The Motivational Impact of a Digital Student Response Tool During Text-Dependent Writing Instruction in a Concurrent Middle School Classroom

Lisa Marie Cobb

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THE MOTIVATIONAL IMPACT OF A DIGITAL STUDENT RESPONSE TOOL DURING TEXT-DEPENDENT WRITING INSTRUCTION IN A CONCURRENT MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOM

by

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DEDICATION

Without hesitation, I dedicate this labor of love to my late parents, Gary and Sherrill Chappell. Everything that I have accomplished in my life, I owe to both of them. Although my parents never had the privilege of a formal education, they understood the curiosities and joys of lifelong learning. My mama and daddy modeled and instilled a strong work ethic, determination, perseverance, and service to others. Both of my parents knew my aspirations to be a first-generation college graduate, and they made sacrifices to make their baby girl’s dreams possible. If only they could see me now.
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"In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success.” (Proverbs 3:6). Thank you, Lord, for helping me to finally understand that every time I thought you were saying no, you meant not yet.

My village of support helped to transform this lofty dream into a lifelong achievement. Thank you, Dr. Elizabeth Currin, Dr. Leigh D’Amico, and Dr. Tiffany Estes, for graciously serving on my committee and offering your expertise to refine my study. Tiffany, your friendship, support, and guidance are more precious than gold. Your words of encouragement and advice reinvigorated me to keep going when I was on the brink of surrendering. Finally, Dr. Todd Lilly, a simple thank you seems inadequate. Your willingness to advise, even on holidays, shows your unwavering commitment to your students and this program. I could not imagine a better advisor for my particular study, and I am forever grateful for your wisdom and direction through all of your feedback, phone calls, emails, and eloquent missives.

To my school and district, you have become part of my family. Thank you for extending the leadership role to the classroom teacher. A special thank you to Mrs. Jane Harrison for sending me on missions to pursue best practices in reading and writing and forwarding opportunities to stretch and grow professionally. Next, every educator should have a work tribe, and mine is the best. Your cheers, prayers, laughs, and listening ears have carried me through the difficult days.
I owe my last and final thank you to my family. Throughout this process, my sister, Lori, has mothered and reminded me that our parents would be so proud. My children have unknowingly inspired me to pursue this degree. They are my ultimate “why.” I refused to quit because I knew their impressionable eyes were watching. Most importantly, to Jason, my husband, best friend, and life partner: You gave me the courage to take a chance and have unselfishly filled roles that I have neglected without hesitation. I share this accomplishment with you. Thank you for unconditionally loving and believing in me.
ABSTRACT

While the Common Core State Standards initiated the instructional shift that promoted technology to achieve a student-centered, process-oriented blended reading and writing classroom, the COVID 19 pandemic demanded innovative technology applications in K-12 public schools. This qualitative, phenomenological action research study explored the motivational effects of a digital student response system tool used to facilitate reading and writing instruction in a seventh-grade ELA concurrent classroom. Overall, using a student response tool to facilitate the text-dependent writing process positively impacted students’ self-determination.

Incorporating a digital student response tool as a facet of a formative assessment system promoted the efficient use of best practices in reading and writing instruction, such as student mentor texts, constructive feedback, and close reading strategies delivered through the gradual release of responsibility method. The intervention allowed the teacher to quickly diagnose student deficits, monitor and adjust instruction, and provide instant and individualized feedback. Furthermore, the digital tool’s features enabled instant use of student responses as instructional resources.

As a result, this digital intervention sustained the necessary engagement levels required for critical thinking and increased writing achievement by serving as an external stimulus of accountability that fulfilled the students’ intrinsic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. First, there was increased peer interaction to activate the social construction of knowledge and move students into their zone of proximal
development. Next, these pedagogies provided students with the skills they need to be in control of their performance. The students also appreciated the organized and systematic approach to reading and writing and found value in seeing their peers’ responses.

Additionally, these learners grasped the power and necessity of revising and editing, two elusive steps to the writing process that have been difficult to achieve with middle school students. The opportunity to revisit their responses after seeing additional examples and feedback promoted a growth-mindset necessary for these learners to experience improved writing abilities. Most importantly, the intervention empowered the students to feel confident when released to independent reading and writing tasks.

On the other hand, connectivity issues, system failure, and the lack of digital literacy contributed to increased frustration and loss of motivation during some instructional intervention lessons. More specifically to distance learners, the study’s findings suggested that the use of a student response tool during reading and writing instruction contributed to the autonomy, competence, and relatedness required to motivate these students intrinsically; however, additional supports are needed to initiate and sustain the desired levels of engagement and motivation in Virtual Learning Academy students.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Sherry, a 10-year veteran Language Arts teacher and a new mother to a 3-month-old daughter, recently started graduate school. She describes with disheartenment, “I just spent 40 plus hours grading and providing meaningful feedback on an end-of-unit essay assignment only to have most of my students swiftly discard their papers without reading the comments and surely to repeat the shortcomings on subsequent writing assignments.” She adds, “I need more time to help my students with text-dependent writing, but I have to move on to other standards.”

Blake, a seventh-grade Language Arts student who struggles with reading and writing, sits silently during a whole-class discussion about the short story “Bargain.” His teacher asks for volunteers to identify the story’s tone and cite text evidence to support his answer. Blake has a response, but he is not confident enough to vocalize an answer and risk failure in front of his peers. The teacher calls on volunteers and provides feedback to three other students. None of the responses resemble his own; therefore, Blake concludes that his thinking must be wrong. The teacher moves forward to a new topic.

Ana, a 17-year veteran teacher, expresses the challenges of providing individual feedback throughout writing instructional units: “During a writing exercise in a classroom of 28 students, I have 10 hands raised eagerly waiting for me to review the
claim to their introductory paragraph. When I spend the time to stop at each student’s
desk to give personalized feedback, my classroom becomes a management disaster full of
disengaged students.”

Lily, a hard-working, seventh-grade Language Arts student, responds to her latest
grade from the end-of-unit text-dependent analysis writing: “I worked really hard on this
assignment only to receive my paper with a completed rubric attached to the front and a
B- written in red ink. What does “skillful” as opposed to “appropriate” presentation of
text evidence mean anyway? I don’t understand what I did wrong. I guess I’m just not a
good writer.”

Jackson, a second-year teacher, explains his frustration using practice
assessments from a digital test preparatory program. He reports: “In our last PLC
meeting, our department chair said that our district spent generous funds on this
program and that we should be using the lessons and practice tests with our students
throughout the school year to prepare for state testing. My students detest using this
program, and most of them won’t spend the time to read the passages before they guess
answers. I know this isn’t the best way to reach my students, but how will I prepare them
for the SC READY state assessment?”

Beth, a Virtual Learning Academy student, prefers face-to-face instruction,
although her mother’s recent cancer diagnosis during the pandemic has forced her
family to remain quarantined. Her ELA teachers once recognized her as a standout
reader and writer; however, this new learning environment has left her feeling ignored, unengaged, and disconnected from her peers.

**Problem of Practice**

The increased rigor from the 2015 South Carolina (SC) College and Career Ready English Language Arts (ELA) Standards, an adaptation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) wherein 90% of reading standards require text-dependent analysis, has magnified the demands placed on the classroom teacher (National Education Association, 2013, p. 13). For ELA teachers like me, the pressure to perform is further heightened by students’ state test scores’ accounting for 40% of the school’s report card grade. To align with the newest ELA state standards, the SC Department of Education adopted a new writing component on the SC state assessment for students in grades three through eight (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). This text-dependent analysis (TDA) item requires students to read a complex text(s) (literary or informational), and from a prompt, construct a well-developed piece of writing that contains a critical response supported by relevant evidence from the text(s) to substantiate the writer’s claim (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). To elaborate, within their responses, students must make inferences regarding the author’s intended meaning through explicit and implicit text evidence to support the analysis of literary or nonfiction reading elements located in the text (Thompson, 2018).

After years of preparing students for the stand-alone personal narrative writing prompt that appeared on the former state standardized test, teachers, literacy coaches, and school and district-level administrators experienced widespread confusion from this new writing task’s elusiveness and robust requirements. Motivating and preparing middle
school students for this sophisticated writing style has been a monumental undertaking that ELA teachers have felt unequipped to handle, yet the mounting pressure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 to preserve our district’s high-performing status remains. Many school districts have invested in simplistic solutions such as allocating substantial funds for test preparation workbooks and digital programs that promise one outcome: student gains on state tests. This promotion of test preparatory pedagogies “ignores the processes of teaching and learning in classrooms” and “does not provide the direction that teachers need in their quest to improve” (Black & Wiliam, 1998b, p. 1). In addition, feedback from summative writing assessments most often arrives too late to inform instruction and well after a new unit is in progress. Finally, neither method effectively utilizes the district’s one-to-one mobile learning initiative that aspires to develop collaborative, creative, and critical thinking skills through a 21st-century approach to learning.

Most recently, a global pandemic due to the virus called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (COVID-19) has magnified the quandary of engaging students in the process of text-dependent writing. The COVID-19 pandemic has sent the public school system on a nearly-impossible pursuit to safely re-open its doors. My school district received negative feedback from students and parents regarding the effectiveness of the self-paced distance learning provided when SC schools were closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year in March. Its response was to re-open on August 25, 2020, operating on a hybrid schedule until returning to a regular schedule on September 18, 2020. Our school district has also offered a full-time virtual academy option for families who do not want their children to return to face-to-face school. Instead
of allocating virtual teachers’ positions, our school district has assigned middle and high school teachers the task of instructing synchronously face-to-face, hybrid virtual, and full-time virtual students - a classroom approach also known as concurrent teaching. The result of this new learning endeavor obligated teachers to swim into uncharted waters. More specifically to ELA, the assignment of concurrent teacher meant translating a growing list of pedagogies and technological competencies into engaging and effective instructional units for a seventh-grade dual classroom in the process of text-dependent writing. Even more concerning to the concurrent teacher is the Virtual Learning Academy (VLA) students whose pandemic circumstances have placed them at a higher risk of an inequitable education.

**Background of Literature**

Existing literature supports my assumptions that test preparation-based instructional materials do not promote student motivation and engagement or utilize the teacher’s instructional expertise (Beers & Probst, 2017). Furthermore, stand-alone and product-oriented reading and writing tasks not only deprive students of the collaboration, personally-meaningful activities, and authentic feedback that are essential to advance learning but also deprive the teacher of real-time data to modify text-dependent analytical writing instruction (Black, 2015; Dweck, 2016; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Harris & Graham, 1995; Pollington et al., 2001; Ravitch, 2014; Thompson, 2018). Frey and Fisher (2013) recommend that ELA teachers find a purpose-driven instruction by shifting the classroom focus from grading summative assessments to a formative assessment system. Formative assessment is a continuous evaluative process embedded into daily instructional delivery
practices (Hegazy & Barton, 2017). To add, Black and Wiliam (2009) posit that assessment practice in a classroom is formative when:

Evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited. (p. 9)

My practices must align with my epistemological beliefs to provide learning experiences that promote students’ abilities to become informed citizens, lifelong learners, innovative thinkers, and empathetic problem solvers. After all, I want my students’ discoveries and interpretations to be grounded in truth in a world bombarded with information. Furthermore, Beers and Probst (2013) state that teachers must create environments where students “interact with the text, bringing [their] own experiences to the words; [they] still must question what was written, must infer what wasn’t written, and must make connections between the text and [themselves] and other and the world around [them]” (p. 15). I determined that an intervention is required that provides a responsive assessment system to drive instruction during the various stages of reading and writing development in a way that honors the process over the product. This system must enhance the learning process by promoting engagement and reflection, collaboration, whole-class participation, and immediate feedback opportunities. I must quickly discover my students’ strengths and deficiencies in reading and writing so that my instructional decisions meet their unique needs. To attempt this mission, I must embrace a multi-faceted, dynamic instructional approach.
Next, to remain consistent with my school district’s reading and writing initiative at the elementary level, I will use the writing workshop model to support process-oriented writing. Writing workshop is a systematic approach to teaching writing traditionally delivered through the following format: a 10-15-minute mini-lesson on some aspect of writing and 40-45 minutes of independent writing by students. During this time, the teacher is conferring individually, or in small groups, with students (Atwell, 2015; Calkins, 1994; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Graves, 1983). This method lends itself to fulfill best practices of process-oriented, blended reading and writing; however, lack of time, classroom management, and low student motivation are a few of the cited reasons that overwhelm teachers who use this approach, especially in large classrooms with diverse populations (Wei & Pecheone, 2010; Zemelman et al., 2012). Teacher-practitioners have addressed the workshop model’s disadvantages by using technology and minor adaptations that have allowed this approach to work in their classrooms (Chambré, 2017; Hughes, 2014; Nagl, 2020). Consequently, I reviewed the research on utilizing digital platforms to provide opportunities for engagement, collaboration, data collection, and feedback that would be difficult for the teacher to achieve independently throughout units of reading and writing instruction. While the results of digital student response tools used in classrooms are promising, the review also exposed many gaps in the literature that provide opportunities for a new qualitative inquiry to incorporate mobile learning in the middle school ELA classroom (Draper & Brown, 2004; Faber & Visscher, 2018; Fuller & Dawson, 2017; Nikou & Economides, 2018).
Theoretical Framework

Classroom research that aspires to initiate change must rely on learning theories to provide “coherence and big-picture understandings” (Shepard, 2005, p. 66). For this study, Louise Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory (1938, 1978) and Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory frame the pedagogical design of my instructional and assessment approach. Next, Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory (1985) provides a lens to determine factors that influence my students’ motivation.

Reader-Response Theory

Rooted in the constructivist view of learning, Louise Rosenblatt’s (1938, 1978) reader-response theory gained attention in the 1960s and 1970s in response to traditional criticisms that view a work of literature as a self-contained object and exclude the reader’s reactions to the text (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Reader-response theory focuses on the reader’s vital role and the transaction between a reader and his/her response to a text to contribute to the enjoyment of reading, the consideration of diverse cultures, and the development of critical thinking. According to Rosenblatt (1978), classroom instruction and questioning should elicit aesthetic responses: The reader’s emotional reactions to a text that require him/her/them to make connections between the text and his/her/their own life and provide opportunities to consider diverse cultures. Rosenblatt’s work has inspired pedagogical tools and strategies such as activating background knowledge, reading a text closely, and crafting reader’s response questions and discussions that promote aesthetic responses necessary for critical writing endeavors (Rosenblatt, 1988; Woodruff & Griffin, 2017). My digital instructional intervention incorporated these essential strategies to provoke a mindset shift away from years of product-oriented instruction and

**Social Learning Theory**

To address the challenges of achieving aesthetic responses to texts shaped by reader response pedagogies, I explored the benefits of teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions during the reading and writing process development. Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory assumes that deep learning occurs in educational environments where teachers and students collaborate as a community of learners. Additionally, Vygotsky (1978) posits that learning opportunities should match a child’s two developmental levels: an actual developmental level, which pertains to tasks a child could complete independently according to current developed mental abilities, and a potential developmental level, which refers to functions a child could complete with assistance from the teacher or peers.

Vygotsky’s (1978) idea of a learner’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) is “the space between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 38). To move students into the ZPD, teachers rely on information from formative assessments to provide scaffolds in the form of modeling and feedback delivered through the gradual release of responsibility method (Butler, 1988; Crossouard & Pryor, 2012; Dweck, 2000; Fisher & Frey, 2008; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hattie et al., 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Hegazy & Barton, 2017; Shepard, 2005; Wiliam & Thompson, 2007). As students begin to understand how to craft aesthetic responses to texts involving a combination of their
connections that contribute to their interpretations supported by relevant text evidence, the teacher can slowly remove the scaffolds (Shepard, 2005).

**Self-Determination Theory**

Once I remove the scaffolds, students should transfer these skills to independent reading and writing tasks within and beyond my classroom. Historically, my students begin the school year viewing text-dependent writing as an onerous requirement from their ELA teacher. Even my voracious readers and writers describe their text-dependent writing skills as mediocre at best. To shift the mindset about their abilities and inspire my students to authentically engage in this process, I must design a digital intervention that disrupts the “Is this for a grade?” and “Is this the right answer?” culture. To understand factors that influence motivation and use this knowledge to build effective instructional units inclusive to every student, I relied on the lens of Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory.

While self-determination theory posits that people have a natural propensity to grow, master, and welcome new experiences, these tendencies require factors such as a social context and other external stimuli. More specifically, the fulfillment of three psychological needs of autonomy (the need to feel ownership of one’s behavior), competence (the need to produce desired outcomes and to experience mastery), and relatedness (the need to feel connected to others) will lead to intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to Ryan and Deci (2000a), there are three basic types of motivation: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation. Amotivation is a lack of desire to accomplish a task, usually due to an absence of interest or ability. Extrinsic motivation presents itself through actions caused by a desire to attain a reward
or approval or avoid punishment. Intrinsic motivation manifests in behaviors based on interest or enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2017). To intrinsically motivate my students, I aspired to use the technology available to mitigate the writing workshop model’s problems and merge my dual audience into one community of learners.

