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The Impact of Blended Learning on Student Motivation and Achievement in Reading and Writing

Kimberly Eish Tiedemann

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The Impact of Blended Learning on Student Motivation and Achievement
in Reading and Writing

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my friends, family, and my God who have supported me during this journey. First, I dedicate this dissertation and my efforts that led to the completion of my degree to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for giving me the abilities and skills to complete this work. I also dedicate this to my husband David for believing in me; to my brothers and sisters for encouraging me; to my friends Hope and Lori for their advice, support, and prayers; to my team members at the Humane Society where I volunteer who donated extra time when I was unable to; and to my mother and my father for instilling in me the value of an education and for providing the home and resources I needed to obtain that.

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ABSTRACT

This action research project, based on 15 days of study, examined the impact of blended learning on student engagement and achievement in a high school Reading Seminar classroom. This action research study answered three research questions: 1) What impact do blended learning strategies have on student motivation in a Reading Seminar elective course classroom? 2) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student writing skills? 3) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student reading skills? The participants included 13 high school freshmen in a suburban middle-class high school in South Carolina. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for this mixed methods action research study. The results of this study could be transferred to other middle and secondary classrooms to help teachers analyze their own strategies for engaging students and for increasing student achievement with blended learning instructional methods.

Keywords: at-risk learners, blended learning, 21st Century Skills, 21st Century Teacher, Common Core Standards, CommonLit digital curriculum, device, digital immigrants, digital natives, double-dipped, LMS (learning management system), MAP (Measures of Academic Progress), marginal students, mastery learning, onboarding, 1:1 classroom, reading seminar

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD.....	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
LMS.....	Learning Management System
MAP.....	Measures of Academic Progress
PTA.....	Parent Teacher Association

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A disconnect exists between teachers and students in today's 21st-century classrooms. While teachers are charged with meeting the needs of all students, the prevalence of technology has required teachers not only to bridge the divide, but also to meet students where they are while in their classrooms.

Although Alfred Einstein is often credited for this quote, it is actually from a movie: "I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots" (Novak, 2014, para. 7.). The teacher-researcher for this study was reminded of this concept daily when she saw her classroom of disengaged students with phones in their hands and earbuds in their ears. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) advised teachers not to use technology more often, but to use it more wisely. High school teacher and expert on blended learning Catlin Tucker (2012) addressed the connection between technology and effective human interaction, instructing teachers to harness teens' obsession with technology and use technology to save class time. After strategically using technology to save class time, teachers implementing blended learning instruction should then require students to interact face to face collaboratively, polishing the 21st-Century skills of collaborating with their peers—of building and maintaining that human interaction without a cell phone or earbuds (Tucker, 2012).

Problem of Practice

The tardy bell rings to begin class, but a group of students is huddled by the windows, three students are seated but zoned out with their earbuds, and several girls stare into their phones posing for pics. Two students appear at the door, now locked, peering through the small window asking to come in. The school policy articulates an hour detention for tardiness, but students still arrive late every day and every class period. Seven students are seated at the front of the classroom, their Chromebooks open, beginning the bell-ringer assignment. The teacher-researcher peeks around a table of students to see Jim in his usual corner on the floor, earbuds in, hood over his head. Most freshmen are not prepared for the demands of high school and do not see the need to apply themselves in their classes. High school teachers often preach, “Do your work! You need to graduate!” Their words fall on deaf ears for freshmen who have not begun to understand course credits, grade point averages, and how quickly graduation will loom before them in just four short years.

Summary of Background Literature

During the past two decades, classrooms across America have evolved from homogeneous to heterogeneous, from traditional rows to cooperative grouping, and from flipped to blended. With the implementation of 1:1 classrooms in schools across the country, technology has opened more avenues for teachers to meet the needs of all students with blended learning. Pappas (2015, para. 8) claimed that the first generation of web-based learning began in 1998, and blended learning “has a proven track record of bringing traditional classrooms into the tech-friendly 21st century.”

Simply put, blended learning is the ideal 21st century classroom, where students have experiences that teach the skills companies want young workers to know: creativity, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaborative group work, managing technology, and innovation (Tucker, 2012). Educator Catlin Tucker has remained in her own high school English classroom in California while sharing her best practices about blended learning through social media and professional books for teachers. Tucker (2012) stated that classrooms must remain student-centered. To be student-centered, to engage students, to improve learning, teachers must meet students where they are with the use of technology (Tucker, 2012). Indeed, students walk into classrooms in August with varying levels of maturity, cognitive development, and educational experiences that will affect their achievement that school year, but a 21st century teacher must meet them where they are with relevant, current best practices (Tucker, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

Blended learning is grounded in John Dewey's progressivist theory of the empowered learner (Dewey, 1910). The progressivist theory stated that the teacher should be the guide and the director, but learners should act more independently in the classroom, have a voice in their learning, and manage their time (Dewey, 1910). Teachers who begin this release of control in a blended learning classroom grant more responsibility to students as they begin the tasks of reflection, goal setting, and making choices about their learning.

Vygotsky's (1978) beliefs about the importance of social interactions that occur during guided learning support blended learning as well. Teachers implementing the blended learning approach discover that this type of classroom environment permits

different rates of learning and varying amounts of assistance as students learn. The collaborative group work necessary to make blended learning effective and the relationships that students develop while working on problems with peers during class “are fundamental to the long-term success of students’ interactions and the quality of their learning” (Tucker, 2012, p. 22).

Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of constructivism also undergirds blended learning instruction. The student-centered learning of a blended learning classroom “is broadly based on constructivism as a theory of learning, which is built on the idea that learners must construct and reconstruct knowledge in order to learn effectively, with learning being most effective when, as part of an activity, the learner experiences constructing a meaningful product” (Attard, et al., 2010, p. 2). Blended learning combines face to face learning, social interactions with peers, and online instruction. During these various engagements, students are presented material and given opportunities to construct their understanding.

Purpose of the Study, Research Questions, and Rationale

The purpose of this mixed methods action research study was to determine the impact of blended learning on student motivation and achievement in reading and writing. Klehr (2012, p. 125) explains, “Because teacher research is done in practice, on practice, it also provides an instructional model for how theory and practice coexist.” Furthermore, Klehr (2012, p. 124) explained, “Because teachers’ pedagogical knowledge is situated—informed by setting, experience, and theoretical framework—what surfaces is a different kind of transferable knowledge” that helps teachers construct meaning and reflect on their practice. This action research study allowed the teacher-researcher to

understand and reflect on her practice to improve instruction for her current and future students. Three research questions were posed in this study: 1) What impact do blended learning strategies have on student motivation in a Reading Seminar elective course classroom? 2) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student writing skills? 3) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student reading skills?

Positionality

The background and upbringing of the teacher-researcher has molded her positionality as a teacher and researcher. She is a veteran teacher of 27 years. She is a white, middle-class, heterosexual, Christian woman. Her hard-working middle-class parents modeled for her the value of setting goals and working hard to achieve them. As Efron and Ravid (2013) advised, the teacher-researcher examined her own personal values and how these shaped her positionality as a high school teacher now. Simply due to her role as teacher and her years of experience, the teacher-researcher was in a position of power in relation to her students. Nonetheless, through her eyes, she saw young people in her classroom who will shape the future of our society. She appreciated and valued the diversity of skin tones and personalities among her students. She worked to earn the trust of their parents whose main goal is for their children to defy the stereotypes their children face and to have a better life than the previous generation of their families. Remembering the examples of her own parents and the opportunities she has had, the teacher-researcher stood at the position of an action researcher who explored instructional strategies for her students so that they could achieve the goals their parents have dreamed for them.

The teacher-researcher believed her job as an effective high school teacher was to make the goal of learning more attainable for her students. Her desire to see the underdog achieve, to win, was the root of her passion for helping marginal students. She had coaches and teachers throughout her own education who honed her abilities and confidence by providing encouragement and manageable goals. She knew that the marginal students she taught, the students who were the participants in her study, were similar to her as a student. Her students were influenced by their histories of successes and failures, their self-efficacies, their own goals, and the involvement of their parents (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Tucker, et al., 2015; Weiner, 1979).

Approximately seven years ago, the school for this study implemented one-to-one technology and issued devices to every student. At that time, the teacher-researcher began implementing instructional strategies using technology, but she continued to seek more effective ways of blended learning to meet the needs of the students in her classroom. Through blended learning, she hoped to provide flexibility, individualization, and self-efficacy through technology, what the digital natives in her classroom needed to experience success (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

Research Design

This action research study employed a mixed methods embedded design, including both quantitative and qualitative data using several instruments. This design is most appropriate for a classroom setting so that the teacher-researcher can gather different types of data to ensure validity (Efron & Ravid, 2015). Qualitative data were collected from semi-structured interviews before and after the study, notes from a video of the class before the study, and a journal kept by the teacher-researcher. Quantitative

data were collected from tickets out, reading assessment scores on CommonLit, and writing scores from a teacher-made rubric.

This study was conducted at a large suburban high school with approximately 1900 students in a town with a population of approximately 4,500. The school consisted of approximately 43% white students and 46% minorities and had a 22% free/reduced lunch rate (AdvanceEd, 2017). The participants for the study consisted of ninth-grade students aged 14-16 years old, who were “double-dipped” in English I and a Reading Seminar elective class from August-June of their first year of high school. English I is the first of four English classes required for students to earn a high school diploma. Curriculum is designed around the SC State Curriculum Standards (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). Reading Seminar is an elective course that provides instructional support in reading and writing for marginal students. The elective class ran simultaneously throughout the year with students enrolled in the same teacher’s English class.

The participants included 7 African American males, 4 African American females, 1 white male, and 1 Hispanic male. Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018) justify using a small number of participants because this sample size can provide detailed, in-depth information about the concept studied. The qualitative researcher can “develop an in-depth understanding of a few people because the larger the number of people, the less details that typically can emerge from any one individual” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018, p. 176).

Data Collection and Analysis

The semi-structured interviews with student-participants were conducted before and after the study. The interviews were transcribed and coded for common themes. The notes from the class video and the teacher-researcher's journal were also coded for common themes. The scores from the reading and writing assessments, the results of the tickets out, and the results of the pre and post-study student opinion surveys provided quantitative data. Triangulation of these 6 sources of data and descriptive statistics allowed the teacher-researcher to propose answers to the three research questions for the study.

Significance and Limitations of the Study

This action research study was significant because it built on the growing need for teachers to adapt their instructional practices for today's students, digital natives, who communicate and process information differently (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). Herr and Anderson (2015) believed teachers can use action research to solve real problems that affect their instruction and student success in their classrooms, thus motivating them and their colleagues, helping their personal and professional growth, and empowering their community. The findings of this study could evoke in teachers this motivation and empowerment. Using action research, teacher-researchers can tailor their research to their own classrooms instead of trying to solve the problem by trial and error or trying to implement strategies from an outside source that is unfamiliar with a teacher's situation (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

One limitation in this study was the lack of time for student-participants and the teacher-researcher to learn to navigate the CommonLit LMS. One student participant,

Tim, stated in his post study interview and on his tickets out that the website was difficult for him to navigate. Student participant Tom stated that he felt he learned using CommonLit because it offered a lot of activities. Student participant Zelda said she used the read aloud feature to help her with the reading selections on CommonLit. For future research, a two-week trial period would enable the teacher-researcher to ensure that all participants are comfortable navigating all of the features on CommonLit. In addition, the two-week trial period would allow the teacher-researcher to become skilled in viewing the different data reports and utilizing the additional instruction tools that CommonLit offers so that she can make informed decisions about instruction.

A second limitation to the study was the classroom disruptions to student learning. Every student participant expressed in their pre-study interview how disruptions from other students made learning more difficult for them. During the study, one student was removed from the class permanently for behavior, and two other students were suspended for a week, almost eliminating classroom disruptions altogether. (Only one of these two students who were removed for a week was a student-participant in the study.) Student disruptions inevitably affected the motivation, the ability to focus, and the quality of work for the student-participants.

A third limitation of this study was the inability to record a post-study video of the class. Due to complications at the school, a post-study class video was unable to be recorded at the end of the study. Thus, those notes could not be compared or added to the pre-study video or to the teacher-researcher's journal.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter Two of this dissertation includes an in-depth review of literature concerning the use of technology in the classroom, effective blended learning practices, and student engagement as it affects achievement. Chapter Three provides details on the methodology, methods, instruments, data collection, and analysis of data for this study. Chapter Four explains the findings. Chapter Five present a broader view of the how this action research study is relevant to today's classrooms, suggestions for future research, and how this study could be applied to guide other teachers.

Definition of Terms

At-Risk Learners: students who experience low academic achievement and who are at risk for dropout; usually socio-economic status, minority status, and education level of the parents are contributing factors (Donnelly, 1987)

Blended learning: instructional practices in the classroom that combine face-to-face instruction with online tools (Tucker, 2012)

Common Core Standards: standards for instruction in K-12 schools developed by a national group of shareholders (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2019)

CommonLit: online digital curriculum with a myriad of reading selections accompanied by multiple-choice questions and writing prompts (CommonLit, 2014-2019)

Device: Chromebook, iPad, or laptop for one-to-one learning

Digital curriculum: instructional content available online that could replace the delivery of a lesson (Tucker, Wycoff, & Green, 2017)

Digital Immigrants: teachers generally born before 1985 with limited access to technology (Prensky, 2001)

Digital Natives: students who are “good at” technology since they are more familiar with digital tools (Tucker, Wycoff, & Green, 2017)

Double-dipped: a term used for students who are enrolled in two English classes or two math classes for extra support/instruction (Practical Leadership, LLC group, 2011)

Google Classroom: online learning management system provided for classroom teachers by Google

LMS (learning management system): online classroom platform such as Google Classroom, Edmodo, or Schoology

MAP: Measures of Academic Progress standardized reading assessment used in K-12 schools (NWEA, 2020)

Marginal students: a student who does not perform at grade level; a student who is on the edge, or the margin, of what is normal

Mastery Learning: instruction that allows students multiple opportunities to master content as a result of formative assessment and additional instruction (Guskey, 2010)

Onboarding: teaching students the procedures for a blended learning classroom, specifically for the use of technology for learning, (Tucker, Wycoff, & Green, 2017)

Reading Seminar: a support class scheduled dually with English I for freshmen needing extra support in reading during their first year of high school

1:1 Classroom: a classroom in which every student has access to an electronic device for instruction and learning

21st-Century Skills: competencies necessary for the careers students will have; collaboration, creative thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy (Rich, 2010)

21st-Century Teacher: a teacher who adapts her instructional practices to teach students the communication and collaboration skills they need in today's world (Palmer, 2015)

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

An effective literature review helps the researcher achieve balance in her research. The researcher should read enough of the existing literature to validate the proposed area of study. At the same time, the researcher should maintain the expectation that she will uncover more information about her topic as she delves into more literature (Herr & Anderson, 2015). A good literature review will help the researcher become more focused or even shift her topic based on the literature she has reviewed (Efron & Ravid, 2013). A good literature review frames the initial research question and provides a rationale for the research question with the understanding that the researcher will continue to review literature as she proceeds through the study (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

The materials that the teacher-researcher chose for this review are important because they represented a balance of the traditional theories of student motivation and self-efficacy and more recent work on the introduction of technology and blended learning instruction for today's students. The teacher-researcher used the ERIC database to search peer-reviewed journals and research studies. She used the key words *motivation, reading achievement, blended learning, and adolescents*. She also used published books and technology sources such as websites and a blog.

Theoretical Framework

Progressivist Theory

John Dewey's theory of progressivism called for a more democratic classroom where students are involved in their own learning and goal setting, and they collaborate and interact with their peers in authentic, meaningful ways (Dewey, 1963). Blended learning is grounded in John Dewey's progressivist theory that student learners should act more independently in the classroom, make choices about their learning, and manage their time (Dewey, 1963; Tucker, et al., 2017). A classroom using blended learning draws on Dewey's (1963) ideals because a teacher must shift roles from the lecturer to the facilitator in the classroom as students take ownership of their own learning and interact with peers to deepen their understanding of the material (Tucker, et al., 2017). Teachers who begin this release of control as "empowerers" and grant more responsibility to students learn how to make blended learning techniques work best in their classroom, so not all blended learning classrooms look alike. However, all classrooms utilizing blended learning models should maintain the same concepts about student learning (Tucker, 2012).

