher-researcher surveyed the students for further quantitative data via questionnaires. During the first 10-day period, the teacher-researcher identified students as either active or passive learners. This identification assisted in calculating the full impact of the Online Learning Community on the class. Questions asked in the class revolved around literary analysis of important classical works. Students synthesized material, developed and defended arguments, and identified metaphors and symbols within the artistic confines of literary writing. The teacher-researcher led all discussions and recorded all information, with any extra information recorded by a TA.

Questions from the instructor were either "guidance" or "progress." After the teacher-researcher gathered 10 classes worth of data, the teacher-researcher calculated the percentage of each type of questions versus each other and the percentage of teacher participation versus student participation. This quantitative data provided a baseline norm to measure how the online community and participation in it have effectively altered the course of classroom discussions. As the research progressed, this information

became less meaningful, as the teacher-researcher constantly had to keep the conversation going with minimal student input.

After the 10 classes of measurement, students completed a survey regarding their participation in classroom discussion. They explained what they liked, what they did not like, what was encouraging, and what was discouraging on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most positive. Upon completion of this, the teacher-researcher showed the students the OLC and explained the purpose and instructions to them. Once usage of the Online Learning Community was implemented, the teacher-researcher observed variations in class discussions in much the same way as before.

This action research study involved student surveys and class observations as the main forms of data collection. Should more information be needed, the researcher conducted follow-up interviews with the students. These interviews were loosely structured in an effort to seek more honest information from the students and not lead them with questioning.

The teacher-researcher collected and archived interview data through the use of a digital audio recorder. The teacher-researcher downloaded and kept all files in a password protected Dropbox account, before deleting them from the device. Information collected through the interviews were recorded and stored in the same way. The researcher will maintain written observations with all other research information in a locked filing cabinet.

As noted on the Research Planning Schedule, students answered questionnaires after every five-class period. These periods included both posting to the OLC, in decreasing frequency, and classroom discussions, in increasing frequency. The

researcher designed these questions to assess students' comfort with each and their reliance upon outside sources for their ideas and opinion defense. The researcher collected, tallied, and kept the responses in a locked filing cabinet with observation notes. The survey is available as Appendix A.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted this study on AP Literature and Composition students at West-Oak High School in Westminster, SC. The design involved observation of one specific classroom and their behavior patterns during implementation of an Online Learning Community, with the OLC active, and without an OLC. The teacher-researcher produced quantitative data via observations done over a 30-day period, with 10 days with significant use of the OLC, 10 days with a blended classroom approach, and finally, 10 days with no OLC. The number of students in the class is 24, and they are all GT high school seniors between the ages of 17-18 years old. Each 10-day period represented 7.5 hours of class time. The researcher calculated time spent using the Online Learning Community via questionnaire, producing quantitative data. The researcher recorded the variety and frequency of students' input during every class meeting.

At the end of each 10-day period, the teacher-researcher surveyed the students for further quantitative data via questionnaires. During the first 10-day period, the teacher-researcher identified students as either active or passive learners. This identification assisted in calculating the full impact of the Online Learning Community on the class. Questions asked in the class revolved around literary analysis of important classical works. Students synthesized material, developed and defended arguments, and identified metaphors and symbols within the artistic confines of literary writing. The teacher-

researcher led all discussions and recorded all information, with any extra information recorded by a TA.

Questions from the instructor were either “guidance” or “progress.” After the teacher-researcher gathered 10 classes worth of data, the teacher-researcher calculated the percentage of each type of questions versus each other and the percentage of teacher participation versus student participation. This quantitative data provided a baseline norm to measure how the online community and participation in it have effectively altered the course of classroom discussions.

After the 10 classes of measurement, students answered a questionnaire regarding their participation in classroom discussion. They explained what they liked, what they did not like, what was encouraging, and what was discouraging on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most positive. Upon completion of this, the teacher-researcher showed the students the OLC and explained the purpose and instructions to them. Once usage of the Online Learning Community was implemented, the teacher-researcher observed variations in class discussions in much the same way as before.

The causal relationship between improved in-class communication and the implementation of the Online Learning Community is evident through increased student participation, less passive learning from students, and improved confidence in the ideas presented in the classroom setting. This were quantitative in nature, as the researcher derived the numerical data via a scaled survey of participants. The teacher-researcher compared data from all three phases of using or not using the Online Learning Community against each other, then measured these data against student survey responses.

As noted on the Research Planning Schedule, students answered questionnaires after every five class periods. These periods included both posting to the OLC, in decreasing frequency, and classroom discussions, in increasing frequency. The teacher-researcher designed these questions to assess student comfort with each, and their reliance upon outside sources for their ideas and opinion defense. The teacher-researcher collected, tallied, and kept these responses in a locked filing cabinet with observation notes.

This action research study involved student surveys and class observations as the main forms of data collection. There was the possibility of follow-up interviews.