**Significance of Study & Purpose Statement**

The collective review initiated an intervention using a digital interactive student response tool called Pear Deck (2020), where every student engages in individual and social learning during whole-class instruction. Pear Deck allows the instructor to embed multiple-choice questions, open-response questions, click and drag features, and highlight and draw tools into Google Slides presentations. Launching Pear Deck through the G-Suite prompts the Google Slides to open in the Pear Deck site through a web browser where students join via a displayed unique access code. Once students enter the Pear Deck session, responses are dragged, typed, or drawn directly onto their device to answer interactive questions. Students can only see the information on their device, and their names are anonymous on the main presentation screen when I opt to share class answers. This real-time data provides an overall view of students’ understanding and allows me to monitor and adjust the lesson and provide feedback immediately. Because of the open-ended and elusive nature of text-dependent questions, students have the opportunity to see multiple written responses on the Mimio Board and listen to my constructive feedback. Further, after the lesson, Pear Deck creates Google spreadsheets and document summaries with individual student responses that streamline the data collection process so I can make informed decisions on small groups, interventions, and extensions.
The purpose of this research study was to understand how a digital student response tool used to facilitate a text-dependent analysis writing unit affects perceived self-determination in a seventh-grade English Language Arts concurrent classroom. While many published studies explore motivation, the benefits of process-oriented, text-dependent writing instruction, and technology separately, this study aims to identify best practices of blended instruction (literary analysis writing instruction enhanced through a digital student response tool) in ELA. Moreover, in my final year of research, the Covid-19 pandemic changed how schools operate. During the 2020-2021 school year, my seventh-grade ELA classroom consisted of a blend of in-person students and remote learning students to receive instruction synchronously. The concurrent classroom is a new phenomenon in middle schools that has not been systematically explored. By gathering and analyzing teacher and student perceptions and samples of student work, my inquiry aspires to maximize the powerful combination of the teacher’s instructional expertise with educational technology advancements to fill the gaps in existing literature.

**Research Question**

After a review of research aligned with theoretical understandings, I crafted the following research question: What is the impact of a digital student response tool embedded into text-dependent writing instruction on seventh-grade students’ self-determination in a concurrent classroom?

**Research Design**

**Researcher Positionality**

The study took place in a seventh-grade concurrent ELA classroom in a rural community in Upstate, South Carolina. Herr and Anderson (2015) recommend the
researcher to ask, “Who am I in relation to my participants and my setting?” to establish researcher positionality (p. 37). While they acknowledge the perplexities of an action researcher’s positionality due to the potential of multiple and shifting roles on the continuum, especially since the emergence of practitioner enrollment in doctoral programs, clearly defining these relationships and acknowledging any limitations that arise from them are essential to ensure a valid study. I assumed the position of an insider in collaboration with other insiders (my seventh-grade ELA students) during my role as a practitioner-researcher to gather and study students’ perspectives to reflect on practices inside my classroom (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 45). I consulted other insiders in my school community (Instructional Technologist, Professional Learning Community of Seventh-Grade ELA Teachers, and Instructional Coach) throughout the process to “have a greater impact on the setting” and increase the chances of a “democratic” process (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 45).

**Action Research Methodology**

Action research is “an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students’ learning,” and therefore, an appropriate and ideal model for a practitioner-researcher (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 2). Action research methodology provides a systematic approach for an insider (the teacher) collaborating with other insiders (my students, colleagues, and supervisors) to critically and reflectively examine the classroom practices where current relationships exist while concurrently delivering the instructional process (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 95). Furthermore, the cyclical process of action research enables me, the practitioner, “to
continually refine the methods, the data collection, and [my] interpretation based on the knowledge gained in earlier cycles” (O’Leary, 2004, as cited by Ivankova, 2015, p. 45).

To gain a deeper understanding of students’ perspectives on the motivational effects of a digital student response tool used during reading and writing instruction in a concurrent middle school classroom, I conducted a qualitative action research study.

Qualitative researchers take a social constructivist stance to learning that asserts that the research’s goal is to mainly rely on the participants’ views of the studied topic since individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Additionally, a qualitative approach allowed me to explore the broad research question in discussions and interactions with the participants as they constructed a situation’s meaning (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). My research sought to understand the effects of using a student response tool during reading and writing analysis instruction. Furthermore, a qualitative approach provides the researcher the freedom to change or refine the focus of a specific research question as the study progresses (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

I will use a qualitative approach to gather data from teacher and student artifacts, observation field notes, open-response surveys, and a focus group interview. Herr and Anderson (2015) recommend the researcher first utilize relevant data from student and teacher artifacts available for the study; therefore, I will collect data spreadsheets from Pear Deck sessions and student work throughout the instructional unit. Next, I plan to utilize an observation protocol that includes descriptive (“what happened during the observation without inferring feelings or responses to what is happening”) and reflective (“reflection and insights about what is happening in the setting”) field notes (Efron &
Student open-response surveys will gather students’ perceptions of the impact of using a digital response tool used to facilitate process-oriented writing instruction versus traditional instructional methods. My VLA student focus groups will follow the open-response survey and highlight the study’s collaborative nature by allowing a view of students’ perspectives through closed and open-ended question format. The multiple data sources will provide a complete picture and ensure the study’s validity and trustworthiness through data triangulation (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 67).

Acknowledgment of Limitations

The sample size, the length of the study, and the setting in a rural middle school in Upstate South Carolina are potential limitations to the transferability of the findings from this study to other locations. Also, I fully acknowledge my preconceived ideas and assumptions of the research and practiced critical reflexivity with regard to setting, participants, and the topic during all stages of the study to ensure no distortions of the outcome (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic created protocols in the school that reduced collaboration opportunities and prohibited in-person interviews.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the study found that incorporating a digital student response tool into text-dependent writing instruction positively impacts students’ self-determination in this concurrent classroom. By serving as an external stimulus of accountability that fulfilled the students’ intrinsic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, this digital instructional intervention sustained the necessary engagement levels essential for critical thinking and increased writing achievement. The student response tool features allowed me to embed on-going formative assessments throughout the unit to diagnose student
deficits quickly, monitor and adjust instruction, provide instant and individualized feedback, and utilize student responses as instructional resources.

With proper facilitation of the student response tool, students could share their responses and see their classmates’ responses. The students appreciated the organized and systematic approach to reading and writing and found value in seeing their peers’ responses. While both audiences reported that the digital tool enabled interaction and opportunities to be active participants and members of the class, the VLA students especially appreciated the increased relatedness after feeling overlooked and disconnected from their peers in other VLA classes. Next, the study found that the instant feedback, opportunity to revise responses after seeing examples, and anonymity that the student response tool created increased the students’ power to control their performance. As a result, both in-person and virtual learners’ responses indicated a shift from a fixed to a growth mindset. For instance, students started taking risks in their writing without the fear of failure or embarrassment. Also, they grasped the power and necessity of revising and editing, two elusive steps to the writing process that have been difficult to achieve with my former middle school students.

While most of the data from my study indicate that a student response tool can help a teacher achieve what he/she cannot do independently, the data analysis revealed that a student response tool does not remedy all of the instructional challenges of a concurrent ELA classroom. For example, some students rely on various digital tools to keep them motivated and engaged, presenting a challenge for teachers learning and troubleshooting new digital resources. Using digital tools increased the chance of losing valuable instructional and work time while overcoming connectivity issues and
unexpected updates that cause problems. Next, many students experienced frustration and decreased motivation when certain features from the student response tool malfunctioned, deleted completed work, or became difficult. Finally, some students were distracted by the interactivity of the student response system (SRS) tool.

More specifically to VLA students, while there was evidence that the student response tool provided a level of competence, relatedness, and autonomy to nurture self-relatedness, their interviews and surveys indicated that they needed additional supports for this motivation to be sustainable. For instance, the WebEx Classroom did not permit the privacy to conduct individual conferences during class time. My VLA students deserved equal access to individually meet with their teacher to build relationships, express concerns, and ask questions. Next, there were technical factors that were beyond my control and expertise. Last, the district technology support line created to fill the gaps of digital literacy in the VLA student population did not provide timely solutions that resulted in the loss of instructional time for these students.

**Organization of Dissertation**

Chapter 1 presented the background for this qualitative action research study. It included the problem of practice, an overview of the literature review, theoretical framework, research question, purpose of the study, and selected methodology. Chapter 2 will detail the literature review and the theoretical and conceptual frameworks aligned to guide the study. Chapter 3 will develop the qualitative action research methodology plan that includes the rationale for the chosen methodology, the setting, participants, intervention, research design, data collection tools, and analysis. Chapter 4 will present
data gathered from the intervention and an analysis of the findings, and Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of these findings for future action.

**Glossary of Terms**

*Close Reading* – the process of rereading and reflecting on a text with the primary objective to assimilate new textual information with existing background knowledge and prior experiences to expand schema (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

*Concurrent Classroom* – A classroom where the population of students is divided into two audiences (face-to-face and virtual students) yet taught synchronously.

*Formative Assessment/Assessment for Learning* - a strategy embedded into instruction to collect authentic data that enables the teacher to identify where the students are at the different stages of their learning and address the learning needs of students as soon as these needs arise (Hegazy & Barton, 2017).

*G-Suite* – a brand of cloud computing, productivity and collaboration tools, software, and products developed by Google.

*Google Applications (Slides, Sheets, Docs)* – Presentation, Spreadsheet, and Document software developed by Google.

*Mimio Board* – A computer whiteboard with interactive teaching devices.

*One-to-One Learning* – a term applied to programs that provide all students in a school, district, or state with their laptop, netbook, tablet computer, or other mobile-computing device.

*Pear Deck* – an online digital interactive student response tool embedded into Google Slides presentations.
**SC READY** – South Carolina’s Standardized State Assessment for Math and English Language Arts for grades three through eight.

**Summative Assessment** – end-of-unit evaluations to measure student learning objectives.

**Text-Dependent Analysis** – an extending writing task that prompts students to provide specific evidence from the passages they read while demonstrating the ability to interpret the meaning behind the evidence they provide.

**WebEx Classroom** – a video conferencing platform designed to connect teachers with virtual students and their parents securely.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of practice for this study at an Upstate South Carolina middle school includes factors that have brought an alarming new awareness to the achievement gap, “the discrepancy in educational outcomes between various student groups,” revealed through the results of the text-dependent analysis (TDA) writing component on the SC Ready state assessment for grades three through eight (Howard, 2014, p. 10). This task requires students to demonstrate their ability to read analytically and communicate their thoughts effectively through a developed writing piece (South Carolina Department of Education, 2018). Surface-level writing exercises independent of reading tasks yet sufficient for satisfactory results on the former, stand-alone state writing component are inadequate to prepare students for the critical literacy demands of the 21st-century college-and-career world the new state writing task aspires to achieve (Thompson, 2018). The transition to this complex writing endeavor has created a broad continuum of instructional practices that have perplexed teachers and their students who travel through each school year adjusting to their current ELA teacher’s reading and writing instruction ideologies.

In particular, these inconsistencies have caused ELA teachers to re-examine their classroom instruction and assessment practices, specifically regarding engagement, feedback, motivation, and technology utilization. ELA teachers have felt ill-equipped to foster this complex writing process, especially considering the lack of explicit instruction on teaching the writing process through teacher licensure programs (Coker & Lewis,
2008; Myers et al., 2016). As a result, many teachers default to traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods that focus on language conventions, isolated skills, close-ended questions, and stand-alone writing tasks that fail to support the demands of nurturing this blended reading and writing endeavor (Harris & Graham, 1995; Pollington et al., 2001). Furthermore, the product-oriented, traditional approach to writing relies on data from the end-of-unit writing assessments that arrive too late to inform instruction, ignore opportunities for peer collaboration, and provide feedback well after a new unit of instruction is in progress (Frey & Fisher, 2013).

In alignment with standardization ideologies, my school district initially invested in test preparatory workbooks. This simplistic solution has proven just as ineffectual because it encourages ubiquitous recitation, the assignment of a text “followed by a series of teacher questions that require students to display their mastery of the material through convergent factual answers” (Tharp et al., 1991, p. 6). This approach discounts the development of critical thinking, cultural literacy, and thoughtful citizenship identified as crucial by A Nation at Risk and America 2000. Moreover, digital reading and writing programs and other test preparatory pedagogies discount the teacher’s instructional expertise and the students’ learning preferences, failing to provide authentic and timely direction for modifying instructional decisions (Black & Wiliam, 1998b).

To offer a viable solution and systematic approach to teaching writing as a process, my school district has worked diligently for the last three years to train elementary teacher to implement the writing workshop model (Atwell, 2015; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983). While an overwhelming amount of research supports this promising shift to address traditional reading and writing instruction shortfalls at the elementary
level, middle school teachers have struggled to continue this approach in their classrooms (Brown, 2018; Coleman, 2000; Kelley, 2003; Singagliese, 2012). First, this writing workshop’s rigid structure can be intricate for teachers to manage and translate into their middle school classrooms that most often boast a larger number of students (Feinberg, 2007). Next, keeping adolescents, who are easily distracted and extraordinarily social, engaged and motivated to persevere through complex reading and writing tasks while the teacher diverts attention to individual and small-group conferences can create a management nightmare (Chambré, 2017). Furthermore, the issue of teacher feedback can hinder analytical thinking. For example, in an attempt to scaffold literary analysis, teachers can inadvertently influence a text’s interpretations by controlling class discussions, working against students’ responses, interpretations, and reflections (Vijayarajoo & Samuel, 2013). Finally, these instructional methods and assessments fail to authentically utilize my school district’s one-to-one mobile learning initiative that aspires to develop collaborative, creative, and critical thinking skills through a 21st-century approach to learning.

As if the challenges to deliver authentic and effective text-dependent writing instruction were not enough to prevail during my inquiry, the public educational system faced its most significant trial in 2020 when a worldwide pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus would force many teachers, including me, into a position of teaching face-to-face and virtual students synchronously. During the summer of 2020, it was impossible to imagine the hurdles my students and I would face during the 2020-2021 school year: connectivity issues, inadequate technology, isolation, anxiety, multiple quarantines, sickness, and deficits from lack of direct instruction during the previous
school year’s distance learning. Because of these new circumstances that forced 15% of my students into a virtual learning environment that placed them at a higher risk of being disengaged, disconnected, and unsuccessful, I deemed it necessary to devote additional focus to ameliorating the inequities in my concurrent classroom.

Throughout this chapter, I will report the importance of a literature review in systematic inquiry and unveil the resources used to inform this process. I will also briefly describe the historical background that gives context to the problem of practice, followed by the theoretical framework that has guided the development of my research questions, my selection of literature, and the best methodology to explore my questions. Also, I will present summaries and findings of recent literature on reading and writing best practices, digital student response tools, motivation, and distance learning.

After a review of research aligned with theoretical understandings, I crafted the following research question: What is the impact of a digital student response tool embedded into text-dependent writing instruction on seventh-grade students’ self-determination in a concurrent classroom?

**Purpose of the Review**

To gain additional insight into the problem of practice, to understand the process of conducting a credible systematic inquiry, and to identify gaps in existing research on the topic, a review of historical perspectives, previous research on the subject, and theoretical and conceptual understandings are essential to the research process. A critique of literature involves the researcher’s current understanding and interpretation of the research topic with implications for how to answer the research questions, in addition to taking further steps to contribute new knowledge (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). Machi and
McEvoy (2016) add that the literature review “must define what is known and also logically identify and define a new unanswered question—a significant question requiring new primary research” (p. 109).

The literature review was on-going throughout the research process, as I consulted a variety of books, websites, peer-reviewed journals, periodical reviews, blogs, and videos. Concomitantly, the required and recommended coursework content consisting of videos, articles, dissertation theses, and textbooks provided foundations for conducting action research and qualitative inquiry, identifying and confronting inequities in education, forming research questions, utilizing theoretical frameworks, and understanding the history of curriculum theories and pedagogies and how they shape current policies and practices. For content knowledge and pedagogical best practices in reading and writing, I collected published books and articles of contemporary experts during state and district-led professional development opportunities that have shaped an understanding of crafting lessons that will engage, inspire, motivate, and elicit critical reading and writing in students. Finally, the University of South Carolina’s online library has provided access to EBSCO and ERIC databases to locate current literature to add to the understanding of existing research, the identification of experts, the discovery of questions that need further research, and the determination of theoretical and conceptual frameworks and methodologies used in previous studies regarding the topic. I used the following keyword searches to locate pertinent information to inform all parts of the study: mentor texts, student-written mentor texts, reader-response theory, social-learning theory, text-dependent analysis writing in middle school, close reading, feedback, self-determination theory, motivation in writing, the achievement gap, formative versus
Historical Perspective

The problem of practice is historically situated in decades of traditional reading and writing practices that are product-oriented due to the over-reliance of summative assessments at the end of reading and writing instructional units. Black (2015) argues that many teachers and curriculum developers “regard assessment as a peripheral component of pedagogy, one that is inescapable but which always threatens to undermine the most valued aim, that of developing the learning capacity of their students” (p. 163). For example, scores and grades linked to summative assessments emphasize competition instead of personal improvement, negatively affecting low-achieving students’ perceptions of their ability to learn (Wiliam & Black, 1998a). Furthermore, results from summative assessments can lead to a fixed (as opposed to growth) mindset in students, a self-perception where people view qualities, like their intelligence or talent, as fixed traits that dedication and hard work cannot change (Black, 2015; Dweck, 2016). For instance, one obstacle of end-of-unit assessments is that most students expect confirmation in the form of a “right” or “wrong” answer. The problem with this type of outlook, according to Black (2015), is that it damages the “development as learners, because it usually indicates a belief in students that they have a fixed intelligence” (p. 169).

The Accountability Era that measures progress solely through the results of high-stakes tests has added to the bleak picture of student achievement in reading and writing.
(Ravitch, 2014). Ravitch (2014) thoroughly defends American public schools and concludes that the impossible expectations and rewards and punishments from standardized test scores outlined in Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and Obama’s Race to the Top (2009) are to blame. Ravitch (2014) posits, “[t]he more that teachers and schools are compelled to focus on raising test scores, the more likely they are to narrow the curriculum,” cheat, inflate scores, and avoid teaching low-scoring students (p. 122).