Theories of Constructivism and Social Development

Piaget was similar to Dewey regarding their beliefs that students need to construct new meaning based on knowledge they already have (Foote, et al., 2001). Direct instruction from the teacher in a blended learning classroom enables students to develop new knowledge. In a carefully designed blended learning classroom, students then engage socially to process that new information. Vygotsky extended Piaget's theories of childhood development with the additions of the Zone of Proximal Development and scaffolding (Foote, et al., 2001). The online component of blended learning includes the

zone of proximal development and a chance for teachers to scaffold learning by designing online practice for students to work at their own pace and ability.

Bandura (David, 2015) and Vygotsky (1978) both stressed the importance of learning in a social environment to cultivate learning. A constructivist classroom allows students to be a part of a community of learners with expectations and routines (Foote, et al., 2001). An effective blended learning classroom provides a social environment with online and face-to-face discussions, using authentic audiences of peers in the classroom and the world outside the brick and mortar classroom (Tucker, 2012). A teacher must carefully orchestrate instruction and routines in a blended learning classroom to make it most effective for student achievement.

Theories of Motivation: Student Autonomy and Choice

In addition to a social environment that allows students to be engaged and learn from each other, a teacher must set up a classroom that provides student autonomy and choice. Autonomy and student choice drive intrinsic motivation in students (Deci, 1995). The goals of blended learning instruction are that students become self-directing, self-resourcing, self-correcting, and self-reflecting (Tucker, et al., 2017). In a carefully planned blended learning classroom, the teacher helps students understand their performance and set their own goals for progress, developing the intrinsic motivation they need to experience success (Schunk, 2003; Tucker, et al., 2017). Bandura (1977) proved that when a person experiences success, he will develop self-efficacy, a belief in his/her own ability. The benefits of blended learning outlined in Tucker, et al. (2017) make this type of classroom possible.

Autonomy and student choice are critical factors to motivate students (Deci, 1995). Blended learning requires a teacher to shift her mindset from teacher control to student autonomy, blending online and offline learning with student choice and the needs of the student as the focus for instruction (Tucker, 2018). Teachers need to understand that the difference between classroom management and student motivation is releasing control to students (Tucker, 2018). A successful blended learning classroom requires time for a teacher to plan carefully how the components of social engagement, choice, autonomy will be included.

Theories of Motivation: Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is grounded in the larger theoretical framework of Bandura's (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory. Much research has connected students' self-efficacy to their choice of tasks, the effort they display, their persistence, and ultimately their achievement in the classroom (Schunk, 2003). A teacher who gives helpful feedback to students builds self-efficacy and sustains motivation for learning (Schunk, 2003). Helping students set goals and monitor their progress build their self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003). Schunk's (2003) work made clear connections among self-efficacy, motivation, goal setting, and achievement in reading and writing. Students involved in a study scored higher than students in the control group for self-efficacy and reading comprehension when they were given clear goals (Schunk & Rice, 1989). In a follow up study two years later, Schunk and Rice (1989) confirmed that when teachers provided feedback about the goals, students involved in the study performed even higher than the students who had only goals. Spache (1976) also reported clear connections between students' self-esteem and performance and persistence on reading tasks. Research for writing instruction has

also proven that goal setting and teacher feedback promotes self-efficacy and motivation among students, thereby improving writing performance (Schunk & Swartz, 1993a; 1993b). Setting goals is an important procedure in a blended learning classroom, allowing students to see their progress, building their self-efficacy, and improving their motivation (Schunk, 2003; Tucker, et al., 2017). A teacher who understands how constructive feedback and setting goals helps build self-efficacy and motivation can empower students within a blended learning classroom.

Social Justice

The theory of social justice addresses inequalities in class, race, gender, ability, or other group identities (Adams, et al., 2018). The vision of social justice is to provide an equal distribution of resources and to establish an environment where all members feel safe, recognized, and respected (Bell, 2018). When planned and implemented carefully, blended learning enables teachers to provide social justice in their classrooms, but first, teachers must recognize and work against the oppressive views described by Freire (2018) of the teacher as the depositor of knowledge and the students as the recipients. This “banking” of education where students are “receptacles” or “containers” to be “filled” is an oppressive view that should be eliminated from modern classrooms (Freire, 2018, p. 72). Blended learning instruction has the potential to support social justice when instruction appeals to the interests, ability levels, and rates of work of all students in a classroom, and when the teacher shares control of their learning with the students (Tucker, 2012).

Historical Perspectives

The Evolution of Classrooms since 2000

During the past two decades, classrooms across America have evolved from homogeneous to heterogeneous, from traditional rows to cooperative grouping, and from distance learning to blended learning. With the implementation of 1:1 classrooms in schools across the country, technology has opened more avenues for teachers to meet the needs of all students with blended learning (Tucker, 2012). Pappas (2015, para. 8) claimed that the first generation of web-based learning began in 1998, and blended learning “has a proven track record of bringing traditional classrooms into the tech-friendly 21st century.” Pappas (2015) stretched the history back farther than 1998 by attributing the first distance education course to Sir Isaac Pitman in the 1840s. Sir Isaac Pitman taught shorthand. He wrote and mailed postcards to his students for them to write back and scored by him. This is the first example of authentic assessments and feedback through distance learning (Pappas, 2015). The 1960s and 1970s introduced mainframe computers to society, followed by live training via television offered by companies to their employees in the 1970s and 1980s (Pappas, 2015). By the 1980s, schools were able to use CD-ROMS for instruction, providing more content and interactive lessons (Pappas, 2015). By the 1990s, our society introduced the first generation of web-based instruction because computers appeared in homes across America (Pappas, 2015). The last 20 years has introduced the union between face-to-face instruction and technology-based learning, known as blended learning (Pappas, 2015).

Simply put, blended learning is the ideal 21st Century Classroom, where students have experiences that teach them the skills companies want young workers to know:

creativity, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, collaborative group work, managing technology, and innovation (Tucker, 2012). Educator Catlin Tucker has implemented blended learning in her own high school English classroom in California and shared her best practices through social media and her professional books for teachers. Tucker stressed that despite the popularity of technology in 1:1 classrooms, instruction must remain student-centered (2012).

Student-centered learning “is broadly based on constructivism as a theory of learning, which is built on the idea that learners must construct and reconstruct knowledge in order to learn effectively, with learning being most effective when, as part of an activity, the learner experiences constructing a meaningful product” (Attard, et al., 2010, p. 2). To be student-centered, to engage students, to improve learning, teachers must meet students where they are with the use of technology (Tucker, 2012). A 21st Century teacher maintains a learner-centered classroom with personalized instruction and choices. A 21st Century teacher offers students opportunities to produce for authentic audiences while modeling the importance of maintaining a responsible digital presence. A 21st Century teacher makes an effort to learn new technologies to share with students, utilizing the Internet and cell phones instead of fighting these tools that are already in the hands of students. Indeed, students walk into classrooms in August with varying levels of maturity, cognitive development, and educational experiences that will affect their achievement that school year, but a 21st Century Teacher must meet them where they are with relevant, current best practices (Tucker, 2012).

Generation of Technology

Palfrey and Gasser (2008) advised teachers not to use technology more often, but to use it more wisely. Blended learning, like other instructional approaches in education, can be implemented well only if teachers understand the needs of their students and how to use their resources most effectively. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) explained that today's students, digital natives, are different. Digital natives learned digitally the first time; they learn, work, and interact with each other differently from the adults in their lives (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008).

Tucker (2012) addressed the connection between technology and effective human interaction, instructing teachers to harness teens' obsession with technology and use technology to save class time. After strategically using technology to save class time, teachers implementing blended learning instruction should then require students to interact face to face collaboratively, polishing the 21st Century skills of collaborating with their peers--of building and maintaining that human interaction without a cell phone or earbuds (Tucker, 2012). The flexibility of the blended learning instructional models makes them attractive and popular, but teachers still need to provide the structure and accountability for the less mature, unmotivated, or undisciplined students (Tucker, 2012).

Digital Natives Defined

A disconnect exists between teachers and students in classrooms. The list of needs for individual students is growing. Technology is here to stay. If a teacher is to remain effective in the classroom, she must bridge the divide and meet students where they are. Prensky coined the terms digital native and digital immigrant in 2001 to define today's students and the teachers who instruct them (Rudi, 2012). Prensky (2001) declared that

today's students are no longer the students our educational system is designed to teach. Most teachers are "immigrants" in the sense that they have migrated into the digital world but still retain an accent, as compared to cultural immigrant. That accent is part of a language from the past that today's students do not understand (Prensky, 2001). Prensky (2001) explained that the status of digital immigrant for teachers depends on their birth year (generally before 1985) and their access to technology.

Prensky (2016), author of seven books and over 100 essays about today's learners and technology, hoped to guide teachers to meet the needs of today's learners in our classrooms and stressed the type of environment in which they will thrive. Our students today have had the Internet since they were born. The Internet has made them accustomed to getting answers quickly and working at their own pace based on their own choices (Rudi, 2012). Digital natives are disconnected from the style of the traditional classroom (Smith, 2013).

Prensky stressed that the classroom content digital natives provide for digital natives must change (2001). Prensky urged teachers of digital natives to provide a curriculum that allows students to discuss sociological issues, consider ethics, and explore politics to help them learn to manage the plethora of information on the Internet (Prensky, 2001). A blended learning classroom that provides choice can offer this to students (Tucker, 2012).

The Changing Role of the Teacher

In short, a teacher today can no longer stand in front of the classroom and deliver information (Prensky, 2016). The information students seek is already there on the Internet. Teachers are accustomed to delivering content through traditional teaching;

however, they must harness a teaching style that empowers students (Prensky, 2016). A teacher who empowers students and provides them with opportunities is a 21st Century teacher (Palmer, 2015). An effective teacher today is described as a coach or a mentor (Rudi, 2012, Prensky, 2016). *iNOCAL* (2015, p. 17) described an effective teacher in today's classroom as "coaches, concierges, guides, and mentors, instead of purveyors of information."

Technology is a powerful tool in our classroom, but students still need guidance as they make choices about their learning (Rudi, 2012). A teacher of today's digital natives should strive for a hybrid model, "the best of digital and traditional learning environments," that combines technology with face-to-face instruction (Rudi, 2012, p. 9). Teachers should offer online tools wisely to address the interests of students and provide choices (Rudi, 2012). Prensky (2016) suggested that teachers who struggle with the transition to blended learning make a conscientious choice to move between "content provider" and "empoweree." The empowering approach can ease a strain on the teacher because she can learn along with students as they explore a topic of their interest (Prensky, 2016). Students are valuable resources for each other and can be a powerful support network for each other as the teacher accepts the role as "empoweree" (Tucker, 2012).

Teachers Can Empower and Motivate Students with Feedback

An effective teacher understands the importance of challenging students to think, to take action, maintain relationships, and enjoy effective accomplishments (Prensky, 2016). That teacher is also a 21st century teacher who has the skills needed for a successful blended learning classroom (Tucker, 2012). With this being said, that teacher

also must remember the importance of the underlying foundation of the relationship she has with the digital natives in her classroom. Teachers will have difficulty achieving a balance in their role as they learn to fluctuate from the “silent facilitator” to the “involved facilitator” (Tucker, 2012). A teacher must not forget the importance of feedback to foster those teacher-student relationships (Tucker, 2012). Assessments with feedback should occur regularly in a blended learning classroom so that students can track their progress toward their goals (Tucker, 2012).

The blended learning instructional models provide more opportunities for interaction and engagements using online tools, but teachers should not feel pressured to spend more time grading. Instead, a teacher can assess students more wisely, especially with technology. Tucker (2012) suggested creating printed reports, conferencing one-on-one with students, requiring students to track and assess their own work by reflecting, and use of scoring rubrics. In Tucker’s 2017 publication with colleagues Wycoff and Green, more suggestions were offered for feedback to students, including: polls and surveys, comments, badges, and auto grading of test and quizzes. The increasing availability of classroom platforms, or learning management systems (LMS), such as Google Classroom or Schoology make these options easier for teachers because they are built into the system (Tucker, et al., 2017). The digital tools for feedback in an LMS help students remain aware of their progress and focused on their goals for improvement, developing ownership in them (Tucker, et al., 2017).

The At-Risk Learner and Blended Learning

Lewis, et al. (2014) conducted a three-year mixed methods research study among at-risk adolescents at five Performance Learning Centers (PLC) in North Carolina. Lewis,

et al.(2014) investigated whether an online environment helps or hinders learning experiences for at-risk learners, and what structures could increase self-efficacy among those learners. The importance of this study is the foundation in Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1982). In short, Bandura (1977) stated that students will be motivated to try if they believe they can be successful. Lewis, et al. (2014) identified online learning as a new challenge for at-risk students and discussed several conclusions at the end of their study. At-risk learners need a strong foundation in managing online learning. The LMS must include mastery learning so that at-risk learners can begin with their weaknesses and move at their own pace. At-risk learners need the teacher as mentor, coach, guide for the face-to-face instruction and guidance. At-risk learners struggle to develop the self-discipline to balance the freedom and time management that they will experience in a blended learning classroom. The conclusions from Lewis, et al. (2014) were essential components for a classroom using blended learning models.

Alderman (1990) discussed student motivation and learned helplessness and made suggestions about the type of classroom structure at-risk students need. At-risk students need a classroom structure that supports goal setting, effort, and strategies that help them learn (Alderman, 1990). According to Ames and Archer (1988), a classroom that utilizes the mastery learning concept is best for appealing to student motivation. In a mastery learning classroom, students can focus on their learning and their progress instead of their ability and performance (Alderman, 1990). The components of a blended learning classroom fit the criteria suggested by Alderman (1990), and Ames and Archer (1988) to meet the needs of at-risk learners (Tucker, 2012; Tucker, et al., 2017). Guskey (2010) explained all aspects of mastery learning completely, including how mastery learning is

grounded in Bloom's (1971) theories about learners. Bloom (1971) believed all students could achieve if given the time, tutoring, and feedback through formative assessment.

Schunk's (2003) work made clear connections among self-efficacy, motivation, goal setting, and achievement in reading and writing. Students involved in a study scored higher than students in the control group for self-efficacy and reading comprehension when they were given clear goals (Schunk & Rice, 1989). In a follow up study two years later, Schunk and Rice (1989) confirmed that when teachers provided feedback about the goals, students involved in the study performed even higher than the students who had only goals. Research for writing instruction also proves that goal setting and teacher feedback promotes self-efficacy and motivation among students, thereby improving writing performance (Schunk & Swartz, 1993a; 1993b).

Related Research

Blended Learning in the High School English Classroom

Blended learning can be very successful in the high school English classroom when the teacher uses the LMS to facilitate feedback about student work and conversations among peers (Tucker, 2012). High school English teacher and blended learning enthusiast Catlin Tucker (2012) devoted chapter six of *Blended Learning in Grades 4-12* to ideas for English teachers. Tucker (2012) explained lesson ideas to help English teachers utilize online tools to teach the Common Core curriculum standards for English Language Arts. Common Core standards at the high school level require students to write about texts they have read. Using online tools in the LMS, students were often asked to discuss their writing with peers to give feedback and suggestions, improving

writing skills. In addition, Tucker (2012) explained how these conversations lead to a deeper understanding of the text student read, improving reading comprehension.

Teachers Camahalan and Ruley (2014) conducted a two-week action research study utilizing blended learning to teach writing to 16 middle school students. Six writing lessons included a pre-assessment and a post-assessment. These teachers sought to answer their question, “What happens to student learning when face-to-face writing instruction is supplemented with online instruction?” After a pre-assessment to determine students’ strengths and needs, the students were divided by ability level into two groups, blended learning and traditional classroom learning. The teacher-researchers used MobyMax LMS to measure the improvement in grammar use in students’ writing. Teacher-researchers Camahalan and Ruley (2014) noted an improvement in students’ grammar use in their writing with a blended learning environment, a difference of 8.5% over the group of students who were instructed face-to-face.

The technology component of blended learning in English classrooms can motivate students to write and improve their writing. The 2010 findings from the National Writing Project reported that technology allows students share their work with real audiences, a larger scope of readers and viewers, and allows students to collaborate with more peers, thereby motivating them to write and improving their writing (as cited in Camahalan & Ruley, 2014).

Camahalan and Ruley’s (2014) study took place at a small private school with only 17 students in the Midwestern United States; however, important conclusions were made about student motivation and the benefit of using the LMS to tailor instruction to individual student’s needs.