Possible follow-up questions included:

1. How does writing at a computer compare to writing in class?
2. How does posting an opinion in the OLC compare to speaking an opinion in class?
3. Which is more comfortable for you: speaking first on a subject in class, or posting first on the same subject on the OLC?
4. What are your feelings about the OLC? Do you wish we would use it more or less?
5. When you post something to the OLC, how much do you use Google or other sources to reinforce or affirm your ideas?
6. Which is more stressful for you: giving a presentation about your interpretation of a soliloquy, or posting on the OLC the same interpretation?
 - a. What if your classmates had questions? Would you be prepared to defend your assertions in either setting?

The teacher-researcher collected and archived the interview data will be through the use of a digital audio recorder. The researcher downloaded and kept all files in a password-protected Dropbox account before deleting them from the device. Information collected through the interviews were recorded and stored in the same way. The researcher will maintain written observations with all other research information in a locked filing cabinet.

Data Analysis and Reflection

The teacher-researcher compiled all survey data and observational data immediately after surveys are given. The researcher will share the results with no one, including the TA or students. Data collection included a series of observations and questionnaires strategically placed throughout the unit, after altering the means of communication, as well as a Teacher Research Journal, added to after each class meeting. The teacher-researcher led all discussions and recorded all information, with other information recorded by a TA. The TA was a student, not in the class, and not educated on the full scope of the action research.

As noted on the Research Planning Schedule, students answered questionnaires after every 5 class periods. These periods included both posting to the OLC, in decreasing frequency, and classroom discussions, in increasing frequency. The teacher-researcher designed these questions to assess students' comfort with each and their reliance upon outside sources for their ideas and opinion defense. The researcher collected, tallied, and kept the survey responses in a locked filing cabinet with observation notes.

Conclusion

Finding a way to reach every student is the ultimate goal of any worthwhile teacher. In the ELA classroom, getting students to understand literature, as well as the ambiguity and subtlety of the art, is often an exceptionally difficult task. This task is additionally challenging considering that students are so accustomed to modern electronic discussion, and the safety net of digital correction. If this technology that some perceive as a weakness or distraction could be properly harnessed, however, it is possible that it could be the wind in the sails of modern education. It will take an overhaul of perspective, but it is possible that if educators can accept a new way of communicating, they can reach all students and teach them how to work with each other, instead of educators working against them. If high school graduates can learn to communicate their effective, intelligent, and astute observations and ideas about literature with each other, and defend these observations from the critical eyes of their peers, then this generation will be prepared to handle any thought-based task.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

Introduction

In Chapter Four, the researcher will provide: (a) an overview of the problem the researcher addressed through this dissertation, (b) an elaborate analysis of the results of the study, (c) a breakdown of the study's data, and (d) a conclusion. The teacher-researcher utilized action research to determine how modern students communicate via technological means, and attempted to use such means to enhance interpersonal communication. The general goal of the study was to determine if the implementation of an Online Learning Community, followed by the elimination of the OLC, would have any effect on the face-to-face communication and/or in-class discussions of an AP Literature high school classroom.

Data Collection Strategy

The teacher-researcher conducted this study on AP Literature and Composition students at West-Oak High School in Westminster, SC. The design of the research itself involved observation of one specific classroom and their behavior patterns during implementation of an Online Learning Community, with the OLC active, and without an OLC. The researcher produced quantitative data via observations done over a 30-day period, with 10 days with significant use of the OLC, 10 days with a blended classroom approach, and 10 days with no OLC. The number of students in the class is 24, and they are all GT high school seniors between the ages of 17-18 years old. Each 10-day period represents 7.5 hours of class time. The teacher-researcher calculated time spent using the

Online Learning Community via questionnaire and recorded the variety and frequency of students' input during every class meeting.

At the end of each 10-day period, the teacher-researcher surveyed the students for further quantitative data via questionnaires. During the first 10-day period, the teacher-researcher identified students as either active or passive learners. This identification assisted in calculating the full impact of the Online Learning Community on the class. Questions asked in the class revolved around literary analysis of important classical works. Students synthesized material, developed and defended arguments, and identified metaphors and symbols within the artistic confines of literary writing. The teacher-researcher led all discussions and recorded all information, with any extra information recorded by a TA.

Questions from the instructor were either "guidance" or "progress." After the teacher-researcher gathered 10 classes worth of data, the teacher-researcher calculated the percentage of each type of questions versus each other and the percentage of teacher participation versus student participation. This quantitative data provided a baseline norm to measure how the online community and participation in it have effectively altered the course of classroom discussions.

After the 10 classes of measurement, students answered a questionnaire regarding their participation in classroom discussion. They explained what they liked, what they did not like, what was encouraging, and what was discouraging on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the most positive. Upon completion of this, the teacher-researcher showed the students the OLC and explained the purpose and instructions to them. Once usage of the

Online Learning Community was implemented, the teacher-researcher observed variations in class discussions in much the same way as before.