Beers and Probst (2017) add that our school systems have “let preparing students for tests substitute for promoting engagement,” and, therefore, allowed a curriculum driven by test-preparatory methods that categorize our students into “pushables” (close to meeting the standard), “slipables” (at-risk of falling below the standard), and the “expendables” (incapable of meeting the standard on state testing) (p. 108). This type of curriculum and instruction leads to a “segregation of intellectual rigor” disguised as differentiation (p. 112). Consequently, these intervention settings for our most vulnerable youth that deliver scripted programs produce “apathetic, uninterested, and disengaged” students who “might (or might not) pass the test” as a substitute for learning experiences that spark the creativity, curiosity, and collaboration that they deserve (p. 112). The intervention programs designed to separate students who are not meeting the standard on high-stakes tests from their high-achieving peers have not been the answer to closing the achievement gap, nor have they established an intrinsic motivation for complex reading and writing tasks.
New Standards Reflect New Ideology

While teacher and student accountability measured by high-stakes tests in education persist, the most current SC READY state assessment writing component, a text-dependent analysis extended-response item, reignites a process-oriented, student-centered approach to teaching and learning that test preparatory pedagogies cannot achieve. This new writing component attempts to deliver a standardized assessment that can authentically and objectively assess the learner’s discoveries and insights. In addition to the 2015 SC College and Career Ready ELA Standards updated to resemble the rigorous CCSS, the SC Department of Education introduced an education initiative called the “Profile of the South Carolina Graduate.” This initiative lists coveted skills and characteristics in the college and career world: 1. critical thinking and problem-solving; 2. integrity; 3. global perspective; 4. work ethic; and 5. collaboration and teamwork (South Carolina Council on Competitiveness, 2015). The 2015 SC College and Career Ready ELA Standards, the SC READY writing component, and “Profile of the South Carolina Graduate” initiative collectively challenge a reading and writing instructional shift to elicit open-ended responses to texts. This shift aligns with my ideological aspirations to engage students in “the process of reading texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships and contexts,” also known as critical literacy (Boutte, 2016, p. 59).

When asked about the inspiration for her reading theory and its practical life applications in the classroom after nearly a century, Rosenblatt, clearly ahead of her time, responded:
I would say the truly “generative” ideas have been the value of democracy for human beings, and the importance of preserving and improving our democratic way of life. This is what colored my thinking about literature and led to my becoming involved with education, with trying to understand how schools can contribute to the growth of people able to preserve and carry into greater fulfillment the democratic society. (Karolides, 1999, p. 161)

During this tumultuous time of teaching and living, Rosenblatt leaves reading and writing teachers with her words of wisdom that remind us of our “why.”

**Theoretical & Conceptual Framework**

Eisenhart (1991) defined a theoretical framework as “a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory…constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships” (p. 205, as cited in Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 13). Furthermore, the doctoral student must develop an original application of the chosen theory (or theories), whereas a conceptual framework “is the researcher’s understanding of how the research problem will best be explored, the specific direction the research will have to take, and the relationship between the different variables in the study” (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, pp. 16-17). First, Louise Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory (1978) and Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory framed my instructional and assessment approach’s pedagogical design. Next, Ryan and Deci’s self-determination theory (1985) provided a lens to determine factors that influenced students’ motivation (see figure 2.1).
Figure 2.1. Theoretical Framework

**Reader-Response Theory**

Rosenblatt (1978) believed reading literature involves a transaction between the reader and the text. Rosenblatt’s theory is an opposed response to New Criticism that viewed literature as a self-contained object and inspired by Dewey’s (1938) constructivism theory that explains how new knowledge is integrated with prior knowledge to comprehend a text. Reader-response theory, also known as transactional theory, proposes that the relationship between the reader and text contributes to new meaning, which she called “the poem” (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1978). Rosenblatt (1978) argues the meaning/poem depends on the reader’s interaction with the text, which is dramatically influenced by the reader’s prior knowledge and experiences known as schemata, and not the text itself; therefore, meaning construction is an individualized, unique experience. In other words, a text will not have the same meaning for every reader because the individual will bring his/her/their own beliefs, experiences, contexts, and knowledge to the transaction.
According to Rosenblatt (1978), all readers’ responses exist on a continuum of aesthetic and efferent responses. The efferent responses to a text are fact-based, summarized information extracted directly from the literature, while aesthetic responses are the reader’s emotional reactions to a text that require the reader to make connections between the text and life. To provide students with opportunities to make deeper connections from a piece of literature and consider diverse cultures, Rosenblatt posits teachers should include instructional questioning to elicit aesthetic responses.

Furthermore, the reader’s process of translating thoughts about the text to written form, according to Rosenblatt (1988), affords occasions for new meaning to grow out of the construction and rearrangement of words and phrases. Once there is no longer a worry of language conventions and correctness, the writer’s interpretations of a text flow freely (Rosenblatt, 1988). Rosenblatt (1988) explains “the interconnectedness of writing and reading… can serve as a stimulus and support to the other”; therefore, “the writer discovers the need to read in order to enlarge knowledge and experience, and that the reader is moved to write to record, express, and clarify ideas and feelings that flow from reading” (p. 14). For students to build on these transactional reading and writing skills, Rosenblatt (1988) adds that peer readings and discussion of texts will enable them to verbalize their interpretations, draw on varied interpretations, and return to the text to justify meaning.

Rosenblatt’s theory has generated significant implications to address the instructional paradigm of text-dependent analysis writing in an ELA classroom. To analyze a text and communicate these ideas through a synthesized and developed piece of writing, the students must interpret it through the lens of their prior knowledge, past
experiences, and diverse perspectives. By using a reader-response approach, middle school students are empowered to become “critical readers and thinkers because they are not simply told how to think about a text, but must justify their multiple interpretations of a text using textual evidence and support” (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017, p. 108).

Rosenblatt’s work has inspired pedagogical tools and strategies such as activating background knowledge, close reading a text, and crafting reader’s response questions and discussions that promote aesthetic responses necessary for critical writing endeavors.

**Close Reading**

Due to the current SC state standards that require mostly text-dependent analysis-related tasks, teachers have found it necessary to explicitly teach the process of close reading (Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017; National Education Association, 2013). The instruction and development of close reading, according to Brown et al. (2012), involves the slower process, sometimes over multiple sessions, of multiple readings of a shorter excerpt of a passage implemented with text-based questions; text annotations; and discussions regarding the author’s intentional choices of words, phrases, literary devices and elements, and text features and structures that shape the meaning that is developed on a deeper level with each new reading. The acquisition of close reading skills supports the capacity to move beyond summarizing and critically examine the craft of writing (Fisher & Frey, 2014). This focus on deep comprehension could result in meaningful change for struggling adolescent readers to independently engage in critical reading (Cantrell et al., 2010).

Bringing this instructional method to practice, Fisher and Frey (2014) conducted research to determine the effects on achievement from the close reading process within
an afterschool instructional intervention for seventh- and eighth-grade students. A significant number of participants had limited English proficiency and/or lived in poverty, and they performed below basic on standardized measures of reading achievement. Compared to the traditional afterschool intervention, their study found that even though the students in their control group had large reading deficits, they benefitted from the intensive close reading instructional intervention. Their evidence included more substantial attendance levels, increased self-perceptions, and increased student achievement levels on the annual California state English Language Arts assessment (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

**Reader Response Questioning**

For learning to occur, a person must integrate new information with prior knowledge (Rumelhart, 1980). Since Rosenblatt’s theory elicits the reader’s culture, background knowledge, and personal experiences to analyze a text, activating the reader’s prior knowledge is crucial for making authentic text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections that contribute to making meaning (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). To encourage student use of schemata to promote critical thinking and deeper understandings of the text, teachers must provide ample opportunities for students to make connections before, during, and after they read by posing questions to initiate reflective responses and discussion (Christen et al., 1991; Graves et al., 2011; McCollough, 2013).

Furthermore, teaching reading through the lens of reader-response theory promotes unity and inclusiveness. Studies that have explored reader-response approaches to diverse texts have found that opportunities for students to examine cultural issues and
historical events from diverse perspectives through relatable stories diminish isolation and strengthen students’ empathy (Leung, 2002; Louie, 2005). To add, Park’s (2012) yearlong qualitative study found that to form a community and a sense of belonging, students need to share their interpretations and perspectives about a text to expand their minds regarding other cultures and beliefs.

More specifically to analytical reading and writing, Vijayarajoo and Samuel’s (2013) case study applied Rosenblatt’s (1978) reader-response theory to their pedagogical practices. The two researchers examined an instructional method to help students move away from efferent stances toward “a more exploratory and meaningful way of bringing personal meaning to the text, thus allowing expression along the aesthetic stance as well” (p. 177). Their study analyzed the effects of an application of reader-response pedagogy introduced during instructional practices that directed student-written literary responses before and after reading two short stories. As measured by an existing efferent/aesthetic continuum, the students’ initial responses were largely retellings of the story, yet subsequent responses revealed a shift to an aesthetic stance that involved the students’ interpretations in constructing the meaning of the text.

While these findings signified an approach to instruction that supports text-dependent analysis writing objectives, the study also implied potential challenges. For illustration, the overall student mindset shift from efferent to aesthetic reasoning was only achieved by a slow and gradual process, as indicated by the first read in the study where no change occurred (Vijayarajoo & Samuel, 2013). The study’s field notes also revealed that the teacher experienced frustration, anxiety, and feelings of lost authority from the
initial chaos caused by the increased dialogue resulting from student-centered discussions and multiple interpretations of a text.

**Vygotsky’s Social Learning Theory**

To address the challenges of achieving aesthetic responses to texts shaped by reader’s response pedagogies, I explored the benefits of teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions during the process-oriented reading and writing instruction. Born from constructivism, Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory assumes learning is enhanced in educational environments where teachers and students collaborate as a community of learners. Additionally, Vygotsky posits that learning situations should match a child’s two developmental levels: an actual developmental level, which pertains to tasks a child could complete independently according to current developed mental abilities, and a potential developmental level, which refers to tasks a child could complete with assistance from the teacher or peers.

Vygotsky’s (1978) idea of a learner’s zone of proximal development is “the space between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 38). According to Vygotsky, when learning involves interactions with students of varied abilities under the guidance of a teacher, students will imitate and internalize these processes that “go beyond the limits of their own capabilities” (p. 39). More specifically to writing, Vygotsky argues that composition must begin with social and cultural interactions through an exchange in which the child’s internal thoughts are translated, leading “to outer speech in the form of writing” (p. 181). As students begin to understand how to
craft aesthetic responses to texts involving a combination of their connections that contribute to their interpretations supported by relevant text evidence, the teacher can slowly remove the scaffolds (Shepard, 2005).

**Formative Assessment**

Theorists have used Vygotsky’s concept of a learner’s zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the foundational rationale for formative assessments, a diverse set of pedagogical practices that embeds assessment within instructional units (Crossouard & Pryor, 2012; Hegazy & Barton, 2017). Although Black and Wiliam (1998a; 1998b) previously published extensive research on the benefits of formative assessment, they developed a theory in 2009 to bring uniformity to a multitude of practices that have been labeled as formative and provide a clear rationale for future inquiry. According to Black and Wiliam (2009), formative assessment practices are the best means to achieve a wide range of learning objectives “in part because the quality of interactive feedback is a critical feature in determining the quality of learning activity, and is therefore a central feature of pedagogy” (p. 8).

To conceptualize Black and Wiliam’s (2009) formative assessment theory in practice, Wiliam and Thompson (2007) propose five key strategies of formative assessment:

- clarifying and sharing learning intentions and criteria for success,
- engineering effective classroom discussions and other learning tasks,
- providing feedback that moves the learner forward,
- activating students as instructional resources for one another, and activating students as the owner of their own learning. (p. 8)
Formative assessment also affords opportunities to capitalize upon “moments of contingency” in the regulation of learning during instruction when teachers, students, and peers collect evidence about students’ achievement to make decisions about the next step for providing immediate feedback and modifying the instruction (Hegazy & Barton, 2017, p. 8).

Black and Wiliam (1998) conducted an extensive review of 250 international journal articles, books, and research studies to provide firm evidence that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise achievement standards. Gorlewski (2008) adds that formative assessment “provide[s] an exceptional opportunity for teachers to collect, analyze, and use data in meaningful ways” (p. 97). Additionally, the implementation of formative assessments into daily instructional practices brings a student-centered approach to teaching and learning (Hegazy & Barton, 2017).

**Scaffolding.** According to Shepard (2005), scaffolding refers to “supports that teachers provide to the learner during problem-solving—in the form of reminders, hints, and encouragement—to ensure successful completion of a task” (p. 36). More specifically, scaffolding instruction based on information from formative assessments “uses insights about a learner’s current understanding to alter the course of instruction” and thus moves the student into the ZPD (p. 36). The gradual release of responsibility and feedback are specific strategies to scaffold instruction during reading and writing instruction.

**Gradual release of responsibility.** The gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model addresses the teacher’s role in guiding students to independent practice or
application (Fisher & Frey, 2008). While Pearson and Gallagher (1983) introduced the initial GRR model, Wilhelm (2001) provided concrete application by presenting four phases of instruction (as cited in Fisher & Frey, 2008). First, the teacher demonstrates while the students watch. Second, the teacher models while the students attempt the task. Next, the students begin the task with teacher assistance. Finally, the students start and finish the task while the teacher observes. According to Fisher and Frey (2008), teachers should base guided instruction on what the formative assessments reveal the students need, and with enough modeling and practice, students will imitate behaviors and reach for appropriate strategies automatically as they read complex texts on their own. They add, “[g]uided instruction gives teachers an opportunity to engage students’ thinking without telling them what to think—and a chance to scaffold students’ understanding before they complete tasks independently” (Fisher & Frey, 2008, p. 35).

**Feedback.** One of the proposed benefits of a formative assessment is feedback. Hattie et al. (2016) assert that students are more likely to accept and apply teacher feedback when there are “clear expectations for learning” and they can “compare their performance with a clearly understood criterion for success” (p. 17). Feedback should help students answer three questions: 1. Where am I going (what are the success criteria)?; 2. How am I going (what progress am I making toward those goals)?; and 3. Where do I need to go next? (Hattie, 2012).

Once the teacher has established the learning expectations for the students, the first question is addressed. Feedback to address the next two questions (How am I going; where do I need to go next?) may be related to three factors (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). First, during the initial learning level, feedback should guide the student to self-correct
(Hattie et al., 2016). The second level of feedback seeks to develop a reflective and metacognitive mindset, followed by the final stage of feedback, where students have a more profound knowledge of the content to establish self-regulatory habits of learning (Hattie et al., 2016). Butler (1988) and Dweck (2000) indicate feedback in the form of comments and the absence of marks encourages students to view assessments as opportunities for revising, editing, elaborating, and extending their current writing. Consequently, they are more likely to transfer the learning to future writing endeavors.

Frey and Fisher (2013) sought to find what students wanted to know in terms of feedback regarding their writing. Their research reports that when feedback is focused on a summative task and, as a result, deferred, it is not likely to change a student’s performance. Fisher and Frey (2013) concluded that when teachers only rely on summative tasks, there is no opportunity for students to revise, or rethink, the work before a new learning objective is introduced. Additionally, on a survey of student preferences regarding what they wanted to know from end-of-unit writing assessments, 80% of students selected “To know what grade I got and generally how I did” (p. 66). However, regarding students’ top two preferences during the development phase of writing, 92% of students selected “Edits to improve my writing” and 84% chose “Specific and detailed information about my performance” (p. 66). These results demonstrate the value of process versus product in the development of writing.

**Writing Workshop**

To create a classroom environment that supports the pedagogical approaches that align with Rosenblatt’s (1938, 1978) reader-response theory and Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory and to remain consistent with my school district’s reading and
writing initiative at the elementary level, I reviewed the literature on the design and facilitation of the writing workshop model. Designed to foster process-oriented, student-centered instruction, the writing workshop model provides a systematic approach to teaching writing traditionally delivered through the following format: a 10-15-minute mini-lesson on an aspect of writing and 40-45 minutes of independent writing by students while the teacher confers with them individually or in small groups (Atwell, 2015; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983). Calkins and Ehrenworth (2016) offer five fundamental principles to implement a Writing Workshop approach: 1. protected time to write, 2. choice, 3. response in the form of feedback, 4. explicit instruction, and 5. working toward clear goals (p. 10).

Through a mixed-methods, action research study of reading and writing workshop (RWW) in the secondary English classroom, Nagl (2020) acknowledges this model often requires a paradigm shift on the part of the teacher to allow for more student autonomy and to limit direct instruction time to 10-15-minute mini-lessons. Nagl’s study found that the implementation of the RWW had a positive impact on engagement, achievement, and attitudes with reading practices, yet failed to explore one of the workshop model’s main facets: writing conferences.

Hughes’ (2014) qualitative study addressed the time management issues and lack of direction of writing conferences contributing to the writing workshop model’s underutilization, examining a conference method that includes all class members participating in a weekly discussion of written drafts in an undergraduate composition class. The data revealed that student writing improved in all areas, and the use of this method, while an iteration of the traditional workshop model, strengthened the sense of
community in this classroom. Whole-class writing conferences provide an opportunity for students to learn the value of writing as a process from their teacher and more capable peers.

Similarly, Chambré’s (2017) study recognized the writing workshop model’s ability to develop students’ writing craft, but the author also identified challenges with and made adjustments to the model, making it more useful for students. To engage students with disabilities who struggle with stamina, focus, and motivation to complete independent work and facilitate the role of manager and conferrer, Chambré utilized technology’s power. Using a Google Docs online word processing platform that provides a synchronous and asynchronous chat feature and allows teachers to monitor students’ work in real-time, Chambré devoted a block of conferring time to comment on the digital document while students worked independently or in groups. Seeing students’ work in real-time allowed Chambré to provide immediate constructive feedback, identify disengaged students, provide interventions, and maintain an overall positive tone during class.

This literature review reveals that interdependent pedagogies used during writing workshop elicit the desired engagement required to intrinsically motivate students to skillfully and independently complete analytical writing tasks. While formative assessments’ benefits are abundant, an ELA teacher’s required modeling, questioning, facilitating, and responding during formative assessment instructional practices are daunting, especially in large classrooms with diverse populations (Wei & Pecheone, 2010). Furthermore, I found that teacher-practitioners have addressed the workshop model’s disadvantages through technology and minor adaptations that have allowed this
approach to succeed in their classrooms. Consequently, I reviewed the research on digital platforms to provide opportunities for engagement, collaboration, data collection, and feedback that would be difficult for the teacher to achieve independently throughout units of reading and writing instruction.