Huang and Hong's (2016) mixed methods study also investigated the effectiveness of blended learning in an English classroom. The experimental group consisted of forty 10th graders who participated in the flipped classroom model of blended learning. The control group included 37 sophomores from the same school. Participants were involved in pre and post testing to measure reading comprehension. Huang and Hong (2016) used Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), a common LMS in Taiwan. Huang and Hong (2016) researched two questions about the effect and the extent of a flipped classroom intervention on reading comprehension for students. Huang and Hong's (2016) study found reading comprehension significantly improved with the blended learning intervention. However, Huang and Hong (2016) admitted that they were unable to make clear connections among the participants' technology skills and their reading comprehension in an English as a foreign language (EFL) class.

Summary

Students in today's classrooms are different than previous generations in how they learn, but educators do have the tools to meet the needs of today's students. Blended learning models can meet the needs of today's students with flexible learning environments that accommodate student choice, interest, and pace of learning while at the same time using technology to engage them in deeper learning with authentic audiences and meaningful activities. Factors such as motivation and self-efficacy have always affected students, making an educator's job more challenging to reach those students. Blended learning models of instruction can build motivation and self-efficacy for students with the components of goal setting, tracking progress, engagement with peers, and feedback from the teacher.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The first year of high school can be a daunting transition for freshmen. Students must adjust to a larger environment, different social groups, more freedom, and more teachers (Southern Regional Education Board, 2008). Freshmen also enter high school functioning at various levels of cognitive development, social maturity, and mindsets about their academic achievement (Southern Regional Education Board, 2008). The high school for this study offered only two levels for ninth grade English: honors and college-prep. While the honors classes served ninth graders reading at a 9th-12th grade ability level, the college preparatory level English classes included students with reading abilities from 4th grade to 10th grade, according to reading scores from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test given in this district. To assist these freshmen who read significantly below grade level, a Reading Seminar class was added to their schedule. Ideally, students were placed in a Reading Seminar class also taught by their freshman English teacher, making these students “double-dipped” for extra instructional support.

Problem of Practice

Freshman English students who were also enrolled in Reading Seminar classes were homogeneously grouped. Factors such as a history of failure, a lack of success, and marginal skills in reading and writing characterized these students and often caused these students to be unmotivated (Weiner, 1979). Thus, teachers must employ strategies to

motivate students and address the wide variety of reading and writing skills within that group of Reading Seminar students. Extrinsic rewards such as points have not been shown to motivate students; instead, the three factors of autonomy, mastery, and purpose are more effective intrinsic motivators (Tucker, et al., 2017). Blended learning focuses on these four factors: choice, a variety of resources, chances for mastery learning, and opportunities to reflect. When these four factors exist cohesively in a classroom, the height of blended learning is achieved, causing students to develop ownership in their own learning (Tucker, et al., 2017). When students adopt an ownership of their learning, they are motivated to learn (Tucker, et al., 2017).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to determine the impact of blended learning on reading and writing achievement and student motivation. Blended instruction can be overwhelming for teachers, and technology can be a deterrent to student learning, so blended learning must be planned and implemented carefully with an understanding of how to blend face to face instruction and online instruction.

Research Questions

This action research study answered three research questions. 1) What impact do blended learning strategies have on student motivation in a Reading Seminar elective course classroom? 2) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student writing skills? 3) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student reading skills?

Overview of This Chapter

This chapter includes a description and justification for the research design, and the validity of action research specifically. In addition, an explanation of the context and setting of the study and the role of the researcher is provided. This chapter provides detailed descriptions of the participants, including sampling procedures and justification for these participants to effectively address the research questions. A thorough description of data collection instruments and methods for data collection is provided in this chapter. Research procedures are explained, including handling of sensitive information to protect participants and the process of transcribing, entering, and organizing data. Finally, an explanation is provided for how data were analyzed to address each research question and which methods were appropriate for analyzing data. A brief summary of the six subcomponents of chapter three concludes this chapter.

Research Design

This action research study was characterized by a mixed-methods design. A mixed-methods design combines both qualitative and quantitative data in a study, hence the term “mixed methods” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, mixed methods research presents a hypothesis or research questions. This study sought answers to three research questions. Then, the mixed methods researcher collects both qualitative and quantitative data. Mixed methods research must include rigorous methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Third, the qualitative and quantitative data are merged, and the researcher should explain in the context of a larger framework the importance of the results of the study. Ultimately, the mixed-methods design is framed by a philosophy or theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The theories of progressivism, constructivism, and motivation support this study.

Rationale for Methodology

Action research is designed, conducted, and analyzed by teachers at work in their own classrooms to solve a problem that is real to them (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Action research allows a teacher to own the research with the purpose of implementing change in her own classroom (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The results of action research can challenge the researcher to continue to make changes in her classroom. Results can also guide other teachers who struggle with a similar problem of practice (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The results of this action-research study about blended learning helped the teacher-researcher reflect on instructional practices and make choices for her future students based on the results of the data collection. The results of this action research can also help guide other teachers who seek to make changes in their own classrooms or advise the stakeholders at this school who make decisions about student instruction.

Context and Setting of the Study

This action research study took place over a three-week period in a high school classroom. According to the 2018-2019 school report card, the high school consisted of 1907 students (SC Dept. of Education, 2020). The town is suburban to one of the state's major metropolitan cities and has a population of approximately 4,500 with an average household income of approximately \$115,000 and a poverty rate of 1.43% (World Population Review, 2020). At the time of the study, the school had a 22% free/reduced lunch rate compared to a 66% rate in the state (Public School Review, 2020). According to the school's 2017 annual report, the student population consisted of approximately 43% white students and 46% minority students (AdvanceEd, 2017). Even though the district allows school choice for parents and students to select another school based on

the programs there, this high school's demographics reflected the demographics of the town, approximately 55% white, 40% African American (World Population Review, 2020).

Role of Researcher

The teacher's role as action researcher was that of an insider seeking to study her own practice. She wished to contribute to her own knowledge base, improve instruction in her own classroom, and meet the needs of her students by developing as a professional. Because the teacher-researcher was actively involved in collecting data for this research, she served as an active participant observer.

Kerr and Henderson (2015) explained, "The degree to which researchers position themselves as insiders or outsiders will determine how they frame epistemological, methodological, and ethical issues in the dissertation" (p. 39). The teacher-researcher desired for this action research study to examine the effect of blended learning on student motivation in her high school Reading Seminar class. This action research occurred in her own classroom, and her position as a teacher-researcher was that of an insider. In action research, the position of the researcher can involve bias about many factors, putting a "positive spin" on their data (Kerr and Anderson, 2015). The teacher-researcher had a responsibility to consider her own experiences as a high school teacher that define her as an insider. She had seen students change during the last five years. The work ethic and motivation of students had changed. The teacher-researcher had to remain mindful of her positionality and her bias, relying on the data collected and avoiding making unfounded conclusions.

Positionality

The teacher-researcher was a veteran teacher of 28 years at the time of the study. Her passion was teaching students who are categorized as struggling or marginal in reading and writing skills. With the onset of one-to-one learning and school-issued devices such as Chromebooks for all students, the teacher had been challenged with maintaining effective, meaningful instruction. Blended learning as a method for combining face to face instruction and instruction using technology had become increasingly popular. With the help of the school's technology coach and a master teacher colleague at her school, the teacher-researcher had been exploring more effective ways of instruction using blended learning to reach her marginal students during the past few years. She understood that many factors affect student achievement in addition to the abilities of students, including intrinsic motivation, parental involvement, socio economic status, classroom climate and community, teacher expectations, and teacher personality. She also understood the social aspect of adolescence, especially for the first year of a high school student, is critical for the emotional well-being which affects performance in the classroom.

Ethical Considerations

This study involved no ethical concerns regarding deception of the participants or confidentiality of the participants. Students and their parents offered informed consent by signing a permission letter allowing participation in the study. Identities were kept confidential in a password protected grade book, CommonLit account, and Google Drive of the teacher-researcher, and pseudonyms were assigned to participants for data reporting. Student-participants were aware that the study would be used to inform their

teacher about becoming a better instructor for their benefit and for the benefit of students in the future.

Participants

The participants for this study were considered a convenience sample because they were already enrolled in the teacher-researcher's Reading Seminar class.

Participants included 13 high school freshmen ages 14-16. Eleven of these students are also "double-dipped" in this same teacher's freshman English class; 2 of these students are enrolled in the English class of another teacher. The student-participants include 7 African American males, 4 African American females, 1 white male, and 1 Hispanic male. Attrition did not occur among the 13 participants; however, one student participant was suspended for behavior issues for a week. When she returned, she began making up the work.

Researchers are encouraged to include a sample that is at least 10% of the population (Creswell, 2014). However, Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018) justified using a small number of participants because this sample size can provide detailed, in-depth information about the concept studied. The qualitative researcher can "develop an in-depth understanding of a few people because the larger the number of people, the less details that typically can emerge from any one individual" (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018, p. 176).

The identity of the participants remained confidential in the data analysis. Parent permission forms and student permission forms were administered and remained on file as evidence of permissible use of student work in the collection of data. The student-participants were assigned pseudonyms for data reporting to protect their identities.

Brief descriptions of each participant are listed in Table 3.1, including their ethnicities, genders, ages, their 8th grade reading percentiles on the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test, and any special needs accommodations they receive. Accommodations can be described as one or more support lab classes during the day with a special education teacher who provided assistance in math or reading for students with learning disabilities or other disabilities such as ADHD or ADD. These students had accommodations such as extended time to complete work, reading assistance, or the right to take tests in a small group setting with their support lab teacher. All of the student-participants attended feeder middle schools, so the teacher-researcher had access to a history of their standardized test scores. MAP reading percentile scores are listed in Table 3.1 for the participants for 8th grade. Reading percentiles ranged from the 12th to the 55th percentile, indicating the wide range of reading ability in this group of participants. In addition to the table, a brief narrative is provided with more information about the personalities of each student-participant.

Table 3. 1 *Student Participants*

	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Reading percentile	Accommodations
1	Tim	15	African American	23	504
2	Jim	15	African American	52	academic support lab
3	Ellie	14	African American	45	none
4	Jason	15	African American	19	ESOL
5	Alan	15	African American	35	none
6	Rick	15	White	47	none
7	Linda	16	African American	42	none

	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Reading percentile	Accommodations
8	Ray	15	Hispanic	45	none
9	Farrah	15	African American	50	504
10	Lucas	15	African American	35	none
11	Jack	14	African American	47	none
12	Tom	15	African American	12	academic support lab
13	Zelda	16	African American	55	academic support lab

- Tim was a 15-year-old African American male. He had a 504 for extended time and small group testing. He seemed to have adjusted to high school well. Tim was a confident, polite young man. He was well-liked among his peers and played football this year. His parents were very supportive, attending Open House and 504 meetings and communicating with the teacher-researcher regularly.
- Jim was a 15-year-old African American male. He had an IEP with a support lab during the school day for academic assistance regarding his diagnosis of ADHD. Last year Jim was diagnosed as clinically depressed. Jim did not adjust well to high school this year and often left class with his head tucked to visit his support lab teacher. His mother was very supportive, attending IEP parent meetings and Open House and communicating with the teacher-researcher regularly. During Jim's spring IEP meeting, his support lab teacher and his mother concluded that Jim's depression affected his academic achievement very adversely this year.

- Ellie was a 14-year-old African American female. She was new to this school district last year and was very quiet. She talked to no one in Reading Seminar class or in the paired English class. Her mother was very supportive and sensitive to any needs her daughter may have had during her first year at this school.
- Jason was a 15-year-old African American male. He was considered ESOL because his parents speak French in the home. Jason spoke English well and was not enrolled in an ESOL class during the day, only monitored each grading period by the ESOL department. Jason's mother responded to one phone call but no emails.
- Alan was a 15-year-old African American male. He was well liked by his peers and played football this year. Despite the strong support of his mother, Alan failed his first year of high school.
- Rick was a 15-year-old white male. He played soccer and football during his freshman year and was well liked by his peers. His mother was active in his education, maintaining regular communication with the teacher-researcher.
- Linda was a 16-year-old African American female. Conflict at home caused her to be upset, unfocused, and often confrontational with the teacher and with her peers at school. She was always apologetic but lacked the coping skills to deal with her homelife. She often left class angry or in tears or was called out of class by her mentor at school.

- Ray was a 15-year-old Hispanic male. He was polite and confident with adults. He was well-liked by his peers and played football this year. He often said his mother was concerned about his grades, but only an older sister and brother could be reached when the teacher-researcher called the phone number provided. She did not reply to emails.
- Farrah was a 15-year-old African American female. She had a 504 for medical reasons. Her mother was very supportive and maintained regular communication with the teacher-researcher. Farrah was well-liked by her peers and was a polite, confident young lady.
- Lucas was a 15-year-old African American male. Lucas was caught up in the social aspect of high school and had difficulty adjusting to the rigor of high school classes. Despite numerous attempts to contact his father via email, phone calls, and texts, communication failed between the teacher-researcher and Lucas' father. Lucas also failed his entire 9th grade year of high school.
- Jack was a 14-year-old African American male. His charisma made him very well liked among his peers, yet he was also mature and polite when speaking and acting with adults. Jack played football and basketball this year and adjusted to high school well. His mother was very supportive, attending Open House and maintaining communication via emails, phone calls, and texts.
- Tom was a 15-year-old African American male. He was polite and confident but also self-reflective and eager to ask for help. He was well

liked by his peers and seemed to have adjusted well to high school. He played football this year. He had an IEP with a support lab during the school day for academic assistance. His mother was very supportive, attending Open House and parent meetings.

- Zelda was a 16-year-old African American female. She was well liked among her peers and was confident and polite with adults. She seemed to have adjusted well to high school. She had an IEP with a support lab during the school day for academic assistance. Her mother was very supportive, attending Open House and parent meetings. She also maintained regular communication with the teacher researcher via emails, phone calls, and texts.

Data Collection Measures, Instruments, and Tools

In teacher action research, collecting data is “purposeful, deliberate, organized, and systematic” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 85). Teacher-researchers should use tools that address their research questions, not the theories supporting the study (Check & Shutt, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Teacher-researchers should ask what they want to know and what tools will help them gather that data (Efron & Ravid, 2013). To measure student motivation and measure achievement in reading and writing, the teacher-researcher selected three instruments to collect quantitative data and three instruments to collect qualitative data. Table 3.2 organizes the data collection instruments.

Table 3.2 *Data Collection Instruments*

Research Questions	Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data
1. What impact do blended learning strategies have on student motivation in a Reading Seminar elective course classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) • teacher journal (Appendix D) • video of class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre- and post- survey on Google form (Appendix A) • Ticket Out (questions 1, 2) (Appendix B)
2. How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student writing skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) • teacher journal (Appendix D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ticket Out (question 3) Appendix B) • Assessment data from teacher-made scoring rubric for writing (Table 4.1)
3. How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student reading skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) • teacher journal (Appendix D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ticket Out (question 4) Appendix B) • Assessment data from CommonLit LMS online curriculum (Table 4.2)

Instruments to Collect Quantitative Data

Three instruments collected quantitative data for this study. First, a survey for students with questions regarding motivation (Appendix A) was administered to students at the beginning and at the end of the study. The questions were designed by the teacher-researcher using guidelines suggested by Efron and Ravid (2013). The student survey addressed the first research question about motivation. Second, the tickets out (Appendix B) recorded student reflections after the lessons about their motivation and academic progress. Third, achievement scores for reading were gathered from CommonLit and writing scores from prompts related to those reading selections. The

achievement scores from CommonLit addressed research questions two and three about student achievement.

CommonLit Explained

CommonLit is an online learning management system (LMS) that provides a collection of reading selections and assessment questions for teachers and entire districts to use for instruction and assessments. CommonLit is an award-winning, research-based, non-profit resource for teachers created by teachers. It offers over 2,000 reading selections for grades 3-12. Teachers can choose assignments by searching for reading selections by book, genre, grade level, literary device, text set, or theme. Reading selections are also offered in Spanish. Teachers can select assignments for students to complete at any time by designating a due date. Students work on assignments independently, using the read-aloud feature and reading guide questions to gauge their understanding before completing final questions. Teachers can analyze their student performance by standards and download the data as CSV file for Microsoft Excel.

Instruments to Collect Qualitative Data

Three instruments collected qualitative data for this study. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the student-participants (Appendix C) before and after the three-week study. The interview questions addressed all three research questions and were developed using guidelines suggested by Efron and Ravid (2013). Semi-structured interview questions were used so that the teacher-researcher could ask follow up questions, allowing the participants to provide more details about his/her thoughts (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Second, the teacher-researcher kept a journal (Appendix D) with reflections about student-participants regarding their motivation and academic

performance. Journaling is an effective way for a teacher to reflect and make connections (Dana & Yendel-Hoppey, 2014). Third, a video of the class was recorded at the beginning of the study. The teacher journal and the video of class provided support, clarity, and justification for conclusions during and after the data were collected and addressed all three research questions.