The causal relationship between improved in-class communication and the implementation of the Online Learning Community would be evident through increased student participation, less passive learning from students, and improved confidence in the ideas presented in the classroom setting. These were quantitative in nature, as the researcher derived the numerical data via a scaled survey of participants. The teacher-researcher compared data from all three phases of using or not using the Online Learning Community against each other, then measured these data against student survey responses.

As noted on the Research Planning Schedule, students answered questionnaires after every 5 class periods. These periods included both posting to the OLC, in decreasing frequency, and classroom discussions, in increasing frequency. The teacher-researcher designed these questions to assess student comfort with each, and their reliance upon outside sources for their ideas and opinion defense. The teacher-researcher collected, tallied, and kept these responses in a locked filing cabinet with observation notes.

This action research study involved student surveys and class observations as the main forms of data collection. The researcher conducted further interviews with the students if further information was needed. These were loosely structured interviews in effort to seek more honest information from the students, not to lead them with questioning. The potential follow-up questions included:

7. How does writing at a computer compare to writing in class?

1. How does posting an opinion in the OLC compare to speaking an opinion in class?
2. Which is more comfortable for you: speaking first on a subject in class, or posting first on the same subject on the OLC?
3. What are your feelings about the OLC? Do you wish we would use it more or less?
4. When you post something to the OLC, how much do you use Google or other sources to reinforce or affirm your ideas?
5. Which is more stressful for you: giving a presentation about your interpretation of a soliloquy, or posting on the OLC the same interpretation?
 - a. What if your classmates had questions? Would you be prepared to defend your assertions in either setting?

The teacher-researcher collected and archived data through the use of a digital audio recorder. The researcher downloaded and kept these files in a password-protected Dropbox account before deleting them from the device. Information collected through the interviews were recorded and stored in the same way. The researcher will maintain written observations with all other research information in a locked filing cabinet.

Ongoing Analysis and Reflection

The researcher compiled survey data and observational data immediately after surveys were given. Results were shared with no one, including the TA or students. Data collections included a series of observations and questionnaires strategically placed throughout the unit, after altering the means of communication, as well as a Teacher Research Journal, which the teacher-researcher added to after each class meeting. The

teacher-researcher led discussions and recorded all information, with other information recorded by a TA. The TA was a student, was not in the class, and was not educated on the full scope of the action research.

As noted on the Research Planning Schedule, students answered questionnaires after every five class periods. These periods included both posting to the OLC, in decreasing frequency, and classroom discussions, in increasing frequency. The teacher-researcher designed these questions to assess student comfort with each and their reliance upon outside sources for their ideas and opinion defense. The teacher-researcher collected, tallied, and kept the survey responses in a locked filing cabinet with observation notes.

Reflective Stance

The class being comprised completely of Gifted and Talented students meant that the results only show the impact on one kind of student. Additionally, the class is mostly female, rural, white students. As such, the consistency of the results may be potentially caused by the consistency of the sample.

Socio-economic factors also presented a consideration in the study's weakness. The sample was comprised of entirely white students at a majority white school. According to school records, most come from two-parent families, with only one student on free or reduced lunch. Therefore, the impact of technology can be minimal because these students are already comfortable and technologically fluent. As Honors students, additionally, these students are invested in their education, regardless of the method; therefore, their effort is theoretically greater than the majority of students.

Finally, the size of the sample and the length of the study could also be considered potential weaknesses. Using such a small group leaves little room for differentiation. Consequently, the length of the study makes it potentially difficult for great change or growth to be evident. Being able to conduct the study on a larger, more varied group could potentially produce more significant results.

Data Analysis

The teacher-researcher collected and compiled quantitative data from the surveys (Appendix A) at the previously scheduled intervals of every 2 weeks. The teacher-researcher questioned all 24 subjects during each survey session, and all 24 subjects participated in all OLC activities. There were, however, occasions where students were absent from class; therefore, the observation element of the research question is somewhat inconclusive.

While research subjects were given the same survey on each occasion, results varied all three times. For all survey questions, trends continued progressing in the same directions from Survey 1 to Survey 3; however, the majority of the responses do not demonstrate alteration in any significant way. For the purposes of this research, significant change is defined as more than a one-point swing. The rationale for this is that is on the Likert-type scale of the surveys, fluctuation of one point or more is a clear demonstration of the research having an effect on the environment.

Various types of interactions took place within the confines of the Online Learning community. While the direction of all posts was intended and instructed to be educational, the researcher noticed that there were frequent deviations to defend a personal opinion, or to stick up for classmates with whom the poster was friendly. These

simple exchanges, while not on-topic for the discussion, seemed to establish a social presence for the student in the OLC.

According to Venkatesh (2014), the concept of Social Presence Theory (SPT) was originally defined by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) as “the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships” (p. 177). While this was defined before the technology for Online Learning Communities was a reality, the theory has been expounded upon by researchers like Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), who provided the following as part of their community model: “The ability of participants in the community of inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to others as ‘real people’” (p. 89). Ultimately, the current teacher-researcher observed that in the high school classroom, these arguments followed along observed social boundaries, creating cliques in the classroom setting or enforcing pre-existing groupings.