**Technology.** While lack of proficiency in technology from the teacher and student could hinder the instructional sequence, technological advances aspire to address many of the challenges that hinder the successful implementation of formative assessments in reading and writing instruction (Sickel, 2019). Fuller and Dawson (2017) report a lack of literature on student response systems (SRSs) for formative assessment in the K-12 setting. However, the accessibility of web-based SRS tools from phones, tablets, and computers; the widespread implementation of one-to-one mobile devices in schools; and the results of existing studies imply a demand to continue research on the promise of SRS tools.

Fuller and Dawson (2017) studied technology professional development for middle school teachers. They found during the direct observation of the implementation of these strategies that SRS tools immediately generate formative assessment data to teachers that inform instruction while engaging students through increased participation. Additionally, teachers reported during post-observation interviews that SRS tool data, as opposed to end-of-unit assessment data, revealed evidence of student learning, reflection, and content deficits throughout the unit.

More specifically, Fuller and Dawson (2017) report strategies that could develop reading and writing skills through the close reading process and student response journals introduced in previous sections. For example, the discussion starter strategy allows the
teacher to pose an initial question to activate students’ prior knowledge about a topic, and the students construct a written response submitted through the SRS tool. The SRS tool thus incorporates formative assessments throughout the delivery of content that can increase student participation, encourage peer interaction, and generate rich discussion from diverse responses. Furthermore, SRS tools can produce formative data for assessing students’ understanding levels to modify the discussion and follow-up instruction accordingly. Fuller and Dawson’s post-observation interviews with teachers revealed that although the SRS tools anonymously report results to the class, accountability remains from the teacher’s ability to review individual student data.

Likewise, Draper and Brown’s (2004) empirical study of SRS tools’ formative use with collegiate students identified this pedagogical approach as beneficial. According to their research, this strategy’s defining attribute is the teacher’s ability to vary instruction based on student needs rather than following a pre-determined instructional sequence. Therefore, as the teacher responds to students’ learning needs by using various approaches to help students master learning objectives, they become engaged in the learning process.

Additionally, Faber and Visscher (2018) examined the quantitative effects of a digital formative assessment tool (DFAT) on elementary school students’ spelling achievement. The sample consisted of experimental schools versus control schools. The use of a digital formative assessment tool did not affect spelling achievement; however, students who used the digital formative assessment tool more performed higher. Most importantly, the study pointed to future research investigating DFATs’ effectiveness in
different subject areas, more specifically in-depth qualitative studies that look into how teachers and students use feedback.

The process of embedding assessments within reading and writing instructional units suggests an equitable and effective way to achieve aesthetic responses to texts, but this process is challenging to manage with a variety and high volume of learners. The reviewed literature suggests technology can mitigate the complexities of managing a formative assessment system that allows the teacher to utilize data and provide feedback in a compact instructional sequence. I explored the possibilities to maximize a digital SRS tool’s efficiency through the school district’s one-to-one mobile devices throughout the instructional unit. I continued to find that the use of technology in classrooms has proven to be more than a trend, and the importance of teacher proficiency in technology is equivalent to content and pedagogical knowledge. However, my review also explicitly and implicitly noted undiscovered areas of educational technology to be studied.

Nikou and Economides’ (2018) meta-analysis of 43 articles on mobile-based assessments published in seven major educational technology research journals in the last 10 years found that the majority of the articles, most of which pertained to formative assessment, reported substantial increases in student engagement, performance, motivation, and attitudes from this type of technology application. While their conclusions were promising, the review also exposed many gaps in the literature that provide opportunities for a new qualitative inquiry to incorporate mobile learning in the middle school ELA classroom: 1. The majority of investigations on mobile assessment have centered on STEM subjects; 2. Only eight articles (4%) in the review are a qualitative research design; 3. Previous literature reviews on mobile learning have shown
that elementary and university students are the primary samples of mobile learning research; and 4. Limited mobile learning and assessment research from the teachers’ perspective exists (Nikou and Economides, 2018).

**Pear Deck.** I discovered Pear Deck during a professional development session with our school’s instructional technologist. She presented this web-based SRS tool as a platform to transform digital presentations into interactive learning tools.

Former high school math teacher and Pear Deck CEO Riley Eynon-Lynch recognized the importance and experienced the struggle (due to class size and time) of interacting with every student during a class session (Pear Deck, 2020). The creator claims this web-based SRS tool supports the following research-based instructional strategies:

- **Formative assessments** (Wiliam, 2018, as cited in “The learning science behind Pear Deck”). The Teacher Dashboard allows teachers to instantly view student responses, giving them real-time insight from formative assessments to adapt instruction to meet student needs. For example, the teacher can see students thinking in real-time and allow ample time for processing, aggregate responses to get the pulse of the whole class, and organize, filter, and manage student responses to see who needs support. Pear Deck Pop-up Prompts allow teachers to issue a formative assessment instantaneously, making it simple to integrate whole-class formative assessment without pre-planning.

- **Active learning & retrieval of prior knowledge** (Theobald, 2020, as cited in “The learning science behind Pear Deck,” 2020). When teachers share student responses anonymously with the class via the Pear Deck Teacher Dashboard,
they can spark rich discussions. This practice makes space for even the quietest voices in the room to participate, ensures that students actively engage and see their ideas discussed, and helps students learn from each other.

- Feedback (Agarawal & Bain, 2019, as cited in “The learning science behind Pear Deck,” 2020). Using the Teacher Dashboard, teachers can guide students when they feel stuck, correct a misconception, or describe what was great about a specific response. For individual students, teachers can use the Teacher Feedback tool to give timely and specific guidance and help students develop metacognition.

- Social-emotional skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2019, as cited in “The learning science behind Pear Deck,” 2020). When a teacher shares student responses with the class, those answers are always projected anonymously to ensure every student feels safe contributing to the class discussion. Teachers can guide students to discuss differing opinions and approaches in a respectful manner, which leads to a more engaged and inclusive learning community.

- Deeper learning competencies (Bitter & Loney, 2015, as cited in “The learning science behind Pear Deck,” 2020). The interactive response types built into Pear Deck make it easy for teachers to change how students are prompted to answer or process their thoughts. Expressing thoughts through different modes is essential for students to develop practical communication skills. Pear Deck’s design helps students learn how to learn; when teachers use features such as real-time formative assessments, Pop-Up Prompts, Teacher Feedback, and Student Takeaways, students are allowed to reflect on
their learning, correct misconceptions, and develop a healthier growth mindset.

Pear Deck (2020) allows the instructor to embed multiple-choice questions, open-response questions, click-and-drag features, and highlight and draw tools into Google Slides presentations. Downloading and launching Pear Deck (2020) through the G-Suite, Google’s “brand of cloud computing, productivity, and collaboration tools,” prompts the Google Slides presentation to open in the Pear Deck site through a web browser where a unique access code is displayed on the interactive whiteboard for students to join from their mobile devices. Once students enter the Pear Deck (2020) session, they can drag, type, or draw responses directly onto their device to answer interactive questions. Students can only see the information on their device, and their names are anonymous on the main presentation screen when the teacher opts to share class answers. In addition, after the lesson, Pear Deck (2020) creates Google Sheets spreadsheets and summaries with individual student responses that streamline the data collection process to make informed decisions on small groups, interventions, and extensions.

More specifically to virtual learning, Sukow (2020) has used Pear Deck to create a collaborative classroom environment and forge meaningful connections with students. Using Pear Deck during virtual instruction has offered a platform to amplify student voices; make learning visible; elicit authentic student engagement; and increase interaction with peers, teachers, and content.

**Self-Determination Theory**

For my students to become independent text-dependent writers, they must be motivated to engage in all parts of the reading and writing instructional intervention. To
understand and measure factors that sustain students’ motivation, I relied on the lens of Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory (SDT), which asserts that motivation falls on a quality continuum with a direct impact on engagement. According to Ryan and Deci (2000b), there are three basic types of motivation: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation. Amotivation is a lack of desire to accomplish a task, usually due to an absence of interest or ability. Extrinsic motivation belongs on a continuum of internalization and integration revealed through actions caused by either a desire to attain a reward or approval or avoid punishment. Intrinsic motivation manifests in behaviors based on interest and enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Because “intrinsic motivation results in high-quality learning and creativity,” educational researchers have taken an interest in understanding this phenomenon (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 55). SDT argues that intrinsic motivation depends on the fulfillment of three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

**Autonomy**

Autonomy is the need to feel ownership of one’s behavior. When people experience this independence, they perceive themselves as responsible for their actions, promoting self-determined motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). In a classroom setting, autonomy has been linked to choices and limits on performance pressure. Katz and Assor’s (2007) study of seventh-grade students found that selecting tasks aligned to one’s individual interests fostered the autonomy required for intrinsic motivation. Additionally, Black and Deci (2000) determined that the undergraduate students in their study reported an increase in perceived autonomy support when instructors limited the extent to which they used performance pressure or other academic demands to elicit behavior.
**Competence**

SDT defines competence as “feeling effective in one’s ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one’s capacities” (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7). Furthermore, people experience competence when they believe they can complete a task or engage in an activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), a sub-theory of SDT, specifies the factors in social contexts that produce variability in intrinsic motivation through rewards, communication, and feedback that satisfy the basic psychological need for competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Thus, students will more likely internalize a goal if they have the relevant skills to succeed.

**Relatedness**

As stated in the previous section, tasks that are not inherently interesting require external motivators. However, “the primary reason people are likely to be willing to do the behaviors is that they are valued by significant others to whom they feel (or would like to feel) connected, whether that be a family, a peer group, or a society” (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, p. 64). The need to feel connected to others and to be “cared for by those others” in return is what SDT refers to as relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7). Through interaction or attachment with individuals or a social community, people experience relatedness needed for growth, exploration, and action (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

**SDT & the Classroom.** In the context of education, if teachers create a classroom environment and instructional units that promote the three psychological needs, students are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to learn a particular subject (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Furthermore, while SDT (1985) posits that people have a natural propensity to
grow, master, and welcome new experiences, these tendencies require factors such as a social context and other external stimuli or extrinsic motivators, especially for tasks that are not inherently enjoyable to students. Additionally, previous research in this area found that compared to elementary school teachers, middle school teachers controlled students more and provided fewer decision-making opportunities, leading to an observed decline in students’ motivation (Eccles et al., 1993). To intrinsically motivate in-person and VLA students, I relied on a synthesis of the aforementioned pedagogies enhanced by the available technology to authentically merge my dual audience into one single community of learners.

**SDT & Technology.** More specific to digital learning, Turner’s (2019) study aspired to fill the gaps of existing literature that examined student motivation in one-to-one learning environments through the lens of SDT. In a qualitative phenomenological study of 11 sixth-grade classrooms, Turner found that one-to-one learning classroom environments support students’ autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs, enhancing student motivation:

- **Autonomy:** Students in one-to-one classrooms were able to exercise choice, take ownership of, and self-direct their learning experiences. Teachers adopted flexible approaches to lesson planning and adjusted instruction in response to student suggestions. Students utilized the laptops to facilitate their learning to include their interests, goals, and curiosity.

- **Competence:** In one-to-one classrooms, increased exploration of topics in greater depth and various perspectives to deepen and broaden their
knowledge supported students’ need for competence in seeking out challenges and exerting persistent effort and strategic thinking to master challenges. Also, students used the one-to-one laptops as a reflective journal, making explicit connections between pieces of information. Next, students in the one-to-one learning environment quickly increased their digital literacy skills, which they used to educate their teachers and peers. Finally, students participated in critical thinking and problem-solving tasks that required learning through trial and error to attain mastery.

- Relatedness: The one-to-one learning environments supported the students’ need for relatedness, as evidenced by their interactions and authentic connections with peers. Through these interactions, students developed communication skills, tolerance, and appreciation of other people and their differences, even in students with historically poor academic records and leadership skills. Students were more willing to share their knowledge in one-to-one learning environments.

**Pandemic Creates New Inequities**

In the final year of my research, the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented learning situations such as the concurrent middle school classroom. My VLA students were a unique population who deserved equal access to my ELA classroom. I relied on credible education blogs and a study about remote-learning college students to gather insight into my VLA students’ struggles. Povich (2020) predicted, “inequities in local school systems because of a lack of funding, technology, or parental involvement will be
exacerbated by schools’ remote learning and hybrid plans in response to the rapidly spreading coronavirus.” Povich interviewed scholar John Rury, who added:

The working-class kids are much more school-dependent to get the skills for a knowledge-based economy. Take away that interactive [in-person] schooling, that puts them at a disadvantage compared to the kids of the college educated, who can more likely work at home. [In-person] school mitigates class differences.

Likewise, students’ lack of digital literacy, isolation, and increased anxieties have contributed to a higher risk of being unmotivated due to being disengaged and disconnected from their traditional, in-person learning environment (Minero, 2020). Finally, Lepp et al.’s (2019) study of college students found that due to an increase in distractions present in the home setting, multitasking was significantly greater in online than face-to-face courses. They encouraged online instructors to use different pedagogical methods to mitigate multitasking behaviors.

**Summary**

The purpose of this literature review was to examine my problem of practice and identify published theories, related studies, and unexplored issues related to the topic. After investigating the historical context of the problem of practice, I also located literature that successfully applied Rosenblatt’s (1938, 1978) reader’s response theory and Vygotsky’s social learning theory (1978) to reading and writing content and pedagogical approaches. Additionally, while I explored the benefits of using the writing workshop model to merge these two theories’ practical applications, I studied technology solutions to address the problems cited from this approach. The introduction of technology in students’ hands remains a promising yet widely unexplored area of
education, specifically in middle school English Language Arts. However, the limited research suggests digital platforms can diminish the limitations of teaching process-oriented reading and writing created by large classroom sizes, dual audiences, and time constraints.

Furthermore, I needed a lens to understand and measure factors that contribute to my students’ intrinsic motivation. To determine the instructional intervention’s effects on student motivation and engagement, I relied on Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory. From the collective review of literature, I designed a reading and writing unit that uses the SRS tool, Pear Deck, to facilitate the reading and writing workshop model and study the effects of this approach on motivation in my seventh-grade ELA concurrent classroom.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Below average results on the recent text-dependent writing component on the SC READY state assessment and a shift to a concurrent classroom have caused ELA teachers to question classroom instructional and assessment practices specifically regarding engagement, motivation, and feedback. Product-oriented summative assessments, test preparatory workbooks and digital programs, and independent reading and writing tasks popularized during the Accountability Era fail to achieve classroom community, critical thinking, and lifelong readers and writers.

Through my initial inquiry, I discovered that an ELA classroom focus that shifts from a summative assessment to a formative assessment system embedded into the daily instructional practices to utilize the teacher’s instructional expertise could increase student motivation and engagement, optimize student and teacher modeling, and maximize opportunities for students to apply constructive feedback. Moreover, technology remains a promising area of education, specifically in middle school ELA, and existing research suggests digital platforms can diminish the limitations of process-oriented approaches to reading and writing created by large classroom sizes and limited time (Chambré, 2017; Draper & Brown, 2004; Faber & Visscher, 2018; Fuller & Dawson, 2017; Nikou & Economides, 2018; Sickel, 2019).
Research Question and Purpose Statement

After a comprehensive review of my problem of practice, identified theories and related studies, and new issues related to the topic, I crafted the following research question: What is the impact of a digital student response tool embedded into text-dependent writing instruction on seventh-grade students’ self-determination in a concurrent classroom?

The purpose of this research study is to understand the motivational effects of a student response tool used to facilitate reading and writing instruction on self-determination in my seventh-grade ELA concurrent classroom. While many published studies explore motivation, the benefits of reading and writing workshops, and technology separately, this study aims to identify best practices of blended instruction (literary analysis writing instruction enhanced through a digital student response tool) in ELA. By gathering teacher and student perceptions, my inquiry aspires to maximize the powerful combination of the teacher’s instructional expertise with the advancements in technology provided through a mobile student response system.

Research Design

Methodology

Through the lens of Rosenblatt’s (1938, 1978) reader-response theory, Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory, and Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory, I will design a reading and writing unit that uses a student response system tool to facilitate the reading and writing workshop model in my seventh-grade ELA concurrent classroom and conduct a qualitative action research study using a phenomenological approach.
Action research is “an inquiry conducted by educators in their own settings in order to advance their practice and improve their students’ learning, and therefore, an appropriate and ideal model for a practitioner-researcher” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 2). Ivankova (2015) adds that action research provides a systematic approach to a problem that allows for the credible production of new knowledge that can transfer to other settings. Quality action research identifies a problem that requires a solution and justifies a need for change or improvement (Ivankova, 2015); acknowledges and critically examines bias and subjectivity and adds measures, if necessary, to ensure they do not distort outcomes (Efron & Ravid, 2013); and operates as a cyclical process that enables the practitioner “to continually refine the methods, the data collection, and their interpretation based on the knowledge gained in earlier cycles” (O’Leary, 2004, as cited by Ivankova, 2015, p. 45).

Qualitative researchers take a social constructivist stance to learning by asserting that “[i]ndividuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences;” therefore, the “goal of the research is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation being studied,” (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Additionally, a qualitative approach will allow broad research questions “so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons” (Creswell & Clark, 2018). My research seeks to understand the effects of using a student response tool during reading and writing analysis instruction. Furthermore, a qualitative approach provides the researcher the freedom to change or refine the focus of a specific research question as the study progresses (Efron & Ravid, 2013).
My research question is best explored through a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. According to Van Manen (2014), “'[p]henomology is the way of access to the world as we experience it prereflectively’” (as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26). This type of research assumes there is an essence to shared experiences, which are the “core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (Patton, 2015, p. 116, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 26). The phenomenon in this research study is a digital student response tool used during a short story reading unit that ends with a text-dependent written response. By capturing the students’ and teacher’s lived experiences with the phenomenon, I aim to discover this digital instructional approach’s strengths and weaknesses.