Research Procedures

Before the three-week study began, the teacher-researcher scheduled the school's librarian to set up the video camera to record the class from beginning to end. The student opinion surveys were conducted at the beginning and at the end of the study. The student survey questions were available to students on a Google form. The Google form allowed easier analysis of data because the responses could be sorted into a spreadsheet and viewed as pie charts or bar graphs. Figure 3.1 provides a graphic representation of the instruction and data collection that took place during the 15 days of the study.

The blended learning whole-group rotation model provides time during class when students work on a digital curriculum so that teachers can meet with individual students (Tucker, et al., 2017). Every day during the course of the study, students worked independently via digital curriculum on the CommonLit LMS. During this time, the teacher-researcher circulated the room and met with students individually. The semi-structured interviews were conducted during the first week of instruction during this independent work time. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The teacher-researcher recorded notes and reflections regularly in a journal. Efron and Ravid (2013) have advised teacher-researchers to start observing the class then focus to participants or interactions that are most related to the study. Because the study focused on student motivation, the teacher-researcher focused on students who were very engaged in their

work or who were very distracted. The teacher-researcher recorded those observations in the journal, identifying what was important or noting any changes in student behaviors from day to day or within that same class period.

Tucker, et al., (2017) have suggested a variety of online and face-to-face activities in the whole group rotation model of blended learning. Class began each day with the teacher previewing the reading selection for the lesson on CommonLit with a discussion or with an activity. CommonLit served as the online component for this study, allowing students to pace their own learning and address their learning goals during independent work time. Tucker, et al. (2017) stressed the importance of students feeling ownership for their learning, thereby developing intrinsic motivation and a desire to learn. The blended learning model stresses the importance of feedback and goal setting as major factors in increasing intrinsic motivation for students (Tucker, et al., 2017). During independent work time, the teacher circulated the room, meeting with individual students about their progress. The teacher-researcher directed the attention of student-participants to work they had completed and then reviewed feedback and performance with them.

In addition to multiple choice reading questions, CommonLit also provides discussion questions. These discussion questions were presented as writing prompts for students on a Google doc in Google Classroom, enabling the teacher to give quick feedback sent to students as an immediate notification on Google Classroom. These written responses were scored using a student-friendly scoring rubric (Appendix F). The concluding activity during each day of the study was a ticket out (Appendix B) asking students to reflect on that day. The Likert scale questions provided quantitative data. No student-participants responded to the open-ended questions for “other thoughts” on the

ticket out. The ticket out was available to students on a Google form. The Google form allowed easier analysis of data because the responses were sorted in a spreadsheet and viewed as pie charts or bar graphs.

All student work, surveys, and responses to interview questions kept students' identities confidential to protect participants. Students were assigned pseudonyms during data analysis for which only the researcher knew the identity. All student data were kept confidential by a password-protected Google Drive and the password-protected CommonLit LMS.

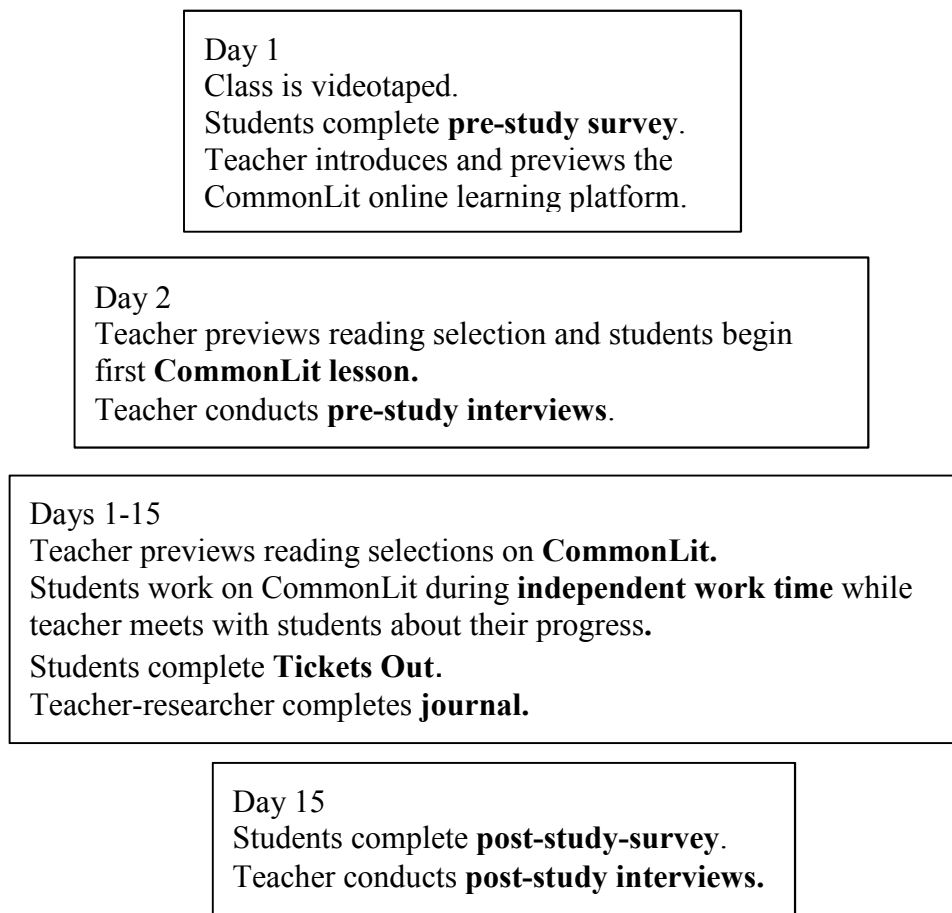


Figure 3.1 *Graphic Organizer of Procedures*

Treatment, Processing, and Analysis of Data

This mixed-methods study employed a convergent design data collection because quantitative and qualitative data were gathered at the same time, analyzed separately, then compared (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Table 3.3 gives an overview of how the data were analyzed.

Table 3.3 *Analysis of Data*

Research Questions	Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data
1. What impact do blended learning strategies have on student motivation in a Reading Seminar elective course classroom?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) • teacher journal (Appendix D) • video of class <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Analysis</u></p> <p>These data were analyzed by inductive analysis. Transcriptions and notes were coded for common themes and sorted by categories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre- and post- survey on Google form (Appendix A) • Ticket Out (questions 1, 2) (Appendix B) <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Analysis</u></p> <p>These quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find measures of central tendencies.</p>
2. How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student writing skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) • teacher journal (Appendix D) <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Analysis</u></p> <p>These data were analyzed by inductive analysis. Transcriptions and notes were coded for common themes and sorted by categories.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ticket Out (question 3) Appendix B) • pre- and post- survey on Google form (Appendix A) • Assessment data from teacher-made scoring rubric for writing (Table 4.1) <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Analysis</u></p> <p>These quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find measures of central tendencies.</p>
3. How does the implementation of blended learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • semi-structured interviews (Appendix C) • teacher journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ticket Out (question 4) Appendix B) • pre- and post- survey

Research Questions	Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data
strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student reading skills?	<p>(Appendix D)</p> <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <p>These data were analyzed by inductive analysis. Transcriptions and notes were coded for common themes and sorted by categories.</p>	<p>on Google form (Appendix A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment data from CommonLit LMS (Table 4.2) <p><u>Analysis</u></p> <p>These quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find measures of central tendencies.</p>

The data for research question one were analyzed first. The interviews, the teacher journal, and the notes from the video of the class were transcribed and coded for common themes by the teacher-researcher. Finally, the teacher-researcher interpreted aspects of the data to answer the first research question. The quantitative data for research question one were analyzed by using descriptive statistics to find measures of central tendencies for the student surveys and for the tickets out. The measures of central tendencies helped identify the collective attitudes and behaviors of the participants.

The data for question two were analyzed next. The qualitative data from the interviews and the teacher's journal were analyzed by inductive analysis. The teacher-researcher developed categories and coded the interview responses and reflective journal by those categories. The teacher-researcher made connections from the coded categories to the original research question, finally making interpretations to answer the research question. The quantitative data for research question two were analyzed by using descriptive statistics to find measures of central tendencies among the responses for the tickets out.

The data for question three were analyzed next. The qualitative data from the student interviews and the teacher journal were analyzed by inductive analysis. The teacher-researcher developed categories and coded the transcripts and notes by those categories. The teacher-researcher interpreted aspects of the data to answer the third research question. The teacher-researcher analyzed the quantitative data from the tickets out by using descriptive statistics to find measures of central tendencies.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study, including the problem of practice, the three research questions, and the significance of this study for educators in the classroom and stakeholders who made instructional decisions for students. This chapter also explained the research design, including the validity of action research, the context and setting of the study, and the role of the researcher. Next, this chapter described the participants, including a table that made the characteristics easy to view. Next, this chapter described and provided an easy-reference table for six instruments for data collection, three for qualitative data and three for quantitative data. The next section described in detail the research procedures, including a figure to represent visually the days in the study. The last section of this chapter described how both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed, including an easy-reference table.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This action research project, based on 15 days of study, examined the impact of blended learning on student engagement and achievement in a high school Reading Seminar classroom. This study answered three research questions: 1) What impact do blended learning strategies have on student motivation in a Reading Seminar elective course classroom? 2) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student writing skills? 3) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student reading skills?

Problem of Practice

The Reading Seminar classes at this high school were designed to “double dip” freshmen in English based on skill gaps revealed by the 8th grade MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) test scores. The MAP test is a norm-referenced test developed and administered through NWEA (2020). Double-dipping freshmen in both math and English seminar classes originated from the research of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), specifically Gene Bottoms, in 2008. The rosters in these seminar classes were based on ability and homogeneously grouped by skill level with the goal of strengthening student skills for their parallel classes of English and math. Teaching students in this Reading Seminar class was a daily challenge due to the distractions of their personal cell phones, unrelated websites on their school-issued Chromebooks, typical adolescent issues

with friends, and their own personal lack motivation. Weiner (1979) documented that factors such as a history of failure, a lack of success, and marginal skills in reading and writing often cause marginal students such as the student-participants in this study to be unmotivated.

Significance of the Study

The increase of technology tools accessible to teachers for instruction and the distractions for students from cell phones and other personal devices (laptops, Chromebooks, iPads) intended for instruction can work against each other in the classroom. Blended learning combines face to face instruction with online instruction. The significance of this study was to identify how teachers could implement blended learning strategies in their own classrooms to increase achievement in reading and writing and improve the motivation of their struggling learners using technology as an advantage, not a deterrent, to learning.

Data Collection Methods

Instruments to Collect Quantitative Data

Three instruments collected quantitative data for this study. First, a survey for students with questions regarding motivation (Appendix A) was administered to students at the beginning and at the end of the study. The questions were designed by the teacher-researcher using guidelines suggested by Efron and Ravid (2013). The student survey addressed the first research question about motivation. Second, the tickets out (Appendix B) each day recorded student reflections about their motivation and academic progress. The tickets out addressed all three research questions. Third, assessment scores for

reading and writing gathered from the CommonLit LMS addressed research questions two and three about student achievement.

Instruments to Collect Qualitative Data

Three instruments collected qualitative data for the study. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the student-participants (Appendix C) before and after the study. The interview questions addressed all three research questions and were developed using guidelines suggested by Efron and Ravid (2013). Semi-structured interview questions were used so that the teacher-researcher could ask follow up questions, allowing the participants to provide more details about his/her thoughts (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Second, the teacher-researcher regularly recorded notes and reflections in a journal (Appendix D). Third, a video of the class was recorded at the beginning of the study. The interviews, the teacher journal, and the video of the class provided support, clarity, and justification for conclusions during and after the data were collected and addressed all three research questions.

Summary of Sample Characteristics

Fifteen students were enrolled in this Reading Seminar class; thirteen students and parents granted permission to participate in the study. All participants were high school freshmen 14-16 years of age. The participants consisted of 7 African American males, 4 African American females, 1 white male, and 1 Hispanic male. Three of the participants were enrolled in support lab classes that provided instructional support for reading skills and writing skills based on their disabilities. One student was considered ESOL but was not enrolled in a support class at school, only monitored each grading period by the ESOL department. Ability levels as represented by 8th grade MAP reading scores ranged

from the 12th percentile to the 55th percentile, indicating the wide range of ability levels of the student-participants.

Intervention Strategy

The blended learning whole-group rotation model provides time during class when students work on a digital curriculum so that teachers can meet with individual students (Tucker, et al., 2017). During the course of the study, the teacher previewed the material with a class discussion or an activity, then students worked independently via digital curriculum on the CommonLit LMS. During student work time, the teacher met with students individually to discuss their progress.

Tucker, et al., (2017) suggested a variety of online and face-to-face activities in the whole group rotation model of blended learning. Before each new assignment on CommonLit, the teacher-researcher previewed the content of the reading selection for students with a discussion or an activity. CommonLit served as the online component for this study, allowing students to pace their own learning and address their learning goals during independent work time. Tucker, et al. (2017) stressed the importance of students feeling ownership for their learning, thereby developing intrinsic motivation and a desire to learn. During independent work time, conversations the teacher had with students were based on the student performance on CommonLit and the additional writing assignments in Google Classroom.

The CommonLit LMS asked students to read a text and answer multiple choice questions. CommonLit also provided writing prompts for students to answer a question in a short paragraph based on the text they read. Students also composed longer written responses based on the discussion questions in CommonLit. Those discussion questions were composed on a Google doc in Google Classroom to enable the teacher-researcher to

provide quick feedback. Both the short answer responses and the longer responses were scored by the teacher. The longer written responses posted in Google Classroom were scored using a student-friendly scoring rubric (Appendix F). The teacher-researcher provided feedback to students within the CommonLit LMS and on Google Classroom about strengths and weaknesses in their writing.

After completing CommonLit lessons, students were asked to complete a ticket out (Appendix B) on a Google form to reflect on their motivation, focus, and thoughts about the difficulty of the assignment. The Likert scale questions provided quantitative data. No student-participants responded to the open-ended questions on the ticket out for which they could make additional comments. The Google form allowed easy analysis of data because the responses can be sorted in a spreadsheet and viewed as pie charts or bar graphs.

All student work, surveys, and responses to interview questions kept students' identities confidential to protect participants. Students were assigned pseudonyms during data analysis for which only the teacher-researcher knew the identity. All student data were stored by the password-protected Google Drive of the teacher-researcher and the password-protected CommonLit LMS.

Analysis and Findings

Analysis of Qualitative Data

The teacher-researcher used Easy Voice Recorder phone app to record the interviews and Live Transcribe transcription app on her phone to convert data from audio to text. After the audio was transcribed to text, the teacher-researcher read through the interview transcriptions multiple times, each time noticing repeated words and phrases as themes. The teacher-researcher also read through her teacher journal and the notes from

the class video multiple times to note repeated words and phrases as themes. Figure 4.1 shows examples of two images from the teacher-researcher's coding.

Yes, it's okay. If you say no, I mean, I really need your honest opinion. What do you what do you think you learned from your about your reading skills one thing I learned from it is that **Like when you click like the reading I read out loud. I think I learned more like I understand you use that feature.** Yes, sometimes ----- like why were you in my head? I go faster, but I don't cut all the things that they say. So I read out loud I caught. They say I've got also I don't understand what you're saying. That's very smart ----- That's very smart that you're aware of that. That's good. All right. Did you learn anything from the feedback on your writing that I've given you have you paid attention to that? **Yes very much.** What have you remembered from that? **I remember from that right away. She started to make that more like bring it back over you anymore things to it.**

common themes

- parent involvement
- motivation
- reading/writing skills
- teaching style/instructional style
- CommonLit

pseudonym Jack

So have you felt successful this semester in Reading seminar class? **Somewhat** What? Okay. What is what do you think? What do you think was good? And what do you think was bad as far as you feeling successful? **The work it wasn't like too hard to like that. But sometime okay, you could like overwhelming.** I guess I as----- Well, I don't know. This is a different situation. So I guess is kind of

don't show it. I don't like I don't like showing emotion. I just I just read it. **Do you ever use the Read Aloud feature on common lit?** No, man. Okay. Yes, ----- **said she did that and she said that she really liked that.** Okay. Well for number five headed you feel about the reading selections on common lit, like if they were interesting or if they were difficult. They were all interesting. How about the difficulty level? **Some of the questions were difficult and some of them weren't. I just don't know.** What did you learn anything about your reading skills from using common with?