Social presence was also an issue for the teacher-researcher. The teacher-researcher had to carefully decide between guiding the discussion’s direction and simply reading the posts. During Phase 1, wherein students were both posting original thoughts and responding to peers, the teacher-researcher observed that classroom interactions were more meaningful; however, there were also more frequent hostile or defensive interactions. Students seemed more confident in questioning the opinions of others. The reasoning for this is that the OLC had previously created allies. Students knew that there was someone in the room who had already defended their assertion; they were therefore far more willing to speak it out loud in the classroom setting.

Rovai (2007) stated that online forum participation could be mutually beneficial for students who follow this process, gaining insight from their peers, and reciprocating with commentary of their own. In this study, the teacher-researcher looked at the motivations of students who spend time in the OLC reading the posts of their classmates but not participating actively, with commentary of their own. Rovai (2007) called this variety of student “pedagogical lurkers” (p. 80). According to Wheeler (2010):

Lurkers diminish their own learning opportunities by forgoing the opportunity to clarify and solidify thoughts by writing responses to interesting online posts. Not writing forum responses may however enable lurkers to conserve their energy by reflecting more upon new ideas, which results in more thoughtful writing of final projects that account for a greater contribution to the overall course grade than more casual forum responses. (p. 1)

Only three students posted on the OLC more frequently than the minimum requirements placed on them by the teacher-researcher. Posts rarely exceeded the minimum length. Upon completion of all three phases, students ranked the following two additional statements: “I look forward to using the OLC the next time” and “I believed that using the OLC was a beneficial addition to the classroom setting.” Both of these statements rated between “Somewhat Disagree” and “Neutral” at 2.66 and 2.61, respectively.

Data Interpretation

Analysis of the data shows that, in practice, there is observable difference in person-to-person communication while the OLC is actively in use. In processing the data of student surveys, however, the difference in their learning is negligible. Students did

not seem to care whether or not the OLC was an active component of their learning process, and did not seem to feel any more comfort in using it than they did discussing the same ideas in the classroom setting.

Item 10 of the survey states, “I am more comfortable participating in the OLC than I am with In-Class Discussion.” Interestingly, while the OLC was most frequently in use during Phase 1, students were the least comfortable with it (3.11). While students were not using the OLC at all, they seemed to feel the most comfortable with it (3.38). This difference, however, is only a minimal shift, and therefore, not a significant observation. Again, a significant shift is defined as a swing of one point or more.

The most consequential change on the survey was Item 7, which states, “My opinions are easily changed by things I read or hear.” During Phase 1, this scored a 2.61, then a 2.66 in Phase 2, and finally a 3.05 during Phase 3. This demonstrates, very interestingly, that the usage of the OLC actually made students less susceptible to the input of others, and allowed students to be more likely to form their own opinions. This means that in the setting of a classroom discussion, students are far more likely to feed off of social cues and simply repeat what they hear, rather than assess and develop their own thoughts, which the OLC seems to force them to do.

Considering that the majority of the other questions went through only negligible changes, the teacher-researcher believes that this is the essential takeaway from the study. If it is true, then students are only participating in classroom discussions so that they can give the appearance of paying attention. In reality, they are simply regurgitating what others have said previously, and have been accepted as reasonable by the class and the teacher. In the OLC, this safety net has been removed; therefore, students are forced to

develop reasonable and defensible opinions and present them without immediate affirmation. When the thoughts are put into writing, students are more aware of their unoriginality, and will strive to have a more thoughtful and individual response.

Conclusion

Table 4.1

Survey One

Phase 1	Averages
Q 1	3.5
Q 2	3.8
Q 3	3.9
Q 4	4.1
Q 5	3.1
Q 6	3.3
Q 7	2.6
Q 8	3.7
Q 9	4.3
Q 10	3.1
Q 11	3.4
Q 12	3.8
Q 13	3.2
Q 14	3.3
Q 15	3.5

Table 4.2

Survey Two

Phase 2	Averages
Q 1	3.5
Q 2	3.8
Q 3	3.9
Q 4	4.0
Q 5	3.1
Q 6	3.3
Q 7	2.9
Q 8	3.6
Q 9	4.3

Phase 2	Averages
Q 10	3.1
Q 11	3.4
Q 12	3.6
Q 13	3.2
Q 14	3.3
Q 15	3.4

Table 4.3

Survey Three

Phase 3	Averages
Q 1	3.5
Q 2	3.9
Q 3	3.7
Q 4	3.8
Q 5	3.2
Q 6	3.3
Q 7	3.0
Q 8	3.1
Q 9	4.2
Q 10	3.3
Q 11	3.5
Q 12	3.6
Q 13	3.4
Q 14	3.2
Q 15	3.4

No student in the student group seemed to show any significant change in their abilities or participation throughout the duration of the action research. Tucker et al. (2014) posited, “in a blended learning culture, stakeholders are empowered to take greater ownership of their respective responsibilities” (p. 8). While it is likely this happened, though not specifically part of the action research, the insignificance of the change could be blamed on the small scope of the research, itself. Tucker et al. (2014) also noted that “the complete shift to blended learning may require anywhere from three to five years;

however, much progress can be made in even one year with the right planning” (p. 13). What this shows is that while the results seemed minimal, any progress at all in such a short span of time can be indicative of progress. Full results show only slight fluctuations at all. While several students did seem to prefer the online over the interpersonal, or vice versa, the results were not significant enough to consider the findings of the study a breakthrough.