**Instructional Intervention**

Now, more than ever, the quest to advance middle school students’ (in-person and virtual) abilities to critically read and write cannot rely on a solitary pedagogy, technological tool, or content knowledge in isolation. Furthermore, Deci’s (2012) resounding advice was the centerpiece of every lesson: “Don't ask how you can motivate other people! That's the wrong way to think about it. Instead, ask how can you create the conditions within which other people will motivate themselves.” To engage and motivate this dual audience, a research-informed blend of reading and writing pedagogies must offer all students opportunities to connect to the text from their lived experiences; contribute their ideas; provide choice, competence, and relatedness; and gain additional perspectives and competencies from their classmates as part of the analysis of a text (Rosenblatt, 1978; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Next, to ensure that “evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make
decisions about the next steps in instruction” during these reading, speaking, and writing events, the adoption of a formative assessment system, a blend of assessment and instructional practices throughout the units of instruction, is essential (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 9). Finally, to maximize the impact of this process, my school district supplies one-to-one student iPads that enable the use of web-based student response systems that “have the capability to provide formative assessment data to teachers that is instantaneous and helpful for guiding instruction, as well as engaging learners” (Fuller & Dawson, 2017, p. 373).

I will design the short story reading and writing unit using an interactive student response tool called Pear Deck (2020) with the intent to engage every student in individual and social learning during whole-class instruction. Additionally, in one of the pre-reading lessons, I will use another interactive student response tool called Mentimeter to compare it to the default SRS and add technological variety to the intervention. I will follow the writing workshop model that will incorporate receiving direct instruction, reading, independent writing, conferencing, and sharing in every class period (Atwell, 2015; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983). During the design of the unit, I will create pre-reading questions to activate prior knowledge before reading each story and post-reading questions that elicit multiple interpretations of the text after reading (Christen et al., 1991; Graves et al., 2011; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Leung, 2002; Louie, 2005; McCollough, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1978; Rumelhart, 1980; Vijayarajoo & Samuel, 2013). I will place the questions on a Google Slides presentation and open the Pear Deck add-on extension to embed open response questions. I will use the Pear Deck teacher dashboard
to monitor responses and the student view to project answers that will generate discussion and provide a variety of perspectives.

To support the guided practice of the close reading process, I will create a Google Slides presentation to display one of the stories in smaller chunks divided chronologically on ten different slides (Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017; Brown & Kappes, 2012; National Education Association, 2013; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Shepard, 2005; Wilhem, 2001). I will launch the Pear Deck add-on extension from Google Slides to embed the drawing response feature to each slide so students can highlight and annotate the passage directly on the slide. After modeling a close read of the first two stories in the unit, I will continue the gradual release of responsibility method by progressing through the story one slide at a time by directing the students to re-read the passage, highlight what they notice as important, and make notes of questions or observations on the slide. Before I progress to the next slide, I will display students’ annotated slides anonymously to synthesize the connections and discuss the varied interpretations, speculations, and questions. The students will demonstrate their close reading skills by independently highlighting and annotating the unit’s final story.

Following the independent close read, I will introduce the culminating writing activity for our short story unit, a text-dependent analysis essay. After an introduction and conversation on the role of analysis in our daily lives, I will model the writing process using one of our unit’s short stories. Through Pear Deck's use, I will incorporate opportunities for the students to be actively involved in the writing model. After a guided model of the text-dependent analysis writing process, I will assign the final writing task. Using Pear Deck, I will design an interactive slide show that will require the students to
follow the writing process steps to brainstorm, plan, organize, draft, revise, and edit their TDA writing assignment. Through the Pear Deck teacher dashboard, I will monitor the students’ progress to determine feedback for individual conferences to provide support and guidance.

**Participants**

Once the problem of practice is identified, the researcher must choose “what, where, when, and whom to observe or interview” (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 96). The study’s setting is in a seventh-grade middle school ELA classroom in a rural community in Upstate South Carolina. The students from the selected class are a combination of 22 in-person learners and six students from the Virtual Learning Academy. Factors that influence the type and size of the purposeful sample, the most common form of qualitative nonprobability sampling, are based on the researcher’s selection criteria. To answer the research questions, I will use a specific type of purposeful sampling called maximum variation by “‘purposefully picking a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest’” (Patton, 2015, p. 267, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 257). For instance, I will use observation field notes, student surveys, and student artifacts to build themes related to students’ perceptions of the effects of using a student response tool and form a focus group.

**Limitations of Study**

The sample size, the length of the study, and the setting in a rural middle school in Upstate, South Carolina are potential limitations to the transferability of the findings from this study to other settings. My research will make every effort to select a typical sample of students who reflect various ability levels in a middle school ELA classroom to
produce an information-rich case. However, as a classroom teacher who is limited to my classroom as a research site, lack of funding, and my students who will require personal assent (see APPENDIX A) and parental consent as participants (see APPENDIX B), my study will also be determined by convenience sampling. Also, I fully acknowledge my preconceived ideas and assumptions of the research and will practice critical reflexivity with regard to setting, participants, and the topic during all stages of the study to ensure an undistorted outcome (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 71).

**Data Collection Methods**

I will use a qualitative approach to gather data from observation field notes, student documents, and student closed- and open-response surveys during this action research study. From the analysis of the three data sources, I will form a focus group to interview. Multiple data sources enhance a study’s validity and trustworthiness through triangulation (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

**Observation field notes**

First, I plan to utilize an observation protocol that includes descriptive (“what happened during the observation without inferring feelings or responses to what is happening”) and reflective (“reflection and insights about what is happening in the setting”) field notes (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 90). In addition to the triangulation of data, observations “provide some knowledge of the context or […] specific incidents, behaviors, and so on that can be used as reference points in subsequent interviews” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139). I will use the stance of a participant as observer where “the researcher’s observer activities, which are known to the group, are subordinate to the researcher’s role as a participant” (Gold, 1958, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.
144). Because of my established relationship with my student-participants, I will record field notes immediately following the class sessions to minimize disruptions to the natural classroom setting.

**Student and teacher documents**

Another data collection strategy that does “not intrude upon or alter the setting” is gathering documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 162), such as student and teacher artifacts (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Therefore, I will collect documents from the Pear Deck online browser that generates Google spreadsheets from the class session. The Google spreadsheets created through the Pear Deck online browser from each class intervention session will include all individual student responses to capture student engagement levels and the potential variations in student responses over time.

**Student surveys**

While surveys are most-often categorized as a quantitative data collection tool, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain how “quantitative content analysis, which traditionally ascribed meaning through counting,” may be considered qualitative research based on how the researcher uses the instrument (p. 179). To gather a larger sample of perspectives and maintain social distancing during the pandemic, I will use a closed- and open-ended student survey administered online through a Google Form (see APPENDIX E). First, the questionnaire will contain a sampling of Likert-scale type questions to assess students’ perceptions of themselves as readers and writers. In addition, I will include open-response questions to capture rich narrative data from a larger number of students, as it enables detailed feedback that will provide insight into their opinions of the strengths and weaknesses of my instructional approach. I will use the survey data to
determine a focus group and generate themes from student perspectives. Before the final year of research, I conducted pilot surveys to revise and omit questions that could potentially confuse my seventh-grade participants or yield useless data.

**Focus group and individual student interviews**

Throughout the unit and following the review of field notes, student documents generated from Pear Deck, and survey responses, I recognized my VLA students had to overcome a more significant amount of adversity than my in-person learners. As a result, I decided to form a focus group where the “researcher and participants engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (DeMarrais, 2004, p. 55, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108). Through an interactive discussion via WebEx videoconferencing software, the focus group provided an opportunity for VLA students to share their stories and overall experiences as virtual students. While most of our discussion was unstructured, I used their survey responses and writing samples to generate individual questions to determine if the instructional approach met the three innate psychological needs of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Because two of the participants could not meet during the focus group time, I conducted two additional semi-structured WebEx interviews. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that “[i]nterviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 108). They add that it is “also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (p. 108). The semi-structured interview format is a reasonable compromise between a standardized/structured and an unstructured format because it “allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to the
new ideas on the topic” (p. 111). This format aligns with a qualitative assumption that individuals define the world in unique ways. The freedom to probe, “asking for more details, for clarification, for examples,” is made possible through a semi-structured interview format (p. 122).

Finally, I carefully considered the types of questions to ask during the interview. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) write that “a ruthless review of your questions to weed out poor ones” is essential, and “good interview questions are those that are open-ended and yield descriptive data, even stories about the phenomenon” (p. 120). Because of my established rapport with my participants by diligently working through the year to build good relationships, I am in an ideal position to audio record the interview to capture everything said for analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Flick (2014) explains the process of data analysis as “the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it” (as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 195). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that during qualitative research, the “final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process” (p. 197). Furthermore, they recommend qualitative researchers simultaneously collect and analyze data to prevent it from being “unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (p. 197).

Once collected, data will go through the stages of coding (open, axial) to create categories. Next, I will sort evidence from categories that appear in more than one piece
of data to identify relevant themes from the study. I will repeat this process until I reach
the point of saturation, the notion “that occurs when continued data collection produces
no new information or insights into the phenomenon you are studying” (Merriam &
Tisdell, 2016, p. 199).

Validity & Reliability

While the process of qualitative data analysis “allows subjective and tentative
interpretations,” it must also prove to be valid and reliable (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 182).
According to Lincoln et al. (2011), the validity and reliability of a research study can be
determined by “asking whether a study’s findings are ‘sufficiently authentic… that I may
trust myself in acting on their implications’” (p. 120, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016,
p. 238). To add, Creswell and Miller (2000) “suggest that the choice of validity
procedures is governed by two perspectives: the lens researchers choose to validate their
studies and researchers’ paradigm assumptions” (p. 124). Throughout my data collection
and analysis period, I will utilize multiple suggested strategies for a qualitative paradigm
to critically examine my assertions and interpretations to ensure methodological rigor and
trustworthiness.

Because the primary instruments of data collection and analysis in qualitative
research are human beings, internal validity, “how research findings match reality,” is a
strength of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 242). However, one strategy
to further ensure the internal validity of a study is called triangulation, “the use of
multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to
confirm emerging findings” (Merriam & Tisdell, p2016, p. 244). Patton (2015) explains
that “triangulation, in whatever form, increases credibility and quality by counteracting the
concern (or accusation) that a study’s findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator’s blinders” (p. 674, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 245). The multiple data collection methods will generate various data sources to analyze, such as survey results spreadsheets, interview transcripts, teacher and student artifacts, and observation field notes. Another strategy to increase internal validity is to collect and analyze data until saturation, “when continued data collection produces no new information or insights into the phenomenon you are studying” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 199).

A final strategy to increase internal validity involves the acknowledgment of the researcher’s positionality. Herr and Anderson (2015) recommend the researcher to ask, “Who am I in relation to my participants and my setting?” to establish researcher positionality (p. 37). While they acknowledge the perplexities of an action researcher’s positionality due to the potential of multiple and shifting roles on the continuum, especially since the emergence of practitioner enrollment in doctoral programs, clearly defining these relationships and acknowledging any limitations that arise from them are essential to ensure a valid study. I will assume the position of an insider in collaboration with other insiders (my seventh-grade ELA students) during my role as a practitioner-researcher to gather and study students' perspectives to reflect on practices inside my classroom (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 45). I will consult other insiders in my school community (Instructional Technologist, Professional Learning Community of Seventh Grade ELA Teachers, Instructional Coach), a strategy called peer examination, throughout the process to “have a greater impact on the setting” and increase the chances of a “democratic” process (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 45). Creswell and Miller (2000)
add that a “peer reviewer provides support, plays devil’s advocate, challenges the researcher to the next step methodologically, and asks hard questions about methods and interpretations” (p. 129).

Moreover, external validity or transferability refers to “the extent to which the finding of one study can be applied to other situations” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 253). More specifically, external validity addresses the question: “[H]ow generalizable are the results of a research study?” (p. 253). To increase the extent to which the study’s findings can be applied to future studies and applications, I will create a “highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and in particular, the findings of the study” known as a thick description (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 257).

Summary

This chapter has described the methodology that will be employed to conduct this qualitative action research study. Louise Rosenblatt’s (1938, 1978) reader-response theory and Lev Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory framed my instructional and assessment approach’s pedagogical design. Next, Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory will provide a lens to measure my students’ intrinsic motivation. This study sought to increase motivation and student engagement in reading and writing analysis tasks through the use of a student response tool. This chapter described the methodological steps (research design and analysis) to explore the research question and the plan to incorporate measures to ensure valid and reliable results.
CHAPTER 4: DATA COLLECTION AND RESULTS

The re-opening of my school in August of 2020 following a mandatory statewide shutdown in March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic multiplied and magnified the existing challenges in public education. My wisdom and experience from 18 years of teaching middle school seemed futile. While a significant number of our students live in homes that fostered a supportive and safe learning environment during the spring’s eLearning, an alarming number of students spent countless hours unsupervised, became the primary childcare for their younger siblings, and faced new or worsened hardships due to the pandemic. As a result, the existing achievement gap was more pronounced than in previous years. Moreover, the number of students who required services for social and emotional health soared.

As if the challenges were not significant enough, negative consequences riddled all options for allocating face-to-face and virtual academy teachers. The most viable solution was the assignment of middle school teachers to assume dual teaching roles synchronously. My additional daily responsibilities and new protocols to follow to ensure our students’ safety and productivity were expansive and overwhelming. The anxiety throughout the school caused by the whirlwind of changes was palpable. Despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles, my new group of students and their newfound appreciation for school and teachers reinvigorated me. Their eagerness for engagement and human connection surpassed all of my previous classes combined. Most importantly and uniquely, they were living through a critical moment in history, and, as a result,
endless opportunities to think authentically and critically about literary texts permeated their new life experiences. My quest to reach and engage every student with the assistance of technology remained a hopeful possibility.

The purpose of this qualitative action research study was to understand how digital student response tools used to facilitate a text-dependent analysis writing unit affect perceived self-determination in a seventh-grade English Language Arts concurrent classroom in an Upstate South Carolina rural middle school. This instructional intervention was a systematic effort to prepare middle school students for an analytical reading and writing style. In previous years, test preparation workbooks, digital reading programs, and end-of-unit summative assessments have failed to motivate and engage students, nor do any of these methods effectively utilize the district’s one-to-one mobile learning initiative that aspires to develop collaborative, creative, and critical thinking skills through a 21st-century approach to learning. While many published studies explore motivation, process-oriented writing benefits through formative assessments, and technology separately, this study aims to improve the researcher’s classroom practices and add to newly developed existing literature on enhancing text-dependent writing instruction through a technology-driven formative assessment system. Moreover, concurrent classrooms are a new phenomenon in middle schools. Virtual students have their own unique needs and challenges that this study closely examined and identified to inform future practice.

After a review of research aligned with theoretical understandings, I crafted the following research question: What is the impact of a digital student response tool
embedded into text-dependent writing instruction on seventh-grade students' self-determination in a concurrent classroom?

Because of the additional time I had with my first block ELA class in the mornings due to a staggered arrival time and homeroom, I selected this class to participate in my study. During the four-week unit, students used Pear Deck and Mentimeter on their school-issued iPads throughout the lessons to respond to pre-reading and post-reading open-ended questions, highlight and annotate excerpts from the stories, analyze a text-dependent analysis prompt, and engage in all of the steps of the writing process during the culminating essay. In conjunction with technology, I utilized the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) method to scaffold students’ ability to complete text-dependent writing tasks (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). I saved all of the Pear Deck sessions’ responses and their final text-dependent analysis writing, wrote descriptive and reflective field notes immediately following each lesson’s conclusion that involved using the student response tool, and conducted an open- and closed-response survey after the unit. Throughout the unit and following the review of the field notes, student documents generated from Pear Deck, and survey responses, I recognized my VLA students were at a greater risk of being disengaged and unmotivated. As a result, I decided to form a focus group of five VLA students to gather their views and perceptions of the digital intervention.

The following account begins with a chronological narrative followed by an analysis of my daily activities and experiences using a student response tool throughout the text-dependent writing instruction to answer the research question. Next, I added the stories of my five VLA students to include their background information, their
experiences as a VLA student, and their perspectives using a student response tool for the text-dependent writing unit. A synthesis of findings to answer the research question follows their narratives. Throughout the chapter, I use pseudonyms in the place of my students’ real names to protect their identities.

**Presentation and Analysis of Short Story Unit**

**Lesson 1a: “Priscilla & the Wimps”**

Immediately following a foundational unit called “Author’s Style: Choices to Make Meaning,” I introduced the short story unit to my first block class. To provide background information in this chapter and highlight my first block students’ independent writing skills, I use sample excerpts from the culminating essay at the end of this unit to introduce each text we studied. In our first story, by Richard Peck, Meron, an in-person student, best summarized the plot in the introduction of her final essay:

Priscilla may not do much but when Monk needs a lesson, she’ll be there to serve it. In the story ‘Priscilla and the Wimps,’ Monk Klutter decides to bully the wrong person. Priscilla may not have been the coolest, but the author uses literary elements to show that she won’t put up with Monk at all.

I chose this story to explore the topics of bullying, power, and the unlikely hero.