I don't know I do not. Do you feel like you're a better reader now than you were at the beginning of the year? Yes. Do you know why? **No, I do not.** Okay. Okay, have you paid attention to any of the writing feedback? I've given you. Yes, what have you learned about your writing that I need to like what some of the stuff that I write. **I need to like be more specific with stuff and I right we'll go in more detail.**

common themes

- parent involvement
- motivation
- reading/writing skills
- teaching style/instructional style
- CommonLit

pseudonym Rick

Okay, I've noticed in the last couple of weeks that you have really really been doing your work and doing it a lot better. Why is that? Because I was I found out that. **Since these grades affect added to football. I found this a lot easier to do it at home for just less distraction.** Oh my gosh, you're the

Figure 4.1 *Examples of Teacher-Researcher Coding*

Creswell and Creswell (2018) described this process of coding as inductive analysis because the researcher builds patterns to organize the qualitative data. The teacher-researcher developed the following categories and highlighted in different colors words and phrases that applied to each category: distractions from other students in class, the teacher's teaching style/the format for instruction in class, students' awareness of their own reading/writing skills, parent involvement, motivation, and CommonLit. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that as the data analysis process moves forward, the researcher reverts between the data and the themes to determine the evidence for her conclusions. This process of data analysis helped the teacher-researcher make connections between the data and the original research questions (Mertler, 2017).

Analysis of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data from the pre- and post-opinion surveys, the tickets out, and the assessments from CommonLit were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find measures of central tendencies. Creswell and Creswell (2018) advised researchers to report the frequency and the averages for the quantitative data, so the teacher-researcher presented a series of bar graphs in this chapter for easy visual representations. Mertler (2017) justified using measures of central tendencies to help a researcher identify what is standard about the participants in a study, particularly when the researcher is striving to discover a collective level of performance or attitude. Thus, the teacher-researcher explained the analyzation of the data in narrative form to clarify conclusions about the student-participants

Research Question #1

The first research question for this study asked, “What impact do blended learning strategies have on student motivation in a Reading Seminar elective course classroom?”

The pre- and post-study interviews with student-participants, the teacher journal, notes from the class video, the pre- and post-study opinion surveys, and the tickets out are five sources of data that provided conclusions to answer this question.

Pre-study Interviews

The transcriptions from the pre-study interview revealed two common themes: (1) disruptions from student behavior as a problem for learning and (2) the students’ preference for instruction that involved the whole class engaged in reading and discussing a book together.

During the pre-study interviews, 8 of the 11 student-participants interviewed explained that disruptions from other students interrupted their learning, citing “loud noises,” “yelling from other students,” and “outbursts.” Ellie expressed her frustration as “when we have to stop reading because of other students talking.” Ray admitted he has to “zone out” to ignore other students and get his work done. Jason admitted to getting “distracted with things online” (on his Chromebook). Only 3 of the 11 students interviewed, Tom, Rick, and Jack, claimed that they were not distracted by other students during class. Tom and Rick blamed their own lack of self-discipline or “being lazy” for not being able to pay attention in class. During class Jack often looked elsewhere or appeared to be inattentive, but he provided profound, thoughtful responses to verbal questions when asked. Jack appeared to be the only student-participant who was not distracted by other students, and although he appeared to be unfocused, he still

contributed to class discussions and learning. The transcriptions from the pre-study interviews allowed the teacher-researcher to conclude that student-participants preferred and were motivated by a quiet, orderly class with instruction led by teacher. This conclusion from the pre-study interviews is important because even after the study that included blended learning instruction, half of the student-participants still recalled reading and discussing a book aloud with the teacher as their favorite thing about class.

Post-study Interviews

The post-study student interview transcriptions indicated three common themes: (1) student awareness of their reading and writing skills, (2) student awareness of what motivated them, and (3) student preferences for instruction that involved the whole class engaged in reading and discussing a book together.

During their post-study interviews, Tim, Alan, and Jim admitted that they were at fault for their own motivation. Tim explained that he “got overwhelmed.” Alan admitted that he would rather use his phone “or do something else.” Jim admitted, “I need to start paying attention more.” During her post-study interview, Ellie admitted she did the CommonLit assignments “just to get a grade.”

While Tim, Jim, and Ray said they looked forward to coming to Reading Seminar class just “to learn” or to “become a better student in English,” Ellie, Zelda, Farrah, Tom, Alan, and Rick, almost half of the student-participants, specifically stated in either their pre or post-study interview that “reading the book together as a class” as what they like best about the Reading Seminar class. Ellie, Zelda, and Farrah stated in *both* their pre- and post-study interviews how they preferred “reading together” as a class. Farrah and Jack specifically identified the teacher’s “personality” as what they like about class.

In his post-study interview, Jack described hands-on projects for other units as his favorite thing to do.

The teacher-researcher asked Rick why his work had improved so much and why his work submission had increased; he replied that he realized his grades mattered to be eligible for football. Rick also identified the Desmond Doss reading selection from CommonLit as his favorite and “the easiest.” He said his dad “is all into that” and Rick “found it interesting.” Rick’s brief statement about the Desmond Doss reading selection points to two important factors for student motivation: (1) personal interest from the student and (2) the support of parents. Not only did Rick mention his father regarding the Desmond Doss reading passage, but the teacher-researcher maintained regular communication via email, text, and phone calls with Rick’s mother. In addition, Rick claimed during his pre-study interview that he was not distracted by students during class; he admitted during his post-study interview that he can get “more work done at home without distractions.”

Rick’s improvement in achievement and his self-awareness about his learning differed drastically from student-participants Jim and Jason. Neither Jim nor Jason was able to reflect on their learning or their motivation during their post-study interview, giving answers such as “not sure” or “I don’t know.” Five factors came together for the student-participant Rick: (1) his extrinsic motivation for grades to play football, (2) his realization that he could concentrate better while doing schoolwork at home, (3) his awareness of how CommonLit helped his reading, (4) the feedback on his writing, and (5) the involvement of his parents.

The transcriptions from the pre-study interviews allowed the teacher-researcher to conclude that student-participants were motivated by a quiet, orderly class with instruction led by teacher. This conclusion from the pre-study interviews is important because even after the blended learning intervention, 6 of the 13 student-participants still recalled reading and discussing a book aloud with the teacher as their favorite thing about class. Although Tom and Rick described specific ways that blended learning using the CommonLit LMS for independent work did help them, their parents' involvement was also a motivating factor for them.

Teacher-Researcher Journal

One obvious theme from the teacher-researcher's journal was the positive effect of parent communication on student behavior and student effort. Parent communication was an expectation of teachers from the school administration, and the teacher-researcher knew it was critical when working with marginal students. The teacher-researcher maintained regular communication with the parents before, during, and after the study. For student-participants Tim, Rick, Farrah, Tom, and Zelda, this communication resulted in more focused behavior and better student effort. Despite regular communication with the parents of Jim and Alan, those student-participants would not complete their work. The failed attempts at contacting the parents of Jason, Ray, and Lucas proved to have detrimental effects; these student-participants did not do their work. Based on these notes in the teacher-researcher's journal, the teacher-researcher made the conclusion for this study that parent contact is critical for student motivation.

Notes from the Class Video

The class video was recorded during a discussion about justice. This discussion previewed the first CommonLit reading assignment about the Supreme Court. Three themes in the class video related directly to student motivation. First, students were out of their seat at the beginning as they had difficulty getting settled in; specifically, student-participants Jack, Lucas, Tom had difficulty settling in. Second, the teacher-researcher had to repeat directions 6 times. Third, after instruction began, all student-participants except two were attentive. Six student-participants, Alan, Farrah, Jack, Jim, Tom, and Ray, actively gave input to the discussion. Student-participants Tim, Zelda, and Ellie listened attentively. Student-participants Lucas and Rick had their heads down or refused to remove their earbuds. The teacher-researcher summarized what is observed in the video regarding student motivation. The video showed that all the student-participants except two did want to become involved in the lesson either by providing input or by listening intently. The teacher-researcher concluded from the notes for the class video that students were motivated to learn when the teacher led a discussion. This conclusion coincided with the pre-and post-interview comments from the students about liking the teachers' personality and preferring classroom instruction where they read and discuss a text together.

Pre- and Post-Study Opinion Surveys

The results of the pre-study and post-study student survey (represented in Figure 4.2) are represented by the number of students who answered for each response. Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 asked student-participants about coming to school, enjoying, and learning in Reading Seminar class, and their motivation to complete their work. Based on

the results of the pre-and post-survey, the teacher-researcher concluded that blended learning was not a factor in student motivation.

Questions 1, 2, 3 pertained to motivation about coming to school and to Reading Seminar class. The results of the pre-study survey indicated that students hold only marginal opinions about coming to school in general; however, student-participants hold favorable opinions about the Reading Seminar class specifically and feel that they learn in the class. Six students replied “agree,” 2 replied “neutral,” and 4 students replied “disagree” and “strongly disagree” about Question 1, liking school in general. More students replied favorably to Question 2 about enjoying the Reading Seminar class specifically. Two students “strongly agree” that they like Reading Seminar class; 7 students “agree” that they like the class; and only 3 are “neutral.” Students responded even more favorably to Question 3 if they learn in Reading Seminar class. Five students replied “strongly agree”; 4 students replied “agree”; and 3 students replied “neutral.”

The post-study survey responses yielded results similar to the pre-study responses for questions 1, 2, and 3 about coming to school and Reading Seminar class in general. Both the pre and post study student opinion survey responses coincided with the comments students made in their pre and post study interviews. In both pre and study interviews, students remarked how they looked forward to coming to Reading Seminar class and enjoyed class.

Question 4 asked student-participants specifically about their motivation. For the pre-study survey, 2 students “strongly agreed” and 5 students “agreed” that they want to do their work in Reading Seminar; 4 students were “neutral” about wanting to do their work and 1 student “strongly disagreed” about wanting to do work in Reading Seminar

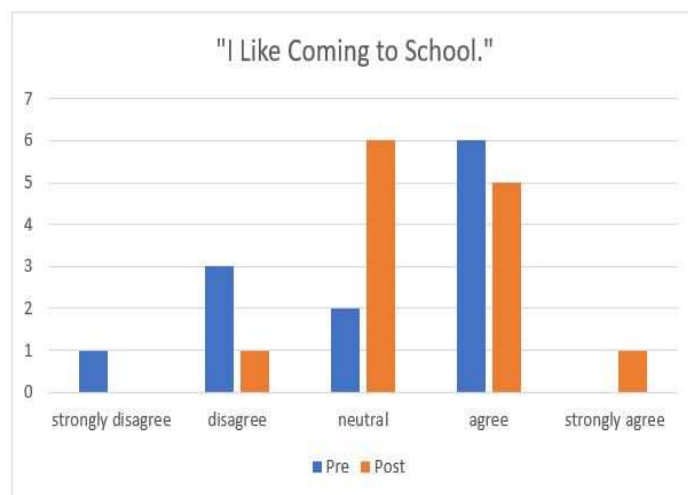
class. The post-study survey indicated that more students felt unsure or “neutral” about their motivation and wanting to do their work for the class. Ironically, these results are not supported by the comments from student-participants in their post-study interviews. In the post-study interviews, students remarked how their parents and their grades motivated them.

The student survey questions 7, 8, and 9 addressed goals of blended learning designed to increase student motivation: making choices, setting goals, and managing their own time. Student responses on the pre-study survey were dispersed across the Likert Scale for these questions. Question 7 asked student-participants if they felt they could make choices about their learning during Reading Seminar class. Three students responded “strongly disagree” or “disagree.” Three students were neutral about making their own choices during class. Six students responded “agree” or “strongly agree” about the ability to make choices in class about their learning in Reading Seminar class. Question 8 asked students if goal-setting helps them learn. Seven students responded “strongly agree” or “agree.” Three students were unsure or “neutral,” and 1 student “strongly disagreed” that goal setting helps them learn. Question 9 asked students if they feel that they manage their time well during Reading Seminar class. Only 4 students replied “strongly agree” or “agree.” Six students were unsure or “neutral” about their time management, and 1 student “disagreed” about his/her ability to manage time during class. Overall, the results of the pre-study student opinion survey, as outlined in Figure 4.2 indicated that students do not have a strong self-awareness of what helps or hinders their learning regarding making choices, setting goals, and managing their time during Reading Seminar class. While only 1 to 2 students replied “disagree” or “strongly

disagree” to these questions, 12 students indicated that they are unsure or “neutral” about understanding these three skills for learning in a Blended Learning classroom.

The results of the post-study student opinion survey showed a growth in awareness and confidence in the three blended learning goals of making choices, setting goals, and managing time. The post-study student survey questions 7, 8, and 9 as outlined in Figure 4.2 shows more students selecting “agree” and “strongly agree.” Furthermore, several students admitted during their post-study interviews an increased awareness about themselves as learners. Based on the growth shown between pre-and post-survey questions 7, 8, and 9 and the supporting statements from student-participants in their post-study interviews, the teacher-researcher concluded that student-participants did actualize the three goals of blended learning for this study and grow as learners as a result.

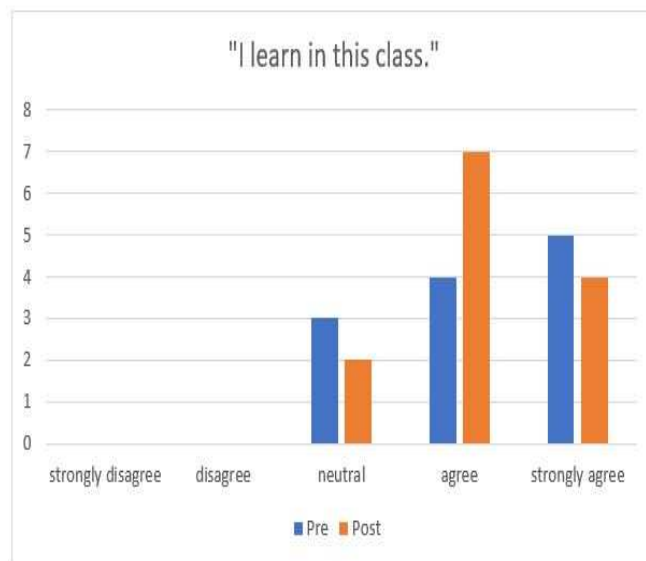
Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	1	3	2	6	0
Post	0	1	6	5	1



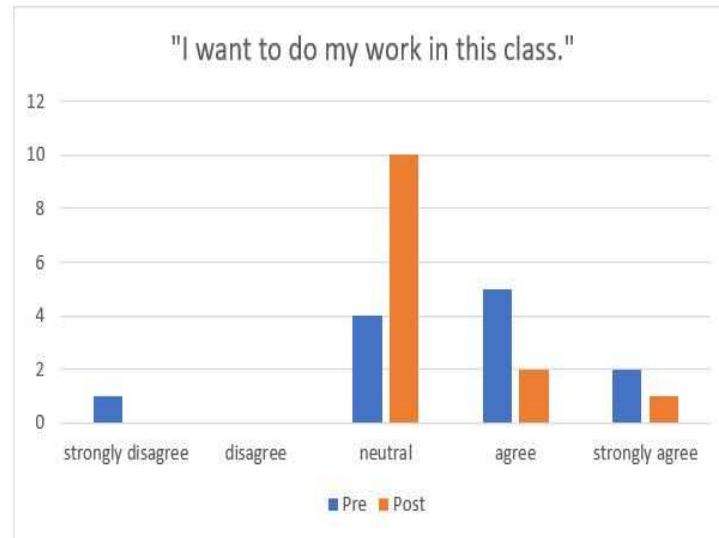
	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	0	0	3	7	2
Post	0	0	4	5	4



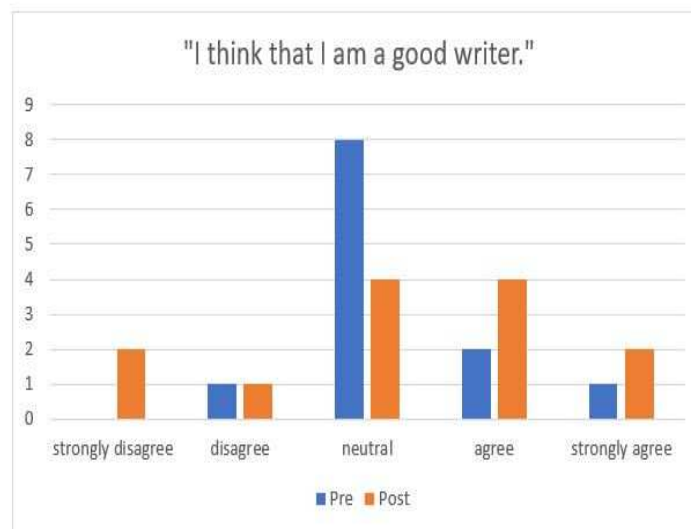
	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	0	0	3	4	5
Post	0	0	2	7	4