Students in an AP level course are considered above average high school students; therefore, it is realistic to determine that they are the best students the school has to offer. As such, the fact that students did not go above the minimum expectations is significant to the research. Equally important is the fact that students seemed to show no real difference in the forum for their work. While data does indicate that students were more likely to think for themselves in the OLC environment, students indicated that they did not see this as an advantage to their learning, nor did they feel any desire to return to the environment, once it had been removed from the curriculum.

Ultimately, the findings of the research are only interesting in their lack of change. For proponents of online learning or blended classrooms, this action research indicates only minimal differences in online learning, as opposed to classroom studying. The minimal differences, however, show that there are benefits to the incorporation of online learning into an AP Literature curriculum.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will provide: (a) an overview of the problem the researcher addressed through this dissertation, (b) an elaborate analysis of the results of the study, (c) a breakdown of the study's data, and (d) a conclusion. The teacher-researcher used action research to determine how modern students communicate via technological means and attempted to use such means to enhance interpersonal communication. The general goal of the study was to determine if the implementation of an Online Learning Community, followed by the elimination of the OLC, would have any effect on the face-to-face communication and/or in-class discussions of an AP Literature high school classroom.

Key Questions

As a result of this action research, the following questions arose:

1. What are the perceptions concerning traditional school for high school students?
2. What factors contribute to the high levels of apathy amongst high school students?
3. What role do learning strategies have on the acceptance of the blended classroom?
4. How would the results have been different, had lower achieving students been included in the action research?

Action Researcher

The researcher was responsible for the creation of the Online Learning Community and the management of its use. The teacher-researcher produced quantitative data via observation. The teacher-researcher designed, compiled, and analyzed the surveys. The teacher-researcher recorded the variety and frequency of student's input during every class meeting, and was also responsible for the collection and calculation of the survey data.

At the end of each 10-day period, the researcher surveyed the students for further quantitative data via questionnaires using a 5-point Likert scale from "disagree strongly" to "agree strongly." During the first 10-day period, the researcher identified the students as either active or passive learners based on observation. The researcher led all discussions and recorded all information, with other information recorded by a Teaching Assistant—a student not in the class, who is unaware of the full scope of the project. The teacher-researcher compiled, calculated, and compared all data.

The researcher encountered many challenges during the study. Most frustrating was the similarities of the survey results and the ethnic and gender homogeneity of the sample size. The researcher designed this project with an expectation for far more diversity in the class than was present in reality. Additionally, the sporadic availability of Internet amongst the school itself, as well as within the community, frustrated the progress and usage of the OLC. Much time and effort went to simply getting the assignments done, and this distracted from the ability of the teacher-researcher to observe.

Developing an Action Plan

At the end of each 10-class period, the students completed surveys in which they answered items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly.” The unit of study during the period was British playwright William Shakespeare. Students studied Shakespeare’s biographical information and read the plays *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. Students synthesized material, developed and defended arguments, and identified metaphors and symbols within the artistic confines of literary writing. The teacher-researcher led all discussions, and either the researcher or the TA recorded all other information.

Questions from the teacher were either “guidance” or “progress” questions. “Guidance” questions pushed the class discussion in a certain way, and “progress” questions changed the subject. The purpose of this labeling was to increase the validity of the findings, and not taint them with the manipulation of the instructor. After 10 classes worth of data, the teacher-researcher calculated the percentages of each type of questions versus each other and the percentage of teacher participation versus student participation. This quantitative data gave a baseline norm by which to measure how the online community and participation in it were altered during the course of classroom discussions.

Students remained unaware of the findings of the study. This decision was made so as to not compromise the validity of the data collected. After every 10 classes of measurement, students answered a questionnaire regarding their participation in classroom discussion. They were asked to explain what they liked, what they did not

like, what was encouraging, and what was discouraging. Upon completion of this, the teacher showed the students the Online Learning Community and explained the purpose and instructions to them. The teacher-researcher encouraged the students to post beyond the minimum, but offered no extra credit or other type of external motivation.

Once usage of the Online Learning Community was implemented, the teacher-researcher observed variation in-class discussions, in much the same way as the teacher-researcher did before. Over the course of the next 10 class periods, there were six mandatory posts on the Online Learning Community. At the end of the 3 weeks, students answered another survey wherein they commented on the effectiveness of the Online Learning Community. They examined any differences in their own work, determined if it enhanced relationships with their classmates, and described how it affected their confidence and comprehensive ability to develop and present ideas.