For students to create aesthetic responses to the text and build classroom community, I had to authentically activate their prior knowledge before reading the story (Christen et al., 1991; Graves et al., 2011; Keene and Zimmerman, 1997; Leung, 2002; Louie, 2005; McCollough, 2013; Rosenblatt, 1978; Rumelhart, 1980; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Turner, 2019; Vijayarajoo & Samuel, 2013). Using Pear Deck, I launched a projector session from Google Slides on my laptop to display on my Mimio Board (see
I selected the “Share Screen” feature from WebEx Classroom so my VLA students could see the same projected view as in-person learners. Simultaneously, I used my iPad to open the teacher dashboard of the Pear Deck session (see Figure 4.2). This view allowed me to track who had joined and participated in each activity from the session. Students signed into the session from their school iPads using the projected class code and responded to the following pre-reading question: “Are there groups in the school that have more power than the rest of the students? What gives them that power? Is that power typically used in positive or negative ways?” My in-person and VLA students typed their responses in the Pear Deck text box (see Figure 4.3), and I displayed them anonymously from the projector view on the Mimio Board to spark class discussion (see Figures 4.4 – 4.6).

![Projected Pear Deck student display view](image)

*Figure 4.1. Projected Pear Deck student display view*
Figure 4.2. Pear Deck teacher dashboard view

Figure 4.3. Student iPad display of Pear Deck session

Figure 4.4. Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board
Next, I displayed the second pre-reading question for this short story: “In your own words, define ‘bully’ or ‘bullying.’ What was your role? How did you handle the situation?” Again, I displayed their anonymous answers on the Mimio Board, and we used these responses to continue our discussion (see Figures 4.7 – 4.9).
It’s when someone says something about you and puts you down or when someone does something that makes you upset and they continue doing it just for their own jokes and joy. I was both at different times but when I was the bully I stopped after a while and when I was bullied I told an adult and tried to ignore them.

Bullying is something that can be very hurtful. It is when someone or may people that has been making fun of you constantly and it can be physically also. I have never been bullied but my close friend has so I had to be the supportive friend and get all those rude comments out of her head. We have a family friend that her son committed suicid but didn’t tell them what was going on and about the bully because he didn’t know what to do.

Figure 4.7. Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board

I think bullying is when someone abuses there power and uses it to constantly mess with and hurt someone.

Bullying is when you are purposely trying to hurt someone in a mental, or physical way but its typically in a mental way I think most times this is caused by jealousy. I dont think I’ve been a bully I certainly hope not but I used to get picked on a lot because I was annoying, and I was smaller than everyone and I used to be called ugly and told that I had no friends but I mean you just have to try and be kind to everyone.

Figure 4.8. Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board

Bullying means when a person repeatedly is mean or unkind to you. One year at recess there was a girl being bullied by other girls and I stood up for her because she wasn’t willing to stand up for herself. In this situation I defended the person being bullied.

I think there has been some confusion with the word bully. Joking around and hurting feelings is not bullying. Bullying is when you have picked on someone for a personal problem and you just repeatedly do it even after they say stop or they get mad. Bully’s can also be physical. I have never been a bully but I have had times where I have had some not ok instances.

Figure 4.9. Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board
After a class discussion on power and bullying, we transitioned to the first reading of the story, the first step of the close reading process (Boudreaux-Johnson et al., 2017; Brown & Kappes, 2012; National Education Association, 2013). For the second read of “Priscilla and the Wimps,” I began Phase 1 of the gradual release of responsibility, a four-step method when the teacher’s role guides students to independent practice or application (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). I projected a copy of the story on the Mimio Board and modeled how I engage in the close reading process: I read the story in smaller chunks; highlighted words/passages I noticed as important; and made notes in the margins to record my interpretations, questions, connections, and predictions of what the author was trying to show the reader (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Shepard, 2005; Wilhem, 2001). Students took notes off my close reading model on their digital copies of the story, and I invited them to add their commentary and interpretations.

**Analysis of Lesson 1a: “Priscilla & the Wimps”**

During the pre-reading and post-reading questions and discussions, I relished the opportunity to observe the active participation the response tool had extrinsically, yet autonomously, encouraged (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Turner, 2019). Josh, an in-person learner, agreed the increased accountability nudged him to put forth his best effort: “You can see if I didn’t write anything so that motivates me to be active in the lesson to make a good response.” This ability was especially valuable when I could not physically see my virtual students engaging in the tasks. Furthermore, students enjoyed and benefitted from seeing their responses “published” on the screen, which in turn contributed to their feelings of sharing with a larger community (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Turner, 2019). For
example, Elijah, another in-person student, bellowed with exuberance, “Hey! That’s my response!”

Additionally, the digital intervention’s design intended to provide these students with a platform to project their perspectives, increase their confidence to articulate these ideas in front of their peers, and create a collaborative community of learners that Vygotsky (1978) asserts is necessary for all students to reach their full potential. I scanned both audiences (in-person and virtual) for the faces of my painfully shy yet bright students, who typically decline participation in classroom discussions. Equally important, circumstances that had physically isolated them from their peers and teacher silenced my virtual students. Tara, a VLA student, affirmed my objective: “Pear Deck helps me more than the past lessons because it’s more interactive and it’s something that everyone participates in and everyone discusses. While in the past you don’t really get to see what other students are doing or thinking.” Johnny, an in-person learner, made comments from his survey that show seeing a variety of responses “gives [him] a better understanding of the text” and, therefore, contributes to his feelings of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). On the other hand, while I was modeling the close read, students captured their annotations on a digital copy in a notetaking app called Notability. As a result, I could not use Pear Deck, and therefore, I could only assess their engagement after students had submitted their copies of the story and after the class session had ended.

**Lesson 1b: “Priscilla & the Wimps”**

At the beginning of the class, the students logged into a Pear Deck session to complete a short readers’ response writing for the story “Priscilla and the Wimps” (see
Gradually releasing the students to the next phase of responsibility through this guided practice, I used the smaller writing exercises at the end of every story to build to a skillful use of text evidence to support aesthetic responses (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Rosenblatt, 1985). These skills would be critical when we moved to the extended text-dependent writing assignment at the end of the instructional unit. While reading through the answers on the teacher dashboard, I was able to immediately assess that both my in-person and virtual students were struggling to develop their aesthetic responses to the text; therefore, I knew that most of the students needed more support (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). I used the star tool on the Pear Deck teacher dashboard to select a few stronger student responses to display as models on the Mimio Board (see Figures 4.11 – 4.14). After discussing how a reader’s thoughts and opinions about the text must be thoroughly developed and supported by text evidence, my students had the opportunity to revise their initial responses in Pear Deck. We reviewed the answers, which catalyzed our concluding discussion as we reviewed the model of my “Priscilla and the Wimps” close read to make connections, label literary devices used by the author to create big ideas, and discuss possible themes of the story.

![Reader’s Response Entry](image)

*Figure 4.10. Reader’s response questions for “Priscilla and the Wimps” on Pear Deck.*
While reading Priscilla and the wimps I learned to stand up for you and your friends. Just like Priscilla did with Melvin. In the text she even says “who’s your leader wimp”. This lets me infer that she wants to handle things and make sure it doesn’t happen again. I can use this in my life because if someone is bullying or being mean to my friend I can stand up for them in fact it doesn’t even has to be my friend. But to stop bullying doesn’t always mean to shove someone in a locker, even though sometimes you really want to.

**Figure 4.11.** Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board

The story reminded me of a time when I was getting picked on for a shirt I was wearing and one of my friends steps in and helps me out. I remember specifically one time when I was trying to get into my locker last year and these boys kept shutting my locker, and when I eventually got it open they just took my backpack and wouldn’t let me have it, then they started emptying it all over the floor, but then a teacher stepping and helped out, this relates to the passage when the boy got shoved up against the locker and was about to get his money taken but then Pricilla got him off of the boy and helped him out.

**Figure 4.12.** Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board

While reading this story I learned that it is important to stand up for people who are getting bullied and use your own power to help others. I can use this in my own by using my power to fight for people who can’t fight for themselves. I know that Priscilla stood up for Melvin because the text states “who’s your leader, wimp?”, And she goes on to put monk in a hammerlock. Also make his neck pop. That shows she stood up for Melvin and did what he couldn’t snitch is defeating Monk Klutter.

**Figure 4.13.** Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board

While reading this story I learned, that even if someone isn't being mean or rude directly to you, you can still do something to stop them. In the story Priscilla wasn’t the one being picked on it was Melvin but that didn’t stop Priscilla, she chopped the Kobra's arm to attempt to help Melvin putting herself at risk to help another person. And I can use this in my own life if any of my friends are ever being picked on or have someone being rude to them I could always help because just because it’s not happening to me doesn’t mean I can’t do anything to stop it.

**Figure 4.14.** Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board
Analysis of Lesson 1b: “Priscilla & the Wimps”

The ability to use the Pear Deck teacher dashboard as a formative assessment tool enabled me to determine that the majority of the students were struggling immediately, return to the modeling phase of GRR, adjust and modify instruction, and finally, allow revisions that resulted in improved performance (Hegazy & Barton, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Turner, 2019). Concomitantly, my students appreciated the freedom of self-expression without the penalty of failure or ridicule, which supported their feelings of being in control of their performance (Black & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Aidan, an in-person learner, replied in response to the difference between student response tool lessons and traditional instruction, “I can express myself and not get made fun of. If I don’t have a good response, then I get feedback and I can make it better.” One of my VLA students, Katie, echoed Aidan’s thoughts, “I enjoy being able to put whatever I think is the right answer without fear that you’re going to correct me in front of class and everyone’s going to know it’s me.”

Next, while it is time-consuming, displaying and discussing various interpretations promoted transactional reading and writing skills that deepened the students’ understanding of the text while building a classroom of connected learners (Rosenblatt, 1988; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Turner, 2019). For instance, one of my VLA students, Drake, reported, “Having my responses displayed made me feel like a part of the class.” To further illustrate this finding, an in-person learner, Jake, added that seeing all of his classmates’ responses “can help develop ideas (not copying) and can be inspirational.” To elaborate, Jay, another in-person learner, wrote, “Seeing other kids’
perspectives on what we are doing helps me to understand it more because I’m a kid and I think like one too.”

Using the student response tool for formative assessment permitted students to learn from their more capable peers and imitate writing styles that surpass their current skill level (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). For illustration, one of my in-person students, Aidan, said in his survey, “Reading other students’ work helps me to get ideas and make my own writing better and stronger.” Kai, another in-person student, also concluded, in response to seeing proficient classmates’ responses, “This definitely helps me understand things better, especially if I don’t understand, I can see what another student’s thoughts are.” Virtual learners reaped these same benefits. For instance, VLA student Austin articulated, “I would edit and revise my own writing based on what other people did right or wrong.” Another VLA student, Drake, added, “Seeing different people’s perspectives and ways of writing motivates me to improve my writing.”

Lesson 2: “Bargain”

One of my in-person students’ introduction of his final essay provides background information for his analysis of our unit’s next story, by A. B. Guthrie. Hagan wrote:

In the story “Bargain” a school aged clerk Al, tells us about a German store owner Mr. Baumer and his rival Slade, a town drunk and a bully to Mr. Baumer. After two conflicts Mr. Baumer realized he couldn’t take Slade down physically, so he used Slade’s weaknesses to get to him.

I chose this story to explore bullying, racism, ignorance, and justice versus revenge. To activate prior knowledge, I decided to try another web-based student response tool called Mentimeter. I shared my screen with my WebEx students and launched a projector
session from my laptop’s web browser to display responses on my Mimio Board.

Simultaneously, I directed both in-person and VLA students to use the web browsers on their school iPads to go Mentimeter’s web address, enter the display code projected on the Mimio Board, and respond to a pre-reading question about justice versus revenge (see Figure 4.15). We reviewed the anonymous responses that sparked a powerful class discussion (see Figures 4.16 – 4.17). For example, the students and I talked about why people choose revenge over justice, and Aidan, an in-person learner, said: “Revenge is instant, but justice usually takes time.” Audrey, another in-person learner, added to Aidan’s comment by stating, “Justice isn’t a guarantee. Like if someone gets away with a crime because they were found innocent in court.”

![Mentimeter](image)

**Figure 4.15.** Student view of Mentimeter response tool

![Anonymous student responses](image)

**Figure 4.16.** Anonymous student responses displayed on Mimio Board
We transitioned to the first reading of the story, the first step of the close reading process (Brown & Kappes, 2012). For the second read of “Bargain,” continuing to the second step of the gradual release of responsibility method, I projected my iPad screen onto the Mimio Board, shared the screen through WebEx, and modeled onto a digital copy how I engage in close reading (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Shepard, 2005; Wilhem, 2001). Students took notes on their digital copies of the story; however, for this second model, I invited them as co-contributors of the close reading of the story and added their annotations to my copy of the text: We questioned the author’s choices, identified and interpreted the author’s craft, documented our speculations, and connected developing ideas through a class discussion (Christen et al., 1991; Graves et al., 2011; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; McCollough, 2013).

After the second close read, I decided to return to the Pear Deck response tool due to its required login that efficiently collects and manages student activity. The in-person and VLA students joined a Pear Deck session to complete a partner writing activity called “Classroom Court,” where they formed an argument to prosecute or defend the main character of “Bargain” (see Figure 4.18). This activity’s objective was for the students to
draw on their prior argument writing skills to make a claim and support it with evidence and reasoning. From using the Pear Deck teacher dashboard to review the responses, I instantly gathered that overall, the students were not successful with this activity (see Figure 4.19). Seventh graders are typically self-proclaimed expert debaters; however, while reading through the answers on the teacher dashboard, I immediately noticed most of the students did not utilize any background knowledge of argument writing. I was running out of class time, and the lack of student success revealed immediately by the response tool uncovered major flaws in the lesson: I released students into the partner writing activity because I assumed their competence from previous years while also failing to properly activate prior knowledge of argument writing skills (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). While most of the responses lacked development, the teacher dashboard of Pear Deck helped me to identify two acceptable student examples, one from the prosecution and one from the defense, that I used to salvage this lesson. On the Pear Deck teacher dashboard from my iPad, I “starred” the two responses I chose to project on the Mimio Board. When I selected “Show Student Responses” on the projector view, Pear Deck only displayed the two responses (see Figures 4.20 – 4.21). We returned to whole-class discussion, and I reviewed the two model responses and the components of an argument (Wiliam & Thompson; 2007). Finally, students had the opportunity to revise their initial responses in Pear Deck before class concluded for the day.
Figure 4.18. Post-reading question on Pear Deck slide

Figure 4.19. Sample student responses that lacked proficiency

Figure 4.20. Model student responses displayed on Mimio Board
Figure 4.21. Model student responses displayed on Mimio Board

**Analysis of Lesson 2: “Bargain”**

The use of a new student response tool, Mentimeter, for the pre-reading questions for “Bargain” had benefits and drawbacks. While the students were familiar with Pear Deck’s features, using different learning tools and activities embedded throughout lessons appealed to their need for variety; therefore, using a new response tool disrupted our routine’s monotony (Katz & Assor, 2007). For example, Meron, an in-person student, recommended avoiding the overuse of Pear Deck: “I get bored of it after using it every day.” Additionally, seeing all of the answers promoted the same rich classroom discussion that Pear Deck had enabled.

Despite the strengths of using Mentimeter, the tool had its shortcomings. First, students were not required to use login information to submit a response. As a result, I could not track who had or had not responded. While it was not an issue during this instance, some of my students, like Aidan, needed the extrinsic motivation of accountability to remain focused and actively engaged (Deci & Ryan, 1985). He writes, “[Pear Deck] helps keep me on track better because it makes us interact with you and the class.” Also, the students were limited to 250 characters per response, which limited their
potential. Rachel, an in-person student, retorted during the activity, “Hey! I wasn’t finished with my response, and it won’t allow me to type anything else.”

I did not use a student response tool for the second model close read of “Bargain,” and, as a result, I did not have instant access to the students’ engagement and progress. For the students to see an accurate close reading model, I utilized other iPad applications (Notability, Airplay) to complete and display my work from a digital copy. Also, I invited the students to be co-contributors to the close read by calling on volunteers who were willing to verbalize their ideas to the class. In my reflective notes, I recorded that from my review of student work after the class session, most of them only copied my annotations and did not add any notes of their own. I acknowledged the limitations of traditional instruction and informal formative assessment that relied on a few outgoing students’ contributions. To assess if the students were self-determined to move to independent practice and utilize them as instructional resources, I modified the next close reading lesson to incorporate the student response tool.

The post-story writing activity continued to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional intervention. While I originally planned to display all of the student responses during the post-story writing activity on Pear Deck, the teacher dashboard feature allowed me to capitalize on this “moment of contingency” and vary instruction based on student needs rather than following a pre-determined instructional sequence (Hegazy & Barton, 2017; Draper & Brown, 2004; Turner, 2019). I decided that since most of the students were struggling with this writing assignment, reviewing off-target responses would waste instructional time. I used the teacher dashboard to select the most proficient answers to project on the Mimio Board and clarify the assignment’s directions.
During the survey, students had mixed opinions regarding this instructional approach. Wes, an in-person student, agreed, “Seeing the better answers helps me understand that part of the writing better as well as seeing the more advanced literary words helps me better my vocabulary.” One of my VLA students, Austin, on the contrary, wrote, “I prefer to see some of the not so good ones, too, because it would tell me what mine would range as.” These differing opinions suggested that what a student requires to feel autonomous and competent varies according to their individual preferences.

**Lesson 3: “After Twenty Years”**

I selected our unit’s next story, “After Twenty Years” by O. Henry, to offer students guided practice of their close reading skills, the next phase of the gradual release of responsibility (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). In the opener of her final text-dependent analysis writing, Prisha, one of my VLA students, skillfully presented the gist of our next story:

Imagine trying to visit your friend, but it turns out that your long lost friend was a police officer and you are a criminal from the west. Then worse yet, he is after you. What do you do? In the story, “After Twenty Years”, a man named Silky Bob goes to New York to meet his friend. A police officer named Jimmy Wells comes up to him and recognizes him as a criminal and a long lost friend. He sends out another officer to trick him into thinking that the other policeman is Jimmy Wells and arrests him.