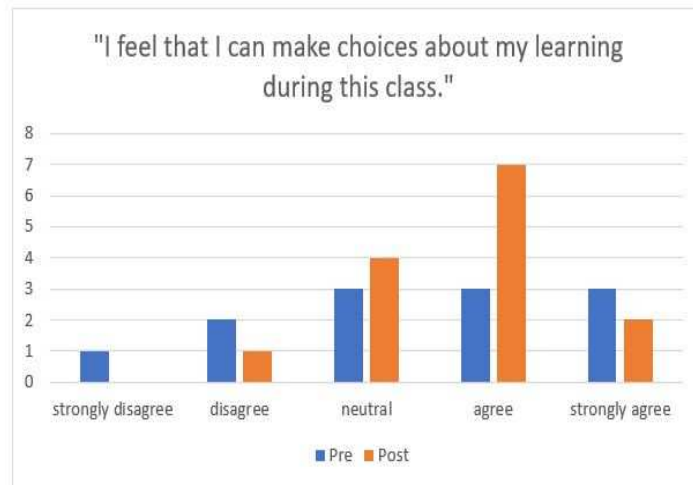
	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	1	0	4	5	2
Post	0	0	10	2	1



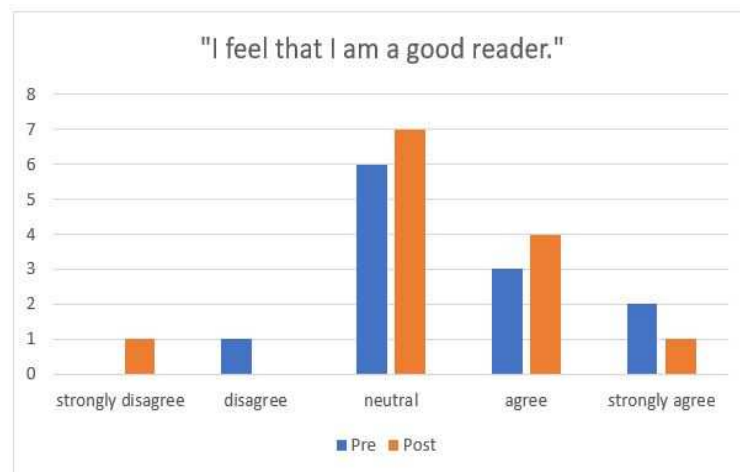
	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	0	1	8	2	1
Post	2	1	4	4	2



Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	1	2	3	3	3
Post	0	1	4	7	2



Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	0	1	6	3	2
Post	1	0	7	4	1



Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	2	0	3	4	3
Post	0	3	2	7	1



Category	strongly disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Pre	0	2	6	3	1
Post	2	1	3	4	3

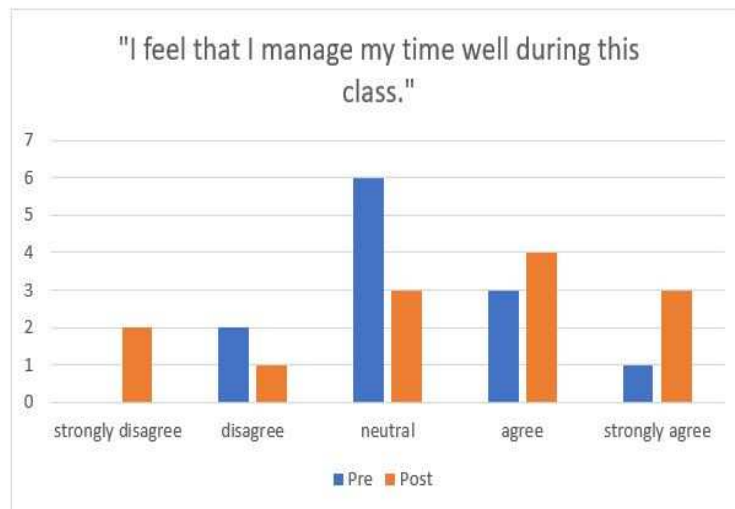


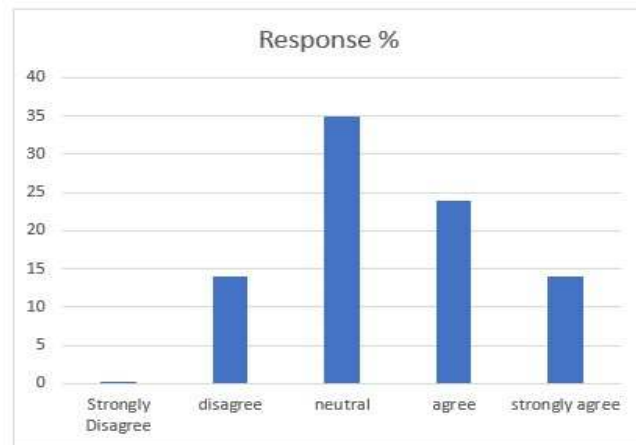
Figure 4.2 Results of Pre- and Post-study Student Opinion Surveys

(12 responses for the pre-survey; 13 responses for the post-survey)

Tickets Out

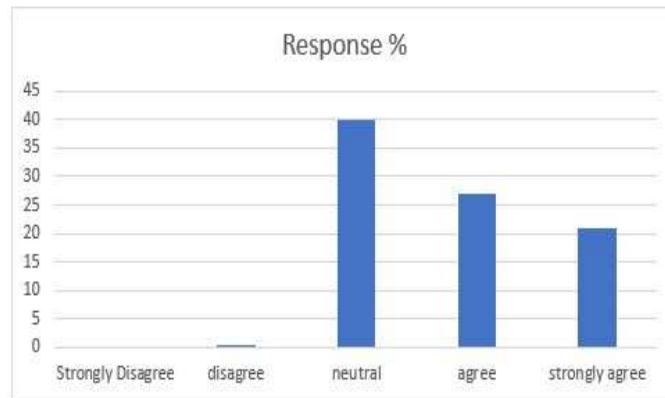
A total of 11 CommonLit assignments were assigned during the study. Students were asked to complete tickets out after their assignments regarding their focus, motivation, the ease of the writing and reading assignments, and their ability to navigate the CommonLit LMS. Figure 4.3 shows the averages of responses from student-participants for their tickets out. These responses indicate that 30%-41% of students felt unsure or “neutral” about each of these questions. However, 38% -53% of students responded favorably (agree or strongly agree; easy or very easy) for these questions. Based on the results of the tickets out, the teacher-researcher concluded that students were able to stay focused and motivated to complete their work on CommonLit and found the CommonLit LMS manageable to navigate.

Category	Strongly Disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Response %	0.08	14	35	24	14



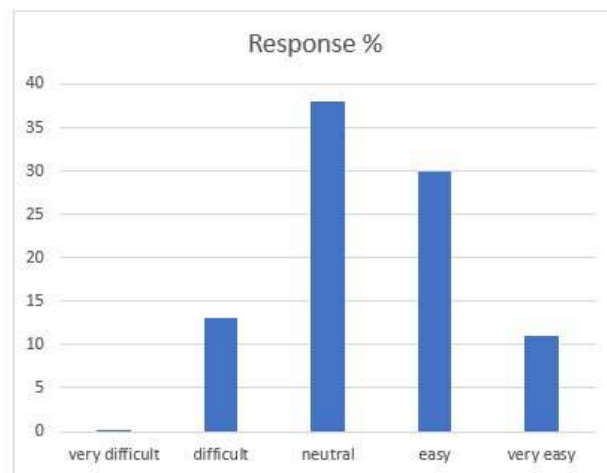
"I was motivated to finish my work today."

Category	Strongly Disagree	disagree	neutral	agree	strongly agree
Response %	0	0.05	40	27	21



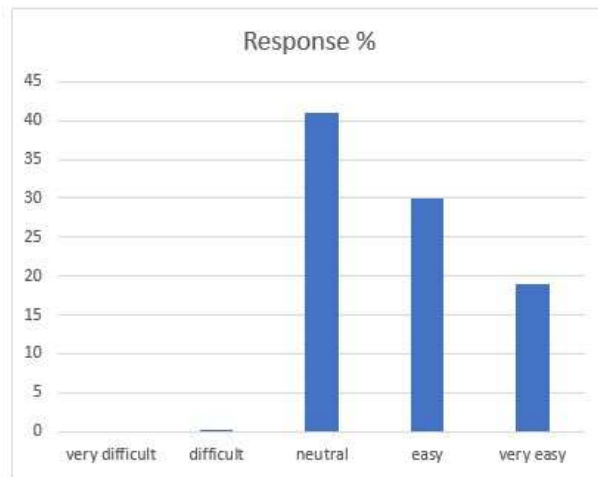
"I stayed focused on my work today."

Category	very difficult	difficult	neutral	easy	very easy
Response %	0.02	13	38	30	11



Rate your writing assignment today.

Category	very difficult	difficult	neutral	easy	very easy
Response %	0	0.05	41	30	19



Rate your reading assignment today.

Figure 4.3 *Averages of Student Responses from Tickets Out*

Research Question #2

The second research question for this study asked, “How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student writing skills?” The pre- and post-study interviews with student-participants, the teacher journal, the tickets out, the pre- and post-student surveys, and the CommonLit data for the writing assessments were five sources of data that provided conclusions to answer this question.

Pre-study Interviews

Eleven student-participants claimed in their pre-study interview that they felt they were good writers. When the teacher-researcher asked them to explain how they knew that, only a few could explain. Tim explained that he felt he can write well if he can relate to the topic. Ray said he learned from former teachers how he needs to develop his organization. Jack remembered that other teachers told him before that he can write well if he tries. Jason said he can write stories well, but he was not sure about writing for an

academic purpose. Rick admitted that he had already been learning from the feedback in his English class to improve his writing. Zelda and Tom both clearly stated that they did not feel they were good writers during their pre-study interviews; ironically, Zelda and Tom both showed improvement on their CommonLit writing assignments.

Post-study Interviews

During the post-study interviews, student-participants were vocal and detailed about what they learned from their writing feedback during the study. Tim said he learned “to use guide words and organize better.” Tom and Zelda said they learned “to add more details.” Ellie admitted that she learned not to use “I” in academic writing. Farrah specifically remembered she needed “to add more details” in her writing. Rick was able to recall specifically the feedback he received on his writing and said he learned “to use better word choice.” Jim said he learned he needed “to read the directions” more clearly for the writing prompts. Only Alan and Jack could not recall specific feedback about their writing.

Teacher Journal

The teacher-researcher’s journal indicated frustration about students’ writing. Although she would preview how to organize a written response and provide bulleted points to guide students through their written responses, students did not seem to improve. However, the span of writing scores for students Ellie, Rick, Farrah, Tom, Zelda were encouraging, and the post-study interviews did indicate that students did learn from the feedback on their writing.

Tickets Out

One question on the tickets out asked the student-participants about the difficulty of their writing assignment. The average responses were 38% unsure or “neutral,” 30% “easy,” and 11% “very easy.” Only 13% of the student-participants selected “difficult” for their writing assignments. This data could coincide with the writing improvement seen for student-participants Ellie, Rick, Farrah, Tom, and Zelda. However, Tim, Jim, Jason, Alan, Linda, Ray, and Lucas did not complete enough of the writing assignments to make a valid conclusion about their writing achievement. Therefore, the teacher-researcher cannot make a valid conclusion about student writing improvement based solely on question #3 on the ticket out.

Pre-and Post-Study Opinion Surveys

Question #5 on the pre- and post-survey asked students if they felt they are good writers. The post-survey data showed that 4 more student-participants chose “agree” and “strongly agree” about their writing skills. However, two student-participants chose “strongly disagree” about being a good writer. The teacher-researcher concluded that this could be due to two factors. First, the feedback on their writing could have caused student-participants to feel as if their writing needed a lot of improvement. Second, the fact that seven student-participants did not complete most of the writing assignments may have indicated that they felt they were unable to do them. The pre- and post- survey data for question #5 did not allow the teacher-researcher to develop a conclusion about student writing although four additional student-participants did choose positive responses of “agree” and “strongly agree” for the question on the post survey compared to the pre survey.

CommonLit Writing Assessment Data

The assessment data from the CommonLit writing assignments is outlined in Table 4.1. The writing prompts that coincided with the CommonLit assignments included the same directions for consistency and were posted in Google Classroom. Students submitted their written responses on a Google doc and received feedback. The responses from the tickets out indicated that 38% of students were unsure or “neutral” about the difficulty of their writing assignments; 30% responded “easy”; and 11% responded “very easy.” However, most students elected not to complete them, or started them and did not finish, indicated by an “I” in Table 4.1.

Students did indicate in their post-study interviews that they have an increased awareness in their writing skills based on the feedback that was given to them. The students who performed well on these six writing assignments (Ellie, Rick, Farrah, Tom, Zelda) are the same students who were able to explain specific feedback about their writing during their post-study interview. Jack did not finish or even submit half of his written assignments, but he scored 100% on the four he did complete. Jim scored “incomplete” for most of his work. On the work Jim did submit, he scored poorly. After talking with his mother and his support Lab teacher, the teacher-researcher concluded that Jim is an excellent writer with detailed thoughts and mature word choice; however, Jim did not answer the writing prompts. In his post-study interview, Jim explained that he “jumps into” an assignment too quickly and does not read the directions. He may have written on something related to the prompt, but he did not answer the questions in the writing prompt related to the literary text for which the prompt was assigned.

Table 4.1 *Percentage Scores on CommonLit Writing Assessments*

	Writing Assignments Related to CommonLit Reading Selections							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Michael Jordan	What My Father Said	Must Die	Malala	Chocolate	Desmond Doss	Role Reverser	Old Soul
Tim	I	I	92%	I	I	I	I	I
Jim	5%	I	16%	38%	I	I	I	I
Ellie	75%	75%	33%	100%	100%	I	100%	90%
Jason	I	I	50%	17%	I	I	I	I
Alan	I	I	33%	I	I	I	I	I
Rick	50%	I	92%	50%	100%	100%	90%	75%
Linda	50%	83%	25%	50%	I	I	I	I
Ray	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
Farrah	I	I	100%	67%	100%	90%	100%	90%
Lucas	I	50%	25%	I	12%	30%	I	I
Jack	I	I	100%	I	100%	I	100%	100%
Tom	95%	92%	80%	50%	100%	100%	50%	100%
Zelda	88%	83%	100%	100%	75%	100%	90%	50%

Conclusions Reached for Question #2

Based on the growth from the pre-and post-study interviews, the teacher-researcher concluded that the student-participants did increase their awareness of their writing ability. Based on the improved writing achievement of Ellie, Rick, Farah, Tom, and Zelda on the CommonLit writing assessments, the teacher-researcher concluded that blended learning instruction did indeed improve student writing skills.

Research Question #3

The third research question for this study asked, “How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student reading skills?” The pre- and post-study interviews with student-participants, the teacher journal, the tickets out, the pre- and post-opinion surveys, and the CommonLit data for the reading assessments were four sources of data that provided conclusions to answer this question.

Pre- and Post-Study Interviews

The pre-study interviews indicated that most student-participants are confident in their reading skills. Alan, Rick, and Zelda said they felt like good readers but did not elaborate. Jim claimed he “read a lot” when he was younger, so he felt as if he was a good reader. Tim said he knew he had problems comprehending, but he “takes his time to go over it.” Ray said he knew he was a much stronger reader than a writer. Farrah and Tom both said they felt good about their reading, but it “depends on” what they are reading and “if they are interested.” Jack said he felt very confident in his reading.

The post-study interviews indicated neutral responses from Tim, Jack, Jim, Ellie, and Farrah. Tim said he did not come to any new realizations about his reading as a result of the CommonLit reading assignments. Ellie and Farrah said the CommonLit reading assessments were “okay” and “kind of difficult.” Zelda and Farrah admitted during their post-study interviews that CommonLit was “difficult” or “confusing.” When asked if she used any of the features on CommonLit to help her reading, Farrah admitted, “no.”