Table 5.1

Research Planning Schedule Sheet

Activity to be Completed	Estimated Amount of Time Needed	Target Date for Completion	Task Completed?
Create and Explain Online Learning Community	1 week	August 19, 2016	
Make First Assignment on the OLC	1 week	August 26, 2016	
Have Students respond to each other on the OLC	1 day	August 29, 2016	
Questionnaire #1	1 day	August 31, 2016	
Hold class discussion on topics addressed in the OLC	1 day	September 2, 2016	
Compile data from Questionnaire #1	1 week	September 9, 2016	
Make Second Assignment on the OLC	1 week	September 12, 2016	
Have Students Respond to each other on the OLC	1 day	September 21, 2016	
Questionnaire #2	1 day	September 23, 2016	

Activity to be Completed	Estimated Amount of Time Needed	Target Date for Completion	Task Completed?
Hold class discussion on topics addressed in the OLC, observing variations in passivity of students.	1 day	September 27, 2016	
Compile Data from Questionnaire #2, and compare.	1 week	October 4, 2016	
Make Third Assignment on the OLC	1 week	October 6, 2016	
Have Students Respond to each other on the OLC	1 day	October 14, 2016	
Questionnaire #3	1 day	October 17, 2016	
Hold class discussion on topics addressed in the OLC, observing variations in passivity of students.	1 day	October 19, 2016	
Compile Data from Questionnaire #3, and compare.	1 week	October 26, 2016	
Finalize data comparisons, and identify significant variations in Questionnaire responses and passivity.	2 weeks	November 9, 2016	

Action Plan

The teacher-researcher conducted this study on AP Literature and Composition students at West-Oak High School in Westminster, SC. The design of the research itself uses observation of one specific classroom and their behavior patterns during implementation of an Online Learning Community, with the OLC active, and without an OLC. The teacher-researcher produced quantitative data via observations done over a 30-day period, with 10 days with significant use of the OLC, 10 days with a blended classroom approach, and finally, 10 days with no OLC. The number of students in the class is 24, and they are all GT high school seniors between the ages of 17-18 years old.

Each 10-day period represents 7.5 hours of class time. The teacher-researcher calculated time spent using the Online Learning Community via questionnaire. The teacher-researcher recorded the variety and frequency of students' input during every class meeting.

The teacher-researcher shared the findings of this study with his peers in the English department as well as the school's Principal, Assistant Principal of Instruction, and Director of Technology at the school where the research was conducted. The teacher-researcher. During the 2018 school year, the teacher-researcher will look to use similar methods in the classrooms of other teachers, modify the steps for a wider sample size, and form a committee to synthesize new data. With a 1:1 Google Chromebook policy in the teacher-researcher's district for the 2018 school year, opportunities have become available that were not there when this research was designed. Because of this research project, the teacher-researcher has been tasked to head up a committee responsible for designing new ways to incorporate technology into the curriculum, as well as maximize and maintain its benefits. The committee will be comprised of the Media Specialist, the Assistant Principal of Instruction, the teacher-researcher, and 3 other teachers from core departments. The teacher-researcher hopes to use this new knowledge to implement significant changes in the way that classes are conducted in the school, and the way that students learn and work, as well.

In implementing these changes, and initial meetings with Administrators and this committee, the idea of student control has been identified as an imperative factor, moving forward. The district has purchased an interactive program called Canvas that will be used by all students and teachers. The committee, however, has expressed that the trap

schools so often fall into is simply having the technology do what the teacher does. It is the goal of this group, therefore, to allow the technology to do what it can, while the teacher maintains their role. It is not simply a new means of relaying information, then, but a shift in the way the classrooms in this school are managed.

Table 5.2

Action Plan Schedule Sheet

Activity to be Completed	Estimated Amount of Time Needed	Target Date for Completion	Task Completed?
Meetings with committee, establishing goals for blended classroom	2 months	February – March, 2017	
Design / Instructional strategies in Canvas	2 months	Spring, 2017	
Completion of Modules in Canvas	1 month	June, 2017	
Summer Institute Training for Faculty	2 months	Summer, 2017	
Faculty Design Modules in Departments	9 Weeks	Fall, 2017	
Individual Teachers design their own first Module	9 Weeks	Winter, 2017	
Committee and Administration Assess and Evaluate Modules	9 Weeks	January – early March, 2018	
Teachers Complete Modules for full courses	3 months	Spring, 2018	
Committee and Administration Assess and Evaluate full curriculum	2 months	July-August, 2018	
Students and Faculty return, and blended curriculum is in place	1 Year	Late August, 2018	
Data is compiled quarterly by the committee, with results and recommendations passed on to Administration.	9 Weeks	October, 2018	
Adjustments and Updates are made after completion of each semester, based on feedback from all stakeholders. Modules are updated and assessed regularly. Modifications are made by faculty, based on feedback from Administrators and the committee. Reviews continue quarterly.	1 Semester	January, 2019	

Facilitating Educational Change

While many curriculum specialists push for the use of technology in the classroom setting, simply using technology is a solution to nothing. Educators must learn how to use technology in an effective way, which reinforces the lessons that are being taught. According to Horn and Staker (2011), “The most common mistake schools make with the technology is to fall in love with the technology itself. This leads to cramming—the layering of technology on top of the existing model in a way that adds cost but does not improve results” (p. 109).