I included this story due to its relatable topics for my seventh-grade audience: friendship, loyalty, and betrayal (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). To begin the lesson using Pear Deck, I launched a projector session from Google Slides on my laptop to display on the Mimio
Board. Simultaneously, I used my iPad to open the teacher dashboard of the Pear Deck session and shared my screen with my virtual students. This view allowed me to see who had joined and was actively participating in the session. As with the first two stories, students signed into the session from their school iPads using the projected class code and responded to a pre-reading question (see Figure 4.22). Students wrote their responses in the Pear Deck text box, and I displayed them anonymously on the Mimio Board as a catalyst for class discussion (see Figures 4.23 – 4.24). After our conversation, I transitioned to the guiding question for the close read of “After Twenty Years”: What choices does the author make to reveal a message to the reader about friendship?

Figure 4.22. Pre-reading question on Pear Deck slide

| 1. Friendship is important because we often rely on others for many things such as comfort, entertainment and much more. |
| 2. To be a good friend can mean many things it could mean always being kind, being trustworthy for others, and maybe even just going to see your friends. |
| 3. Yes I have had friends make me upset before they did later apologize I forgave them, however now I have to be mindful and cautious about what I tell that person or how I act around them. |

Figure 4.23. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board
Because I needed to create a learning situation where the students could learn from their peers while determining if they were acquiring the necessary close reading skills to make deeper connections and understandings, I utilized Pear Deck for this guided practice. Before the lesson, I created a Google Slides presentation to display the story in smaller chunks divided chronologically into 10 separate slides. I launched the Pear Deck add-on from Google Slides to embed the drawing response feature on each slide. The drawing tool would allow students to highlight and make notes about the passage directly on the slide. After the first reading of the story, students joined the launched Pear Deck session from their iPads. For the second read of “After Twenty Years,” continuing the gradual release of responsibility method, I progressed through the text one slide at a time by directing students to read the excerpt from the story; highlight portions of the text that contribute to the guiding question; and make notes of questions, connections, interpretations, and predictions on the slide (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Shepard, 2005; Wilhem, 2001). Before I would progress to the next slide, I displayed students’ annotated slides anonymously. Both the in-person and virtual students were able to see the variety of responses and annotating styles. Some students identified and labeled literary devices and elements of the plot or summarized parts of the passage.
(afferent responses to text) (see Figure 4.25). In contrast, other students questioned the text and included personal reactions, inferences, and predictions (aesthetic responses to text) (see Figures 4.26 – 4.35) (Rosenblatt, 1978). Additionally, I used the students’ examples to point out big ideas and themes from frequent responses.

Figure 4.25. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.26. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board
trying to make the
officer feel more reassured

the police
knows what he's talking
about

Figure 4.27. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.28. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.29. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board
Figure 4.30. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.31. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.32. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board
Figure 4.33. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.34. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.35. Sample student response displayed on Mimio Board
At the conclusion of the guided practice close read of “After Twenty Years,” the students progressed in the Pear Deck session to two post-reading prompts that required them to analyze the author’s foreshadowing use (see Figures 4.36 & 4.39). This shorter writing activity was essential to assess the students’ abilities to make inferences, identify the author’s craft, and cite relevant text evidence to support their ideas. These smaller pieces of analytical writing provided another guided practice to connect close reading to writing and build to the end-of-unit writing assignment by showing students the three different parts of a thorough analysis of an author’s craft: The text evidence, the writer’s interpretation of the evidence, and the connection to a claim or big idea. As a class, we read each response to check for the components of a skillful analysis. For example, we brainstormed ideas for making each response stronger by avoiding repetition and adding evidence to support inferences (see Figure 4.37). Also, I challenged students to support their claims about characterization with text evidence that shows what the characters say and do in addition to how they look or appear (see Figures 4.38, 4.40, & 4.41). After reviewing all of the responses as a class and hearing my feedback, the students revised and edited their writing.

Figure 4.36. Post-reading question on Pear Deck slide for “After Twenty Years”
There were clues that foreshadowed that Bob was shady and suspicious. I know this because the text talks about how Bob had diamond things. The author also states in the passage that he told the officer what he was doing IMMEDIATELY. Shady people don’t tell people the truth. They hide it. He was in a shady or suspicious area. This shows how the passage could have foreshadowed that Bob was shady or suspicious.

For one, Bob in this book was a very shady character overall. I know this because it talks about how he has scars and a square jaw showing he’s a tough guy that based on his looks is possibly a criminal. In the text it also states how he has a diamond pocket watch which also shows how he possibly stole in Chicago to get it or just money to buy it.

After Reading -

WHAT CLUES FOreshadow THAT THE POLICE OFFICER IS JIMMY WELLS?

Figure 4.37. Sample student response to “After Twenty Years” displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.38. Sample student response to “After Twenty Years” displayed on MimioBoard

Figure 4.39. Post-reading question on Pear Deck slide for “After Twenty Years”
Figure 4.40. Sample student response to “After Twenty Years” displayed on Mimio Board

Figure 4.41. Sample student response to “After Twenty Years” displayed on Mimio Board

Analysis of Lesson 3: “After Twenty Years”

The drawing feature of Pear Deck and the teacher dashboard (see Figure 4.42) allowed me to quickly assess and guide students through the process of close reading, an essential component of guided practice in the gradual release of responsibility method (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Fuller & Dawson, 2017; Sickel, 2019; Turner, 2019; Wilhelm, 2001).
Furthermore, from the projection view, I could use the students’ close reads as models for their peers to see a variety of annotating styles (Vygotsky, 1986, as cited in Thompson, 2013). Many of my students expressed that this version of close reading guided practice through the use of a student response tool contributed to their autonomy, connectedness, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Hattie, 2012; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Turner, 2019). During his survey, in-person student Roger said, “It shows what other people find important and you hear the teacher’s comments about other’s work.” One of my virtual students, Katie, admitted, “I’m really bad at annotating because I highlight the entire thing usually, but seeing all the different annotations kind of gave me an idea of what I’m supposed to do which helped me a lot.” Moreover, students felt less overwhelmed annotating the text when I separated the story into smaller chunks divided chronologically into ten different slides. Katie also reported, “it helps create a less stressful environment because we aren’t just getting a four-page story thrown in our face. We can actually break it down and go piece by piece.”
On the other hand, using this feature of Pear Deck was the most problematic lesson of this entire unit. Some of my students were distracted by Pear Deck’s drawing capabilities and, as a result, did not complete their annotations (see Figures 4.43 – 4.44). Also, several students noted during the lesson and their post interviews that the drawing feature was not user-friendly. During this lesson, Jayden, an in-person student who struggles with technology, said, “This drawing tool is very difficult to use.” In his survey, Jayden reiterated, “Usually when I have to highlight or write annotations on Pear Deck, it doesn’t turn out so well. It glitches and doesn’t show the whole annotations.” Jenn, another in-person student, added, “Pear Deck doesn’t like you writing on the text, so it’s easy to accidentally put a random line on the page.” VLA learners expressed similar technical difficulties during this lesson. For instance, during his interview, VLA student Austin stated that while it was helpful to see his classmates’ annotations, the app would sometimes freeze up, kick him out of the lesson, or delete his work. These findings suggest that technical glitches and lack of usability can negatively impact student motivation.

Figure 4.43. Sample student response of slide ten displayed on Mimio Board
After the guided close read, activating students as instructional resources for one another during the post-reading responses provided opportunities for them to feel connected and grow their competencies as readers and writers (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Turner, 2019; Wiliam & Thompson, 2007). For illustration, an in-person student who struggles to begin writing tasks, Sam, said, “This definitely helps me understand things better, especially if I don’t understand, I can see what another student’s thoughts are.” Meron, another in-person learner who is a strong writer but lacks confidence, also confirmed the benefits of these moments for the social construction of knowledge: “I may see something that is a very good example that helps me in my writing to make it as great.” Finally, VLA student Katie shared the above classmates’ feelings during her survey: “It helps me strengthen my writing so that I learn what I can do to improve it due to your feedback on others.”

Moreover, even though the students’ work was anonymous, the “publication” of their writing on the Mimio Board falls on the continuum of autonomously-aligned external motivation that, as a result, ignited their intrinsic motivation and competitive spirits (Atwell, 2015; Calkins, 1994; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Graves, 1983; Turner, 2019).
Drake, a VLA student who thrived the most from being included in lessons, wrote in his survey that “it makes it fun when you can type and maybe get your writing singled out by the teacher.” Another in-person student, Jack, added: “Reading other students’ work helps me to get ideas and makes my own writing better and stronger. It helps me motivate myself when I see other people’s answers. I strive to do just as good.”

**Lesson 4: “The Scholarship Jacket”**

In our final story from the unit, the students had moved to the phase of independent reading and writing. VLA student Tara’s final text-dependent essay captured the essence of “The Scholarship Jacket” by Marta Salinas:

Imagine years of hard work being put on the line just because of where your father works, for some this may sound unrealistic but for Maratha this is all too true. In this story, Maratha has worked very hard for years to keep her grades up with an A plus average. Things take a turn for Maratha when she overhears two of her teachers discussing giving another young girl the prize because her father works at the only store in town… Maratha stands up to discrimination and fights for what she deserves to show that hard work always pays off in the end.

I included this story in this unit because the economic divide at my school is profound. While a growing number of our students can relate to the main character’s obstacles, such as racism and discrimination that jeopardize her dreams, many of our students quickly stride through life with unearned privilege and power. Regardless of their circumstances, my students either gained a critical perspective or received a hopeful message from reading the story (Leung, 2002; Louie, 2005; Park, 2012). I used the student response tool, Pear Deck, to deliver a pre-reading question (see Figure 4.45) and gather and
display the responses to activate prior knowledge and initiate class discussion. After the pre-reading discussion, I assigned students the task of independently demonstrating their close reading skills by highlighting and annotating “The Scholarship Jacket” (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Fuller & Dawson, 2017; Sickel, 2019; Thompson, 2013; Wilhelm, 2001).

**Figure 4.45.** Pre-reading question on Pear Deck slide for “The Scholarship Jacket”

After the independent close read of “The Scholarship Jacket,” the students joined a Pear Deck session to select one of three post-reading response prompts (see Figure 4.46).

**Figure 4.46.** Post-reading response questions on Pear Deck slide for “The Scholarship Jacket”

**Analysis of Lesson 4: “The Scholarship Jacket”**

Based on my first block’s responses to their future dreams and potential obstacles during the pre-reading question, I was not surprised they had lofty goals that they believe
are achievable through hard work (see Figures 4.47 – 4.49). However, one of my in-person students, Hope, acknowledged the discrimination she would face as a female pursuing her dreams in a male-dominated industry, and by sharing her perspective (see Figure 4.50), expanded her peers’ worldview (Leung, 2002; Louie, 2005; Park, 2012). In her survey, Hope suggested the anonymity of the response tool motivated her to share a personal goal she usually would keep to herself: “When you turn something in you don’t always want your classmates to see it, so it shows the work but not your name.”

In the future I want to go to an Ivy League school and be a lawyer then move to NYC. I might face an obstacle by my grades not being a good as they need. I could overcome this by working hard now.

*Figure 4.47. Sample student response to the pre-reading question displayed on Mimio Board*

I want to become a pediatric orthopedic surgeon. I can do this by getting good grades and take harder classes in high school and collage so I can get into medical school and not fail all the test.

*Figure 4.48. Sample student response to the pre-reading question displayed on Mimio Board*
While most students met my expectations of emerging close readers during the independent reading of “The Scholarship Jacket” using Pear Deck, I was also able to identify students who needed additional support to stay motivated to reach mastery (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gorlewski, 2008; Hegazy & Barton, 2017). For instance, two virtual students, Prisha and Katie, demonstrated transactions between the reader and the text that should result in a deeper, meaningful understanding of the story in their close reads (see Figures 4.51 – 4.52). Conversely, while two other virtual students, Drake and Tara, exhibited their ability to identify crucial excerpts from the text and make inferences, their lack of development and quantity of annotations from their close reads suggested they were not intrinsically motivated to independently complete the reading task (see Figures 4.53 – 4.54).
Figure 4.51. An excerpt from Prisha’s close read of “The Scholarship Jacket”

“Martha,” he said, “there’s been a change in policy this year regarding the scholarship jacket. As you know, it has always been free. He cleared his throat and continued, “This year the board has decided to charge fifteen dollars, which will not cover the complete cost of the jacket.”

Standing with all the dizziness I could muster, I said, “I’ve never spoken to my grandfather about this and he doesn’t read the newspaper. I’m going to kick the dirt out of the bus stop. The dirt road was a quarter mile from the highway, so by the time I got home, my eyes were red and puffy.

Where’s Grandma?” I asked Grandma, looking down at the floor so she wouldn’t ask me why I’d been crying. She was sitting on a chair as usual and didn’t look up.

‘I think her out back working in the bean field.”

Figure 4.52. An excerpt from Katie’s close read of “The Scholarship Jacket”

Figure 4.53. An excerpt from Drake’s close read of “The Scholarship Jacket”
Overall, the students completed close reads that demonstrated aesthetic interpretations of the story; however, an unannounced forced iPad update from the school district created problems for all of my students, especially my VLA population. Large iPad updates change the format of some apps, and new “bugs” appear. This update plagued both student populations when they experienced trouble submitting their digital close reads and completing their post-story writing response. Since I was preoccupied with providing digital assistance to in-person students, I could not monitor the Pear Deck teacher dashboard and did not realize my virtual students were experiencing the same difficulties without any support. As a result, their post-reading responses were a disappointing afterthought. One of my in-person learners, Sam, captured the frustration of the moment during this class period: “I barely had any time to respond after I finally submitted my close read.”

Moreover, since technical problems bombarded the VLA students and they had to troubleshoot alone during the independent close read, only one VLA student, Tara, completed her post-reading assignment. Based on her response that contained more summary than analysis, Tara’s technical difficulties and lack of support led to increased
frustration, which deflated her motivation and hindered her full potential (see Figure 4.55). In her survey, Tara wrote that she liked Pear Deck because it helped her focus, but “it’s slightly difficult to work.” Tara’s survey comment and her intermittent discrepancy in ability and achievement suggested that VLA students could need additional support to benefit from the instructional intervention fully.

**Figure 4.55.** Tara’s reader’s response to “The Scholarship Jacket”

**Lesson 5a: Modeled and Guided Practice of Extended Text-Dependent Writing**

Following the independent close read, I introduced the culminating writing activity for our short story unit, a text-dependent analysis (TDA) essay; however, my students were not ready to craft an extended piece of writing independently. After an introduction and conversation on the role of analysis in our daily lives, I returned to the first two phases of GRR to model the writing process using the short story “Bargain” from our unit (Atwell, 2015; Calkins, 1994; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Fisher & Frey, 2008; Graves, 1983; Fuller & Dawson, 2017; Sickel, 2019; Thompson, 2013). Through Pear Deck, I actively involved the students to diagnose deficits and move them into their zone of proximal development (Hegazy & Barton, 2017; Thompson, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978).
First, I showed the students a sample text-dependent analysis prompt:

In fiction writing, authors use a combination of literary elements to build a life lesson or message to the reader. In “Bargain,” analyze how the author develops the story in order for the reader to infer the theme. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Next, I introduced an acronym called UAQR or Unicorns Are Quick Runners (see Figure 4.56) that I use to teach the students how to dissect the prompt and set a purpose for close reading.

Steps to Attack the TDA Prompt

1. Read the prompt and complete the following:
   U - Underline what the prompt is asking me to do.
   A - Analyzing whom or what? (Whom or what am I to analyze?)
   Q - Question myself about the prompt. (First, turn the prompt into a question. Next, question myself about the prompt. What questions do I need to ask to answer the prompt? These will be your guiding questions for close reading the passage)
   R - Read the passage. (Yes, I am just now reading the passage!) Then, close read it again highlighting and annotating the text using the guiding questions that I have created.

Figure 4.56. UAQR strategy to identify the task of the prompt and set a purpose for reading.

After the students read the three-sentence writing prompt, the “U” in UAQR directs them to underline the writing task. In a traditional text-dependent analysis prompt, sentence two relays the task. Using the drawing tool in Pear Deck, students underlined the second sentence of the TDA prompt to identify the task. Next, I modeled identifying the “A” in UAQR, which asks the writer to identify whom and/or what the writer will be analyzing. I directed the class’s attention to the prompt and identified the “whom” as the author and the “what” as literary elements and the theme. Before I proceeded to “Q,” I used this
occasion to discuss the importance of including a claim that addresses the task in the introduction of the essay. I explained to my students that we had identified all of the components to craft a safe claim (a basic claim written directly from the language of the prompt that the writer can later revise to reflect their personal writing style). Since the students should have been familiar with writing claims/thesis statements, I utilized Pear Deck’s open-response tool for students to practice writing a claim using the identified “whom” and “what” the writer will analyze. Once the students completed their claims in the Pear Deck text box, I anonymously displayed their responses on the Mimio Board. While a few students failed to address the task and other students began citing specific details and summaries of the story, overall, I received a variety of student claims that were acceptable or skillful. After my feedback and additional comments on claim writing, the students had an opportunity to revise their statements (Butler, 1988; Dweck, 2000; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hattie, 2012; Hattie et al., 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

To end the class, I covered the “Q” in UAQR, which directs the students to build guided questions that will set a purpose for their close reading: To find evidence to support their thoughts and ideas used to develop their claim. I started by listing the following questions: What is the central theme in “Bargain”? What details from the story help me to infer the theme? What literary elements are used by the author to deliver these details to the reader? I directed the students to the Pear Deck slide to type the theme of “Bargain” in their own words. I used the Mimio Board to project Pear Deck’s student view to review the themes and identify similar answers. We voted on our favorite response to use as the theme to develop our class essay: Education is important, and ignorance is dangerous.
During my planning, I used the report feature of Pear Deck to export their answers to Google Sheets (see Figure 4.57) so I could identify my students who would need additional support on writing claims (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gorlewski, 2008; Hegazy & Barton, 2017).