Four student-participants Tom, Alan, Rick, and Zelda explained their positive responses about the CommonLit reading assignments in detail. Tom described specifically in his post-study interview that CommonLit helped him realize “there’s more

to the story that what you read,” and he liked CommonLit because “there’s more to it—more to do.” Alan said CommonLit inspired him to look up new words he saw and figure them out in the reading passage. Rick was able to explain even more clearly how CommonLit helped him in his post-study interview, describing, “It helped me with reading something and answering the questions. I guess what CommonLit has helped me with is to analyze the text and answer the questions. I kind of had trouble, but I tried- I had trouble connecting the dots of how me reading this going to help me answer that.” Rick explained that CommonLit helped him “practice reading . . . kind of made it easier and easier to answer questions after reading text.” Zelda did admit that she developed a stronger awareness of her reading and she understood the CommonLit passages better when she utilized the read-aloud feature.

Teacher Journal

The teacher-researcher’s journal indicated continued frustration about students’ reading. Although the teacher-researcher would preview the topic of the reading passage with a discussion or activities, students did not seem eager to complete the work. One significant event stood out to the teacher-researcher while student-participants were previewing Alan King’s (2017) poem “What My Father Said.” Jack remarked during class, “I like this. We need to do more like this.” Other students shook their heads and murmured, “yeah.” The teacher-researcher did search the CommonLit LMS but did not find any more poems by Alan King. She did order a book of his poems to use in future lessons. Jack’s comment is supported by the research for student choice and student interest as motivators for struggling readers and writers. Unfortunately, choice and interest were not factors in the CommonLit reading assessments for this study.

Tickets Out

One question on the tickets out asked the student-participants about their reading assignments. The average responses were 41% unsure or “neutral,” 30% “easy,” and 19% “very easy.” Only .05% of the student-participants selected “difficult” for their reading assignments, and no students selected “very difficult.” These data indicated that the students viewed the difficulty of the reading passages as manageable; however, this did not coincide with the reading scores and the rate of completion on the CommonLit assessments. Based on this data, the teacher-researcher concluded that lack of motivation was the factor that caused student-participants not to complete or even attempt to do well on the CommonLit reading assessments.

Pre- and Post-Opinion Surveys

The results of the pre and post- study student survey (represented in Figure 4.2) indicated that students were not confident in their reading skills. Question 6 asked students if they felt they were a good reader. Only 2 students replied “strongly agree,” and 3 replied “agree.” Six students were unsure or “neutral” about their reading skills, and 1 student “disagreed” about being a good reader. The results of the post-study student survey showed no significant improvement in students’ confidence about their reading skills.

CommonLit Reading Assessment Data

The assessment data from the 10 CommonLit reading assignments are outlined in Table 4.2. A symbol of “I” indicates the student-participant did not complete the work. The teacher-researcher enabled the audio read-aloud feature if students chose to listen to the reading selection. Also, teacher-researcher enabled the guided reading questions for

students to check their understanding before completing the multiple-choice questions and the short answer questions at the end of the reading selections. The percentages in Table 4.2 indicate student accuracy for the multiple-choice reading questions and the short answer questions on CommonLit for reading comprehension. CommonLit is a very well-developed LMS, but to avoid a learning curve in navigating all the reading selections in the LMS, the teacher-researcher did not allow students to choose their own selections. One student who performed poorly on the assignments or simply did not complete them indicated in his post-study interview and on his post-study opinion survey that CommonLit was difficult for him to navigate. The teacher-researcher made the decision to pre-select the reading assignments based on the reading levels of the selections according to CommonLit. The reading selections were labeled at a 7th-8th grade difficulty according to Lexile levels, and the teacher-researcher felt this was appropriate considering the MAP reading percentages for the student-participants in this study.

Scores from Tim, Jim, Ellie, Alan, Linda, Farrah, Lucas, Tom, and Zelda indicated inconsistent achievement, with percentages ranging from 6% to 100%. Jason performed well on the reading assessments when he chose to complete them. Jack's scores showed improvement from 25% to 89% and 95% but were still inconsistent with some scores dipping to 50% at the beginning of the study and again at the end. The inconsistencies in these scores related to responses from the tickets out and the post-study interviews. Responses on the tickets out yielded a variety of responses about the difficulty of the reading selections and if students were able to stay focused. Students

indicated in their post interviews that the reading selections were “okay,” they “didn’t mind doing them,” but completed them “for the grade.”

Table 4.2 *Percentages Correct on CommonLit Reading Assessments*

	CommonLit Reading Assignments										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	Justice	Jordan	Food	Rain drops	My Father	If We Must	Malala	Cocoa	Doss	Roles	Old Soul
Tim	I	25%	45%	I	I	38%	6%	38%	I	I	I
Jim	33%	25%	31%	25%	38%	60%	38%	36%	75%	40%	42%
Ellie	94%	95%	55%	25%	95%	78%	38%	96%	69%	75%	88%
Jason	I	95%	I	I	I	80%	75%	I	75%	90%	I
Alan	42%	25%	70%	I	25%	67%	34%	I	0%	25%	50%
Rick	8%	I	I	60%	65%	67%	I	89%	100%	95%	0%
Linda	8%	70%	45%	65%	69%	25%	19%	I	50%	40%	0%
Ray	69%	100%	45%	I	75%	60%	I	I	I	I	I
Farrah	17%	I	45%	I	75%	100%	55%	86%	67%	40%	I
Lucas	I	45%	45%	25%	I	72%	0%	I	63%	31%	I
Jack	25%	95%	50%	I	I	80%	70%	89%	67%	80%	50%
Tom	44%	38%	13%	38%	25%	57%	56%	17%	67%	13%	I
Zelda	75%	75%	44%	25%	65%	56%	30%	79%	67%	40%	0%

Jack had the second highest MAP reading percentile scores among the student-participants. His writing scores for the CommonLit assignments, when he chose to complete them, earned scores of 100%. His reading scores for the CommonLit assignments fluctuated from 25% to 95% accuracy. During his post-study interview, Jack said the work on CommonLit “was not hard . . . pretty easy . . . a lot easy.” Jack

explained during his post-study interview that he preferred the hands-on projects (with posters and Crayola markers) that the class did earlier in the school year and a Google Drawing that he did for a lesson in English class. The teacher-researcher concluded that Jack is a student whose performance was determined by his motivation. Jack's unwillingness to submit work for the CommonLit reading assessments contradicted his reading ability reported by the MAP test and by the scores of 100% that he did earn on CommonLit, pointing to motivation as a factor for Jack. Jack's claims that other students did not distract him, his obvious ability to perform well on writing assessments, and his preference for hands-on projects also indicated that motivation was a factor in his performance.

The quantitative data analyzed from the CommonLit reading selections did not show an improvement in reading achievement for these students. While student-participants Ellie, Rick, Farrah, Jack, and Tom scored well on several assignments, only Rick improved his scores consistently. The teacher-researcher concluded that the blended learning intervention of direction instruction followed by the reading assessments on the CommonLit LMS did not improve student reading skills. The teacher-researcher attributed the lack of motivation based on disinterest in the reading selections as the main factor.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the study, including the problem of practice, the three research questions, and the significance of this study for educators in the classroom and stakeholders who made instructional decisions for students. This chapter summarized the characteristics of the participants and the intervention strategy to address

the problem of practice for these participants. Next, this chapter listed the instruments for data collection, three for qualitative data and three for quantitative data. The last section provided a brief overview of the findings followed by details of the findings organized by research question and the instrument that gathered the data for each question.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This action research study explored how blended learning strategies could affect the motivation, reading, and writing skills of ninth grade high school students “double-dipped” in both English and Reading Seminar class. This study was significant because it explored motivation and instructional strategies for students with marginal skills in reading and writing, topics that continue to interest teachers regardless of their years in the classroom. The study took place in a Reading Seminar elective class of 13 ninth grade students in a suburban, middle-class high school with approximately 1900 students. The qualitative data collection methods included recording the class on video for the teacher-researcher to take notes, conducting pre- and post- study semi-structured interviews, and recording notes in a teacher journal. Quantitative data collection included conducting pre and post study student opinion surveys, collecting tickets out, and tracking student performance for reading and writing based on reading passages in the CommonLit LMS.

Recap of Problem of Practice

Adolescence is a critical time of maturity when social skills are developed, and academic skills are honed. This combination can interfere with students’ motivation to complete work. The onset of one-to-one learning where each student has his/her own school-issued device complicates instruction, especially when a teacher is not grounded in best practices for instruction that can combine traditional direct instruction with instruction using technology. Blended learning instructional strategies are specific and

scripted by experts in education who have researched the benefits and outlined how this type of instruction can help students be more successful. The combination of motivation, maturity, the transition to high school, and a wide range of academic skills in a ninth-grade classroom presents unique challenges even to a veteran teacher.

Research Questions

This study explored three research questions: 1) What impact do blended learning strategies have on student motivation in a Reading Seminar elective course classroom? 2) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student writing skills? 3) How does the implementation of blended learning strategies in a Reading Seminar elective course affect student reading skills?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research study was to examine marginal students and how blended learning may improve their motivation, reading skills, and writing skills. The study provided three sources of qualitative data and three sources of quantitative data. The intent for this study, as for all action research studies implemented by teachers, was for the teacher-researcher to study herself and her practices in order to improve student achievement (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

Recap of Methodology

Action research allows teachers to explore options and make changes that will benefit students in their own classrooms where teachers are familiar with their own settings (Efron & Ravid, 2013). This 15-day action research study was conducted at a suburban high school of approximately 1900 students. The student-participants included 13 ninth graders aged 14-16 who were “double-dipped” in a Reading Seminar elective

class. The teacher-researcher sought solutions to improve motivation for these students and their achievement in reading and writing through blended learning strategies.

Although research must be intentional, systematic, and purposeful, classrooms are dynamic and unpredictable, and there is “no single solution that will produce consistently successful results” (Efron & Ravin, 2013, pp. 3- 4). The teacher-researcher employed three instruments to collect qualitative data: pre- and post-study interviews, a class video, and a teacher journal. Three instruments also collected quantitative data: tickets out, student opinion surveys, and achievement scores for reading and writing. The combination of the qualitative and quantitative data allowed the teacher-researcher to view the classroom as a whole, considering all parts of the data, to make sound conclusions and guide her instruction moving forward.

Recap of Results and/or Findings

The teacher-researcher concluded from this study that motivation for these Reading Seminar students is affected by a variety of factors, including the teacher’s instructional style, parent involvement, extrinsic rewards such as grades, and choice and interest in reading and writing topics. These four aspects for motivation affected student achievement in various ways. Most students admitted in both their pre- and post-study interviews that the teacher’s instructional style affected them the most. They preferred direct instruction with whole-class engagement. This is supported by Vygotsky’s social learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Many students admitted that grades are the sole reason they complete their work, and other students realized that support from their parents helped them to achieve. While most students stated they understood the feedback provided by the teacher and the reading practice in CommonLit, their reading and writing scores remained flat, showing inconsistent scores and no significant improvements.

Students who performed well at the beginning of the study continued to do well, regardless of the intervention.

Regarding question 1 about motivation, the blended learning intervention did not improve student motivation for this particular study, but the intervention did improve student awareness of blended learning goals of making choices, setting goals, and managing time. Regarding question 2 about student reading skills, the blended learning intervention did improve reading skills and awareness of their reading abilities for some students due to the CommonLit LMS. Regarding question 3 about student writing skills, the blended learning intervention improved writing skills for only a few of the student-participants even though most of the participants could explain how they understood the feedback provided about their writing.

Description of the Action Researcher as Curriculum Leader

The teacher-researcher was a veteran classroom teacher with a master's degree, an Ed Specialist Degree, and National Board Certification. Throughout her years of experience and professional development, she has learned that nothing can replace the effectiveness of a quality teacher in the classroom. Quality instruction from the teacher matters, regardless of any tool of technology or scripted curriculum. The teacher-researcher learned from the student-participants that motivation stems from a variety of sources, and a critical role of the classroom teacher is to identify what motivates each student. A teacher should work to understand their students' histories, their successes and their failures, and their skills so that she can tap into that to provide the most effective learning experiences, grounded in sound educational practices, for her students (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Furthermore, students desire "validation and connection with a teacher who

inspires them and believes in them” (Tucker, et al., 2017, p. 81). The teacher-researcher learned from this study that above all else, a positive, supportive relationship with her students is the foundation for any instruction.

Action Plan

After concluding the results of this study, the teacher as curriculum leader planned to approach administration about revisiting the suggestions by SREB (2008) that the district implemented for all high schools almost twenty years ago. Through the years, tenets of that plan fell by the wayside mostly for convenience, not due to their ineffectiveness. While approval to reimplement tenets of that plan and an actual timeline will take time, the teacher as curriculum leader could take small steps on her own. She could obtain approval from the school’s department chair and support from the district language arts coordinator to initiate a consistent team approach among the other Reading Seminar teachers at her school. A toolkit of best practices will guide instruction for these teachers. Research about motivation will guide instructional strategies, including research-supported strategies for using technology as a one-to-one tool combined with direct instruction and student engagement as a whole class. A plan to involve parents will become a regular routine. A document to provide purposeful, consistent, detailed feedback will be shared among the team members. A plan to establish classroom order and routines and to address misbehavior and distractions will be adopted by the team members.

Recommendations for Policy/Practice

Schools need to provide teachers with quality professional development and ongoing support from curriculum leaders and instructional coaches for teachers interested in implementing blended learning to improve student motivation and academic skills.

First, high schools that do not already practice “double dipping” for freshmen in math and English, should adopt the recommendations from the SREB (2008). Teachers should be provided with professional development suggested by the SREB (2008) to make the most of the extra time provided in the seminar classes, or the classes scheduled for “double-dipping.” These suggestions include, but are not limited, to the following (SREB, 2008, pp. 7-8):

1. intentional teaching of reading and writing strategies
2. high interest, engaging reading and writing assignments
3. use of technology and software applications to advance students’ skills in reading, writing, comprehension
4. requirements that students revise work until it meets clearly understood scoring guides and rubrics set to grade-level standards
5. completion of a daily learning log
6. a portfolio of student writing, evidence of a variety of reading materials, and evidence of using technology to communicate
7. use of re-teaching strategies with extra time for students not achieving
8. intentional teaching of the habits and skills used consistently by independent learners

Second, teachers need to understand how to construct lessons that utilize most effectively the components of blended learning. The school’s instructional technology coach at this school said, “Teachers often think they are doing blended learning, but they assign students work online while they answer emails at their desks.” A master teacher at the school said that she discontinued using the term blended learning, admitting,

“Students have a negative connotation towards the phrase ‘blended learning’ because they've had teachers who have done it poorly in the past.” A teacher aspiring to implement blended learning should seek the guidance of the school’s instructional coach or technology coach. The teacher should be coached to implement blended learning slowly, master the basic techniques, develop a strong understanding of the tenets of blended learning, and add more components as she becomes more skilled in this type of instruction. Teachers must understand how blended learning may improve motivation for their students when all of the components are planned and utilized, including: (1) the blend of direct and online instruction; (2) social interaction among students; (3) detailed feedback, reflection, and goal-setting; and (4) autonomy and student choice. Finally, teachers should understand the theoretical foundations of blended learning that can increase opportunities for success and achievement, including: (1) a democratic style of classroom, (2) constructive social interactions, and (3) tenets of social justice.

Third, administration must have a plan for teachers to communicate regularly with parents. This communication would be directly from the teacher and in addition to school-wide functions such as orientations, Open House, and PTA meetings. The principal for the school where this study took place explained that he began weekly newsletters to improve parent communication based on feedback from the school report card. Teachers in the school were also asked to record parent communication throughout the school year in a shared database. Even still, teachers need to be informed about the research that supports parental involvement for student achievement. A key factor in motivation, behavior in the classroom, and academic achievement for students is the involvement of their parents, specifically mothers (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). Grolnick and

Ryan (1989, p. 151) discovered that “by fostering autonomy in their children, parents better prepare their children for an educational environment that requires independent mastery and self-regulation.” Teachers must appreciate how parents can have a positive influence on their children as the research states and as the students in this study admitted.

Implications for Future Research

As a result of this study, four recommendations are suggested for future research.