What the blended experience offers is both the technological aspect, convenient and comfortable for the socially inept, and the interpersonal, which allows students to grow together in Vygotskyian harmony. Vygotsky (1978) defined the Zone of Proximal Development as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Meanwhile, Thompson (2012) reported that “39% of Americans spend more time socializing online than face-to-face” and “nearly 20 percent prefer communicating online” (para 2). The contrast of the blended classroom, therefore, works under the notion that the social experience and the educational experience are intrinsically interlinked. It is in the nourishing of either setting which makes the community more impactful.

There is a synergy in the union of the halves of blended learning communities that makes for an optimal educational environment, beneficial to a wide variety of learners, according to Allen and Seaman (2013) of the Babson Survey Research Group.

According to an ongoing studies of online education, 77 percent of academic leaders rated the outcomes for online learners as equal to or better than face-to-face (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Additionally, Horn and Staker (2011) posited:

Blended learning allows for a fundamental redesign of the educational model ... it creates a more consistent and personalized pedagogy that allows each student to work at her own pace and helps each child feel and be successful at school.

Leveraging technology, blended-learning programs can let students learn at their own pace, use preferred learning modalities, and receive frequent and timely feedback on their performance for a far higher quality learning experience. (p. 6)

Face-to-face learners will become more thoughtful and more independent in their opinions, while the online learners will become more collaborative and learn to function better in a community setting.

Summary of Research Findings

The acquisition of information and ideas through listening and talking belongs in the face-to-face context. Taking ideas, however, and presenting them in a documenting fashion belongs in the online context. This is plain to see, and requires no extra research to defend. What this study set out to prove, however, is that neither context is sufficient on its own in modern education. Students are so heavily reliant on technology that it must be incorporated into the curriculum, but must be done so in a way that is effective, reasonable, and meaningful.

While the findings of the study were mostly inconclusive, many concepts are presented which can be unpacked and applied to future studies. According to Baines and Slutsky (2009):

Student apathy is one reason ‘traditional’ approaches to teaching have yielded such mediocre results in recent years, at least 97 according to national and international benchmarks. Reports from the National Association of Educational Progress (NAEP), Program for International Student Achievement (PISA), and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) are more likely to induce panic than hope because many students care nothing about how well they perform. (p. 98)

While the modern American high school student remains apathetic, the teacher-researcher observed an increased level of participation during in-class discussions while the OLC was in use. Additionally, during Phases 2 and 3—where usage was diminished and eventually eliminated—students asked with regularity when the next OLC assignment would be. While it is possible that this could simply be conditioning, it is the opinion of the researcher that there was a desire to continue on the OLC.

Based on what was observed during the research, the blended classroom is a direction that the teacher-researcher intends to work towards. While face-to-face learning affords one more opportunity to learn, as a collective, online learning seems to support the personal intellectual development that students are not pushed to gain in the classroom of today. The outcomes of this action research give evidence that the combination of online and classroom communities give students the best of both worlds, allowing different students, with different skills, to thrive in the setting they prefer.

While each setting has a different element of positives, each student also has a different set of skills. In this union, students will find where their strengths lie, increase their capability, and become varied learners. Additionally, the synergy of the two will give students the confidence to overcome their shortcomings in the environment in which they excel the least.

The traditional classroom has existed as it is now for hundreds of years. It was designed as it is, because at one point in human history, it made sense for it to be that way. As technology has increased, so too has this notion. The traditional classroom, therefore, no longer has the relevance it once did. There are things that technology can do beyond the capacity of a teacher, however the opposite is also true. Teachers are no longer the authority they once were, therefore, the educational establishment must embrace and acknowledge this, and that the Internet now fills that void.

Suggestions for Future Research

The correlation between participation in the Online Learning Community and the confidence of students to participate in the face-to-face classroom setting is one that begs to be analyzed by this study. With the findings of this study demonstrating that students are more likely to participate in an in-class discussion after having participated in an online discussion, it is interesting to think of the possibilities as to how to harness the benefits of one as a prescription for healing the ailments of the other.

It would be interesting to see if these results hold consistent in a larger sample group, or with learners of regular ability. The results of this research demonstrate that the majority of people are more comfortable with technology; therefore, there must be a significant portion of the population that would have a more distinct reaction to such.

Along these same lines, the sample group for this research was entirely white and predominately female. It would be interesting to find if a more diverse group would have a different outcome.