Use CommonLit For Its Full Potential

Provide a trial period for students to learn how to navigate most effectively all the aspects of CommonLit, such as the guided reading questions and the read-aloud feature. CommonLit provides useful charts and graphs for each student and the standards for the teacher-researcher to analyze. A one to two-week trial period is suggested for the teacher-researcher to collect data about students’ strengths and weaknesses and become well-versed in managing the student data in the LMS. CommonLit provides curriculum standards for the reading passages and questions, so the teacher should become skilled in reviewing student data in the LMS in order to address standards that will improve student skills. The teacher should also explore the additional resources provided on CommonLit, such as the videos and additional texts available by themes.

Consistent Record Keeping

The teacher-researcher could use a daily checklist for off-task student behavior to collect more data on student motivation. To reduce the chances of getting caught up in note-taking, the checklist could include predetermined student behaviors chosen by the teacher-researcher according to what she knows about her students, such as the

following: distracted by cell phone, talking to peers across classroom, head down on desk, unrelated websites on computer, etc. These checklists would provide quantitative data to support the qualitative data from a video observation, student interviews, and teacher-researcher journal. These checklists would also provide talking points when the teacher-researcher meets with students about their progress on the assignments.

A Tool for Goal-Setting

A strategy to assist with the goal-setting aspect of blended learning is to provide students more specific feedback about their progress, such as a written record of their progress to supplement the verbal conversations between teacher and student. A “high-level blended learning classroom should strive to achieve ongoing data collection and incorporate instructional adjustments at the student level” (Tucker, et al., 2017, p. 29). Hand-written notes by the teacher about student achievement could supplement the conversations between the teacher-researcher and student-participants during independent work time to provide feedback and set goals.

More Time and More Participants

A longer period of time for the study will allow more data collection, more time to adjust direction instruction based on student performance, and more time for student choice on assignments on CommonLit. In addition, more participants from other teachers of Reading Seminar classes will allow rich conversations among colleagues and insights about effective instruction.

Summary

This study provided a deeper understanding of blended learning and marginal adolescent learners for the teacher-researcher. Blended learning strategies did not prove

to be the root of student motivation for this particular study. Blended learning strategies for this particular study did not provide conclusive evidence that student performance for reading or writing improved. Instead, student maturity and self-awareness, distractions to learning by peers in class, extrinsic rewards such as grades, parent support, and the students' preference for whole-class engagement with the teacher were factors that impacted motivation for the student-participants and affected their performance for the reading and writing assessments.

Success and improvement for marginal students such as the participants in this study cannot easily be checked off with a list. The teacher-researcher realized while analyzing the data that more profound factors complicated the possibility of achievement for her student-participants, such as a lack of confidence from their history of failure, parents who refused to or who were unable to reciprocate communication, extreme conflict in one student's home, confusion about sexual identity for one student, a history of clinical depression for one student, a medical issue for one student, and ADHD/ADD for several students, among other things the teacher-researcher did not learn about but may have existed in the students' home lives and personal lives.

The significance of this study was to identify how teachers could implement blended learning strategies in their own classrooms to improve the motivation of their struggling learners. Curriculum leaders and instructional coaches share a responsibility to provide initial professional development and ongoing support for teachers who want to improve student achievement in reading and writing, who teach marginal students, and who desire to use blended learning.

Linda Darling-Hammond, well-known and respected in the field of education for decades, said, “If you don’t have a strong supply of well-prepared teachers, nothing else in education can work” (Spector, 2019, para. 17). A master teacher at the school where this study took place explained that the school’s instructional technology coach and the district’s instructional technology coach guided her when she wanted to implement blended learning. They provided workdays out of the classroom and helped her prepare lessons. This teacher did an outstanding job implementing blended learning in her classroom. Quality professional development and ongoing support is imperative for teachers who want to explore interventions such as blended learning to impact student motivation and achievement.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT SURVEY QUESTIONS

Directions: Please complete this survey to help your teacher assess your needs in this class. Please base your answers on this class only, not your other classes or your other teachers.

Question 1

I like coming to school.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

Question 2

I enjoy this class.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

Question 3

I learn in this class.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

Question 4

I want to do my work this class.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

Question 5

I think that I am a good writer.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

Question 6

I feel that I am a good reader.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

Question 7

I feel that I can make choices about my learning during this class.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

Question 8

Setting goals helps me understand what I need to learn.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

Question 9

I feel that I manage my time well during this class.

(totally disagree) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (totally agree)

APPENDIX B

TICKET OUT

Directions: Please complete this Ticket Out to help your teacher assess your needs in this class. Please base your answers on today's class only.

Question 1

I stayed focused on my work today.

(not at all) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (yes, definitely)

Question 2

I was motivated to finish my work today.

(not at all) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (yes, definitely)

Question 3

Rate your writing assignment today.

(very difficult) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (easy)

Question 4

Rate your reading assignment today.

(very difficult) 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 (easy)

Question 5

In the box provided, explain anything to the teacher that she needs to know about your frustrations, concerns, or requests you may have.

--

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PRE-STUDY

1. What do you look forward when coming to this class?
2. What prevents you from learning in this class?
3. Do you feel you are a good writer?
4. Do you feel you are a good reader?

POST STUDY

1. Have you felt successful in Reading Seminar class?
2. What did you like learning the best this year?
3. What motivates you to do your work (grades, your parents, eligibility for a sport, etc.)?
4. How did you feel about the reading selections on CommonLit? (difficulty, interesting, etc.)
5. What did you learn about your reading skills from using CommonLit?
6. What did you learn about your writing from the feedback I've given you?

APPENDIX D
TEACHER JOURNAL

Student	
Date	
Notes	
Reflections	

(Dana & Yendol-Hoppe, 2014, p110)

APPENDIX E

COMMONLIT LESSONS

Lesson One: American Justice

Introduction

In lieu of the discussion questions on Common Lit, the teacher-researcher and student-participants discussed the concept of justice and the main character of Phillip in the previous novel the class studied, *Nothing but the Truth*, by Avi (2010).

- Was Phillip treated fairly? How did justice become confusing to discredit Miss Narwin?
- How did Phillip's father influence him?

CommonLit Reading Text

American Justice in the Supreme Court (McBirney, 2016)

Lesson Two: Michael Jordan

Introduction

On the heels of the tragic death of basketball star Kobe Bryant, the teacher-researcher and student-participants read and discussed Kobe Bryant's poem "Dear Basketball" (Bryant, K. 2015)

The teacher-researcher and student-participants discussed these questions together in class.

1. What **main ideas** does Kobe express throughout the poem?
2. What **tone** (attitude, view, or opinion on the subject) does Kobe have about basketball?
3. What words in the poem support the writer's **tone**?
4. What **literary technique** does Kobe use when he talks to the sport of basketball?
5. Reread the last stanza. What does Kobe review? Why is this an **effective way** to end the poem?

After the class discussion, student-participants wrote a reflection based on the poem.

Reflect on Kobe's message in his poem.

- Summarize Kobe's message.
- Explain the meaning or purpose (theme) of the poem.
- How can the message in the poem inspire *anyone* who reads it?
- Apply the message of the poem to your own life. Does the message remind you of yourself or someone else? Before reading the poem, did you already believe what Kobe believed to be true? If not, how can you use the message of the poem for your life or for someone else's life?

CommonLit Reading Text

Michael Jordan: A Profile in Failure (Stibel, 2017)

Lesson Three: Food Choices

Introduction

The teacher-researcher and student-participants discussed the food choices they make by eating snacks from the school vending machines and cookie sales during the day, skipping breakfast, and avoiding school-prepared school lunches.

CommonLit Reading Text

Your Food Choices Affect Earth's Climate (Raloff, 2014)

Lesson Four: Raindrops

Introduction

The teacher-researcher and student-participants discussed the recent abundance of rain and how it is important in the ecosystem.

CommonLit Reading Text

Raindrops Break the Speed Limit (Ornes, 2014)

Lesson Five: What My Father Said

Introduction

The teacher-researcher and student-participants discussed the father-son relationship from the previous novel the class studied, *Nothing but the Truth* (Avi, 2010).

CommonLit Reading Text

"What My Father Said" poem by Alan King (King, 2017)

Two of the three CommonLit discussion questions were used as two short writing prompts posted on a Google Doc in Google Classroom.

#1 In the poem that we will read, the speaker is upset that his father won't let him play with his friends, but then they get into trouble. Write 10-12 sentences.

- Discuss a time when you disagreed with a decision your parent made that turned out to be right.
- How did your feelings compare to the speaker's feelings in the poem?
- How do you feel about your parents' decision today?

#2 In the poem, the speaker describes how he and his friends daydream about being professional football players. Write 10-12 sentences.

- What are some of the things that you dream or daydream about for your future?
- What are some of the ways that your parents support or challenge these dreams?

Lesson Six: If We Must Die

Introduction

Discussion for teacher-researcher and student-participants-what does it mean to be brave?

CommonLit Reading Text

“If We Must Die” poem by Claude McKay (McKay, 1919)

Two of the four CommonLit discussion questions were used as two short writing prompts posted on a Google Doc in Google Classroom.

#1 According to the speaker, how should a person face death? Explain your answer in detail.

Use examples from the poem. Use the line numbers to help you reference what the speaker says.

#2 Based on your own experience, how do people face death? Cite evidence (give examples) from your own life, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

Lesson Seven: Malala

Introduction

Discussion for teacher-researcher and student-participants---As a follow up to the poem “If We Must Die,” Malala’s speech is also about bravery.

CommonLit Reading Text

Malala Yousafzai’s Address to the United Nations, Malala Yousafzai, July 2013 (Yousafzai, 2013)

Two of the three CommonLit discussion questions were used as two short writing prompts posted on a Google Doc in Google Classroom.

#1 In the context of Malala Yousafzai’s life and speech, what does it mean to be brave? Use examples from Malala’s speech and cite the line number.

#2 According to Malala Yousafzai, what is the purpose of education? To what extent do you agree with her claim? Use examples from Malala’s speech and cite the line number. Use examples from your own education in your answer.

Lesson Eight: Chocolate from Children

Introduction

1. YouTube video “Why Fair-Trade Chocolate Matters” (equalexchange, 2015)
2. pre-reading vocabulary self-check quiz on a Google form posted on Google Classroom (correct answers highlighted)

What is CACAO?

- a. I think this sounds like another word for cocoa.
- b. I think this may be the powder inside a cocoa bean.
- c. I think this may be chocolate candy from France.

What is fair trade?

- a. I think this sounds like exchanging goods between countries in the right way.
- b. I think this sounds like playing a game by following all the rules.
- c. I think this sounds like governments regulating what can be purchased from a foreign country.

What does it mean to EXPLOIT someone?

- a. This means to turn someone over to the government for crimes.
- b. This means to use someone--usually to your own advantage.
- c. I think this means to expose what someone else is doing illegally.

What is TRAFFICKING?

- a. I think this means following rules while driving a car.
- b. I think this means to use someone by transporting them somewhere else.
- c. I think this has something to do with traffic court.

What does it mean if something is RAMPANT?

- a. having a bad reputation
- b. being out of control
- c. having a terrible smell

What might QUESTIONABLE SOURCING be?

- a. not knowing where something came from
- b. someone who is not honest about anything
- c. products or goods that are spoiled or out of date

CommonLit Reading Text

Chocolate from Children (Dunn, 2013)

Two of the three CommonLit discussion questions were used as two short writing prompts posted on a Google Doc in Google Classroom.

#1 In the text, the author claims that readers can help end child labor by only buying chocolate that is approved by Fair Trade Certified and the Rainforest Alliance.

- Why do you think this can help end child labor?
- After learning about how child laborers are treated and paid, would you be willing to spend more money on fair trade chocolate? Why or why not?

#2 In the text, the author discusses how children are forced to pick cocoa beans for chocolate.

- Why is this unfair?
- What risks are children exposed to when they pick cocoa beans?

- What other activities are they missing out on because they are picking cocoa beans?
- How might this negatively affect children later in life?

Lesson Nine: Desmond Doss

Introduction

Watch the four video clips.

#1 Hacksaw Ridge (2016 - Movie) Official Featurette – “The True Story of Desmond Doss” (1:09 minutes) (Lionsgate Movies, 2016)

movie trailer/features from the movie/interviews with director Mel Gibson

<https://youtu.be/9f5MUtRfoD0>

#2 Almanac: The Conscientious Objector (2:02 minutes) (CBS Sunday Morning, 2014)

On October 12, 1945, Cpl. Desmond Doss, a Seventh Day Adventist, became the first conscientious objector to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for his service as an unarmed medic in WWII. Charles Osgood reports.

<https://youtu.be/8a-JkN8wYPw>

#3 Movie Trailer (1:32 minutes) (YouTube movies, 2020)

<https://youtu.be/XH38OM2o7Ig>

#4 The Hero of Hacksaw Ridge: Desmond Doss (26:14 minutes)

(The Incredible Journey, 2019)

<https://youtu.be/X0PAoEFEXLo>

NOTE: at 26:14 minutes, this video advertises the Bible and offers a free Bible to viewers. You can STOP the video at this point. This video is OPTIONAL. I am NOT trying to influence anyone’s personal beliefs or rights. *The first 26 minutes of this video is strictly facts from the Battle of Hacksaw Ridge in history as told by Desmond Doss himself and other soldiers.*

CommonLit Reading Text

The Real ‘Hacksaw Ridge’ Soldier Saved 75 Souls Without Ever Carrying a Gun (Blair, 2016)

Two of the three CommonLit discussion questions were used as two short writing prompts posted on a Google Doc in Google Classroom.

#1 In your opinion, should the US military allow conscientious objectors to serve in the military? Why or why not? Cite examples from the text about Desmond Doss, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

#2 Consider what the article says about Desmond, what makes Doss a hero? How does Doss' heroism differ from the heroism of other soldiers on the battlefield? Cite examples from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

Lesson Ten: Role Reverser/Old Soul

Introduction

- These 13 statements (Brown, 2018) were assigned on a Google form on Google Classroom using a Likert Scale as response options.
 - ◆ You seek out alone time. You enjoy being alone.
 - ◆ You find peace in knowledge, truth, and wisdom.
 - ◆ You feel tapped into your spiritual side.
 - ◆ You feel connected to the past.
 - ◆ You spend time reflecting on your life.
 - ◆ You understand there is a bigger picture to situations.
 - ◆ You don't need a lot of things. You are content.
 - ◆ You don't have a lot of friends your age.
 - ◆ You feel more mature and wiser than others your age.
 - ◆ You understand emotions/why you feel the way you do.
 - ◆ You easily give good advice to your friends, and they seek your advice.
 - ◆ You feel safe and secure at home and enjoy being home.
 - ◆ You turn to yourself, not to others' opinions of you, to find your self-worth.
- Choose three statements that you ***strongly disagreed*** or ***strongly agreed*** with about yourself.
- Discuss them here. Use these bulleted points to help you.
 - ◆ Have you ever heard of being "an old soul"? If so, where did you hear it?
 - ◆ Did someone else come to mind as you were reading the 13 statements?
 - ◆ Give your opinion/explain how three of the statements DO or do NOT apply to you.
 - ◆ Use key words to guide your reader (First, then, also).
 - ◆ This is academic writing. Use capitalization and punctuation.

CommonLit Reading Texts

David's Old Soul, Nikki Grimes (Grimes, 2017)

The Role Reverser: Growing Up Too Soon, (Jantz, 2014)

The discussion questions on CommonLit were assigned as a writing prompt.

How did Adam's relationship with his parents change?

- How did this change affect Adam?
- Is a "role-reversal" a good thing or a bad thing? Why? Use details from the text to support your answer.
- How do you predict that Adam will be affected by this "role reversal"? Support your answer with details from the text.
- What does being an "old soul" mean to you?
- In your opinion, is growing up based on age or experience? Why?

APPENDIX F

SCORING GUIDE FOR WRITING PROMPTS

	Needs Improvement (0-18 points)	Almost There (28 points)	Sets an Example (35 points)
Use a TAG in your response (title, author, genre)	no TAG 0-3	TAG needs revised 4	5
Use the first statement of the question to begin your written response.	no introduction 0-3	introduction needs revised 4	5
Write 7-10 sentences.	lacks details and examples 0-3	write more details and examples 4	5
Even though this writing prompt asks for your opinion, avoid overusing phrases like “I think” and “I feel,” and “In my opinion.”	overuse of personal pronouns 0-3	too many personal pronouns 4	5
Use key words to guide your reader (First, then, also).	no guide words 0-3	few guide words 4	5
This is academic writing. Use capitalization and punctuation.	problems with capitalization and punctuation 0-3	some problems with capitalization and punctuation 4	5
Write a conclusion statement.	no conclusion 0-3	conclusion needs revised 4	5