Conclusion

No student in the student group seemed to show any significant change in their abilities or participation throughout the duration of the action research. While several students did seem to prefer the online over the interpersonal, or vice versa, the results were not significant enough to consider the findings of the study a breakthrough.

Students in an AP level course are considered above average high school students; therefore, it is realistic to determine that they are the best students the school has to offer. As such, the fact that students did not go above the minimum expectations is significant to the research. Equally important, the fact that students seemed to show no real difference in the forum for their work.

This may imply that students simply were doing what they had to in order to successfully complete the class. Even as advanced students, they were disinterested in the subject matter, and were driven only by grades, and not by learning. While the data does indicate that students were more likely to think for themselves in the OLC environment, students indicated that they did not see this as an advantage to their learning, nor did they feel any desire to return to the environment once it had been removed from the curriculum. As noted in the research, however, this could simply be the effect of the small scope of the research and the limited span of time in which the research was conducted. Had there been not only more students, but a wider variety of student, the results could've been much different. Additionally, the implementation of a

blended learning environment is not intended to be done in isolation. To see the true benefits of such a classroom, the context of the research should be conducted amidst an entire learning community. Without full “buy-in” by students and faculty alike, the change is allowed to be seen as manipulation and temporary, and therefore not given the opportunity to thrive.

Ultimately, the findings of the research are only interesting in their lack of change. For proponents of online learning or blended classrooms, this action research indicates only minimal differences in online learning, as opposed to classroom studying. The minimal differences, however, show that there are benefits to the incorporation of online learning into an AP Literature curriculum.

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APPENDIX A: STUDENT SURVEY

10 Day Progress

Rate each statement on a 1-5 Scale, with 5 meaning “Agree Strongly” and 1 meaning “Disagree Strongly.” A rating of 3 is “neutral.”

1. I find it easier to write on a computer than by hand.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

2. I prefer multiple-choice questions to discussion questions on tests.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

3. I know how to find evidence to support an argument.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

4. When I read, I develop strong opinions about characters and events.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

5. I use online databases and search engines regularly to find information.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

6. I can effectively defend my ideas in a class discussion.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

7. My opinions are easily changed by things I read or hear.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

8. When I write essays at home, I am heavily influenced by things I read or hear.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

9. I understand literature better after hearing the perspectives of my classmates.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

10. I am more comfortable participating in the OLC than I am with In-Class

Discussion.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

11. Historically, I feel comfortable participating in class.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

12. I believe that I learn better when I take an active role in classroom discussions.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

13. I prefer giving a presentation to writing an essay.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

14. I believe that I am a good writer.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

15. I believe that I am a quick thinker.

1(disagree strongly) 2 3(neutral) 4 5(agree strongly)

APPENDIX B: STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Student,

My name is David Dennis. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Administration, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying the effects of internet communication on classroom discussion. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete some surveys about your comfort level in talking in front of people vs. writing. In particular, you will be asked questions about whether you find speaking more difficult than writing, or vice versa. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. The meeting will take place during your regular class times, and will not interfere with the curriculum. Some classes may be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team who will transcribe and analyze them. They will then be destroyed.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (864)886-4530 or ddennis@oconee.k12.sc.us or my faculty advisor, Dr. Kenneth Vogler, kvogler@mailbox.sc.edu, (803)777-3094 if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095.

Thank you for your consideration. If you choose to participate, please sign below and return to me.

With kind regards,

David Dennis

130 Warrior Lane

Westminster, SC 29693

(864)886-4530

ddennis@oconee.k12.sc.us

dennisjd@email.sc.edu

Signing your name below means you have read the information about the study (or it has been read to you), that any questions you may have had have been answered, and you have decided to be in the study. You can still stop being in the study any time you want to.

Printed Name of Minor

Age

Signature of Minor

Date

APPENDIX C: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent / Guardian and Student,

My name is David Dennis. I am a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Administration, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying the effects of Internet communication on classroom discussion. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete some surveys about your comfort level in talking in front of people vs. writing. In particular, you will be asked questions about whether you find speaking more difficult than writing, or vice versa. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to. The meeting will take place during your regular class times, and will not interfere with the curriculum. Some classes may be audio taped so that I can accurately reflect on what is discussed. The tapes will only be reviewed by members of the research team who will transcribe and analyze them. They will then be destroyed.

Participation is confidential. Study information will be kept in a secure location at the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Taking part in the study is your decision. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at (864)886-4530 or ddennis@oconee.k12.sc.us or my faculty advisor, Dr. Kenneth Vogler, kvogler@mailbox.sc.edu, (803)777-3094 if you have study related questions or problems. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at the University of South Carolina at 803-777-7095.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign the attached document, and return to me.

With kind regards,

David Dennis

130 Warrior Lane

Westminster, SC 29693

(864)886-4530

ddennis@oconee.k12.sc.us

dennisjd@email.sc.edu

APPENDIX D: FIELD NOTE RESEARCH PAGE

Observation # _____ Date: _____ Time: _____	Observations	Comments