**Figure 4.57.** Pear Deck session on writing claims exported to Google Sheets

**Analysis of Lesson 5a: Modeled and Guided Practice of Extended Text-Dependent Writing**

As Fuller and Dawson’s (2017) study established that student response tools help teachers determine content deficits and feedback sooner than summative assessment, I found the capability to monitor in-person and VLA students’ participation and immediately provide feedback to every student as part of the instructional process empowering. Although this period to review each student’s work took a substantial chunk out of the instructional block, I had verified student engagement, assessed significant areas of weakness in students’ writing, and provided constructive feedback to every learner (Butler, 1988; Dweck; 2000; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hattie, 2012; Hattie et al., 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Furthermore, I used my students’ work as mentor texts to build self-confidence in my reserved, yet capable, students and to improve my
students’ writing skills and techniques by encouraging them to incorporate approaches used by their peers (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978; Wiliam & Thompson, 2007). For illustration, John, an in-person student, when replying to one of the survey questions that asked him to describe the impact of viewing his classmates’ responses, wrote, “I feel like seeing their writing and the way they do it helps me understand and find more ways to write. I feel like it makes me a better writer, too.”

Finally, and unexpectedly, students found comfort in seeing errors in their peers’ writing similar to their own, which established relatedness. More specifically, Audrey said, “[w]hen other people got the same feedback as me, I felt like I was not alone.” Drake added, “it helps me know that I’m not the only one making a mistake and it makes me confident.”

Lesson 5b: Modeled and Guided Practice of Extended Text-Dependent Writing

After a brief review of the previous class that covered the “U,” “A,” and “Q” in the UAQR acronym, I facilitated another application of close reading. I designed the Google Slides for this session so that each slide had a guiding question for reading, and I could embed a Pear Deck open response text box for the students to enter their evidence and reasoning. This step would be the “R” in UAQR: The students looked back through the story to find a substantial piece of evidence to support their answers to the next guided question and entered their answers in Pear Deck. I presented the responses on the Mimio Board to probe deeper thinking, group similar answers, and connect ideas.

None of the responses were flawless. Some of my students wrote inferences, but they did not include text evidence to support their answers. For example, John wrote, “Education was important to Mr. Baumer,” and Aidan responded, “Mr. Baumer poisoned
Slade with the wood alcohol.” While we agreed that these inferences were essential to lead us to the story’s theme, I pointed out that we had to present text evidence to support these ideas from the text and explain how they are connected to the theme. Other students cited text evidence without including their interpreted meanings of the text. Audrey wrote, “Al tells Mr. Baumer that Slade couldn’t read and all freighters steal whiskey when they are hauling goods.” I used this response to show that text evidence without the writer’s ideas or connection to the claim was just a summary of details from the story. Finally, many students quoted from the text without providing context. When Kai wrote, “‘Haryu, Dutchie!’ Slade said,” I reminded the class to provide readers with context so they will know the events and characters that surround Slade’s words.

I allowed the students to revise their responses and added a layer to the task by revealing the next guiding question: What literary elements are used by the author to deliver these details to the reader? When one of my in-person students, Zoe, bravely admitted, “I don’t understand what you mean” and several students were reluctant to revise their responses, I asked the class to return to the author’s style unit and name a literary device/element used by authors to create meaning in a story. As the students freely responded, I began a list of their answers on the whiteboard: Foreshadowing, Figurative Language, Characterization, Setting, Tone and Mood, Imagery, Conflict. I added, “What is the literary device that tells the vantage point of the story?” “Point of view!” Lily shouted. I continued with a series of questions: “Now, look back at your response and decide which literary device was present or helped you to make your inference. Was it a detail only known by our narrator? What were the results of the main
characters’ traits? Was it the particular setting that made the events possible or believable?” They returned to their responses in Pear Deck and revised and elaborated.

As I was reviewing their answers in Pear Deck, I modeled the process of taking their isolated responses and connecting them into an organized, developed piece of writing. We created three categories to support our claim based on the most substantial evidence and reasoning from the class responses. We formed our three focus points: Characterization of Mr. Baumer and Slade, Details that foreshadow, and Mr. Baumer’s store clerk as the first-person narrator. At this point, the students had a sufficient grasp of identifying relevant text evidence and interpreting its meaning. However, to demonstrate how to connect their evidence and ideas to the claim, I introduced them to Gallagher’s (2004) “Say, Mean, Matter” strategy (see Figure 4.58) and used it to model the development of our first and second body paragraphs (see Figures 4.59 – 4.62).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does the text SAY?</th>
<th>What does it MEAN?</th>
<th>Why does it MATTER?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Choose evidence that supports your claim.</td>
<td>- How do I interpret this quote?</td>
<td>- How does this piece of evidence support my idea/claim?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Text evidence can be presented by: - Using direct quotes from the text</td>
<td>- What literary device does the author use?</td>
<td>- What is the effect of this evidence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Paraphrasing a piece of the text</td>
<td>- What does this quote mean to the story/article?</td>
<td>- What do I see in this evidence that I want my reader to see too?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Using a direct phrase from the text</td>
<td>- What do I infer from this evidence?</td>
<td>- How does evidence confirm my expectations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Paraphrasing with your paraphrasing</td>
<td>- Write it in your own words.</td>
<td>- How does this evidence challenge my expectations?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.58. Questions to scaffold the Say, Mean, Matter strategy*
Figure 4.59. Teacher model of the Say, Mean, Matter strategy

Figure 4.60. Teacher model of the Say, Mean, Matter strategy

Figure 4.61. Teacher model of the Say, Mean, Matter strategy
Figure 4.62. Teacher model of the Say, Mean, Matter strategy

For the final category, I asked the students to practice taking our collected evidence and expand it on the Pear Deck slide using the “Say, Mean, Matter” strategy (Gallagher, 2004). A mountain of difficulties bombarded this exercise and prevented the students from reaching their full potential. First, the school district’s WiFi was unstable; therefore, students lost connection to the Pear Deck session. Next, when I inquired about my VLA students’ lack of participation, one of them explained: “There is constant glitching, and the audio keeps cutting out. It sounds like you are seizing.” Finally, students again expressed difficulties using the drawing feature on Pear Deck. I wearily reviewed the answers that they struggled to craft (see Figure 4.63), and I showed the students my synthesized response (see Figure 4.64).
When asked to describe how using a student response tool for constructing written responses differs from reading and writing lessons they have had in the past, the following students responded:

Jack: It helps you learn from your mistakes.

Aidan: You can fix somethings about your response to make the ending result a lot better than it would have been.

Kai: I can fix my mistakes, but if it’s my final draft I can’t.
The difference was that students felt in control of their performance, or autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Using the SRS tool as a formative assessment allowed me to provide feedback and opportunities to revisit their responses, so students adopted a growth mindset and a newfound value of editing and revising with a greater chance of transferring to future writing endeavors (Butler, 1988; Dweck; 2000; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hattie, 2012; Hattie et al., 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

On the other hand, this web-based platform’s overnight popularity contributed to a system overload that caused delays in joining and remaining connected to presentations. Unexpected technology glitches and connectivity issues interfered with the critical thinking needed to complete this task. Because middle school students can lack the digital literacy skills to troubleshoot, technical challenges create classroom management quandaries, but in this concurrent classroom, insurmountable chaos ensued (Minero, 2020). Typing or writing their responses in the three separate boxes on the slide using the Pear Deck drawing tool exacerbated the problems. I returned to my remaining interactive slideshows and made adjustments to minimize the frustrations that I could control (Fuller & Dawson, 2017).

**Lesson 5c: Modeled and Guided Practice of Extended Text-Dependent Writing.**

I began the class with a renewed hope that the previous class’s difficulties would not carry over to this new day. I revised the next lessons by changing the drawing slides on Pear Deck to the open-response text box feature. I reviewed our plan for the three body paragraphs but reminded the class that our writing would not be complete without an introduction and conclusion. I explained the components of a three-part introduction: The hook to grab the reader’s attention, the “gist” to reveal the necessary background
information of the text that will build context for the reader to understand the analysis, and the claim that addresses the task of the writing prompt (see Figure 4.65).

![Introduction Slide](image)

**Figure 4.65.** The components of an introduction slide

Next, I modeled the process of crafting a skillful hook and challenged the students to write their own “hooks” on the Pear Deck open response slide. After years of reading unenticing “attention grabbers,” I was captivated by their creative and diverse opening lines that I was confident would inspire the students when it was time to write independently:

Caleb: “If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.” In the story Slade tried that and look what happened to him.”

Hope: “Revenge is best served cold” or at least that’s what Mr. Baumer from Germany that now lives in Moon Dance Montana thought.

Zoe: Some say that revenge is sweet and satisfactory, but I think Slade from Moon Dance Montana would disagree especially in his case.

Jake: Revenge is a killer. In this case, literally.

Elijah: Mr. Baumer is to education as Slade is to alcohol, we'll see how this town goes.
Audrey: Learning to read and write is very important especially when Wood alcohol is involved. In the story we see how Mr. Baumer uses Slades weakness to get to him.

Prisha: Education is like water. We need it everyday and Slade REALLY needed it.

Tara: “People who create their own drama, deserve their own karma.” In this story that’s exactly what happened to Slade.

During the second half of the class, we examined my “gist of the text” portion of my introduction, and I challenged my students to write a more concise yet compelling version in the open-response slide of Pear Deck. Continuing with their enthusiasm from the first part of the class, they did not disappoint me with their story summaries (see Figure 4.66). On the other hand, a common mistake that I pointed out while showing the students’ examples was that some of the summaries included unnecessary details or reader inferences appropriate for body paragraphs. The third component of the introduction was the claim that we had previously written during the UAQR lesson.

Figure 4.66. Pear Deck projected view of student “gists”
Analysis of Lesson 5c: Modeled and Guided Practice of Extended Text-Dependent Writing

While I recognize that some writing experts would critique this lesson as a formulaic approach to writing instruction, my experience and feedback with the gradual release of responsibility revealed this method as a necessary scaffold (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Shepard, 2005; Wilhem, 2001). Responses from student surveys support the assertion that this method provides the steps that students need to build their confidence to tackle complex tasks:

Drake: We can actually break it down and go piece by piece.

Tara: It helps us not get as stressed because it simulates having a smaller amount of work when in reality, it’s the same amount just broken up.

Asher: It breaks our lesson up into pieces, so we can take time to focus on each part.

Furthermore, the adjustments to the student response tool in the slideshow significantly affected student performance. Several students noted that the hook writing lesson was the most enjoyable and beneficial part of the writing unit. During the lesson, the energy from the engagement level pervaded the classroom, which was a relief after Wednesday’s epic disaster. This ELA teacher was unexpectedly delighted at my students’ reactions to an academic writing lesson: “This was fun!” and the “Oohs!” and “Ahhs!” followed by “That was my hook!” in response to an extraordinarily impressive attention grabber. On the survey, students who chose Writing a Hook as the most useful lesson elaborated, “I liked that one because it gave me really good ideas,” “It is more like my style of writing trying to make it interesting,” and “I am horrible at writing hooks, so it helped to see examples.”
Lesson 5d: Modeled and Guided Practice of Extended Text-Dependent Writing and Introduction of Independent Writing Task

Before introducing the independent writing prompt, the final lesson was to tie the body paragraphs together in the conclusion of the essay. First, we reviewed the introduction and body paragraphs of our writing. Next, I displayed a slide showing how I would restate the claim, explicitly state the text’s theme, and make a real-world connection in the essay’s final paragraph (see Figure 4.67). I distributed a digital copy of the student-involved final draft to each student and projected it on the Mimio Board to discuss the essay’s visual layout and the additions of transition words and phrases to show a logical progression and connections of ideas.

![Conclusion - Tie it All Together!]

Guthrie’s development of characters, use of foreshadowing, and choice of narrator lead the reader to infer a different meaning from Mr. Baumer’s concluding words to Al, “Is good to know to read,” the wise words that he repeated to Al throughout the story. Slade’s death caused by his inability to read the warning on the barrel and to see Mr. Baumer’s intelligence is an important message to the reader of the harsh consequences of ignorance. While it is unfortunate that the “Slades” of the world continue to exist, Guthrie’s story is a comforting reminder that their impact is not invincible.

Figure 4.67. Student-involved teacher model of a conclusion paragraph

Finally, it was time to reveal the culminating writing activity for the short story unit. First, I reviewed the four stories that we covered during the unit and read the prompt to the students. Next, they joined a Pear Deck session to re-read the prompt, selected one of the remaining short stories for their writing focus, and began the self-paced steps through UAQR (Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016). Through the Pear Deck teacher
dashboard, I monitored the students’ progress while they underlined the task, identified whom and what they were analyzing, and wrote a claim and guiding questions for close reading (see Figures 4.68 – 4.70).

![Figure 4.68. Pear Deck Teacher Dashboard view of “Underlining the Task”](image)

![Figure 4.69. Pear Deck Teacher Dashboard view of student claims](image)
**Figure 4.70.** Pear Deck Teacher Dashboard view of guiding questions for close reading

**Analysis of Lesson 5d: Modeled and Guided Practice of Extended Text-Dependent Writing and Introduction of Independent Writing Task**

Prior to the use of a student response tool, modeling writing was a teacher-centered lesson that excluded students from the process, and as a result, they were less likely to transfer these steps to their writing (Butler, 1988; Dweck, 2000; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hattie, 2012; Hattie et al., 2016; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). My students’ survey responses support that this student-centered intervention contributed to the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000b) position that students need to feel connected, autonomous, and competent to be intrinsically motivated to engage in learning to their fullest potential:

Jayden: It helps me focus better because it makes us interact with you and the class.

Kai: It makes it more fun and interesting than someone just teaching a lecture about TDAs.

Katie: A lot of times, teachers give us something to read, and then they gave us the prompt and they tell us what to do. They walk us through it, but it’s still kind of overwhelming. When there’s Pear Deck, you walk us through it step-by-step and it gives us kind of a set amount that we’re doing at a time. That way, it’s not too overwhelming.
When I released students to complete the first steps of the writing process individually, I used the teacher dashboard from the student response tool to monitor their progress and provide immediate support to students who needed my attention the most (Chambré, 2017; Fuller & Dawson, 2017; Nikou & Economides, 2018; Sickel, 2019). For instance, the independent task caused motivation to diminish in some cases. Using Pear Deck, I could quickly identify off-task students (face-to-face and virtual) and assess if their case needed simple redirection or a more involved intervention.

**Independent Text-Dependent Writing Task**

The students had 5 days to use the writing process to construct their TDA extended writing responses. They completed all of their planning, draft work, and revisions on a student-paced Pear Deck slideshow while I monitored their progress (see Figure 4.71). I identified students who were off-topic or summarizing and prioritized them in the order of individual conferences. Throughout the week, I began each class with a mini-lesson that addressed common mistakes that I had identified from their work on Pear Deck completed during the previous class period. Also, I used student exemplars that I starred in Pear Deck to display skillful hooks, summaries, claims, body paragraphs, use of transitions, presentation of evidence, text-to-world connections, and conclusions (see Figures 4.72 – 4.74), and I conferenced with every student throughout the week (Atwell, 2015; Calkins, 1994; Calkins & Ehrenworth, 2016; Graves, 1983). On Friday, students synthesized their work in Google Docs, revised and edited one final time, and submitted their final drafts.
Figure 4.71. Teacher dashboard to monitor students’ writing progress

Figure 4.72. Pear Deck projected view of student hooks
Analysis of Independent Text-Dependent Writing Task

Using the student response tool to monitor student progress during independent writing allowed me to plan intentional student conferences in order of importance and mini-lessons that addressed common mistakes and challenges (Chambré, 2017; Sickel, 2019). Before this systematic approach, students who were not afraid to ask for help monopolized my conferencing allotment, and I spent valuable time repeating the same feedback (Hughes, 2014). Most importantly, students found value in the specific input during the individual conferences:
Austin: It helps me immediately improve because I know what I have done wrong right away.

Jake: She helps me see what I did right/wrong

Hope: I feel like when she corrects my response it helps me fix those mistakes and then I will be able to write better and better.

Tara: She tells me what I need to work on and what I’m good at.

Students also felt like seeing the exemplars from their peers and common mistakes helped them on their final drafts:

Aidan: I like to see my classmates’ work so I can see what I can improve on, and it motivates me to do my best.

Audrey: I see what others did wrong or right, and I can strengthen my writing using some of the stuff that was good or correcting what you didn’t like.

Zoe: This definitely helps me understand things better, especially if I don’t understand,

Jayden: I can see what another student’s thoughts are.

Kai: Reading other students’ work helps me to get ideas and make my own writing better and stronger.

Meron: I can build on mine after seeing others

The final draft turn-in rate and student perceptions of improved reading and writing ability were, in honor of the most overused word of the year, unprecedented: 26 of my 28 students from this class turned in their final drafts by the due date. At the end of the unit survey, out of 27 student responses, 37% selected “agree” and 55.5% selected “strongly agree” to the following statement: I feel more confident about my ability to close read a text than I did at the beginning of the short story unit. Also, of those same students surveyed, 55.5% selected “agree” and 33% selected “strongly agree” to the
following statement: *I feel more confident about my overall writing ability than I did at the beginning of the short story unit.* Despite an abrupt and early ending to in-person learning the previous school year that caused delays and deficits, despite the forced absences from quarantines due to direct exposure or a diagnosis of the Covid-19 virus, despite days when my VLA students could not stay connected to WebEx because of technical issues, despite social distancing guidelines that limited partner and group work, despite added protocols such as desk shields and face masks that hindered non-verbal language, despite cleaning rooms in between each class that took valuable time away from connecting with students, despite an astronomical increase in parent and student emails due to technical problems, despite navigating WebEx while teaching dual audiences, despite my students’ limited digital proficiencies that hindered critical thinking, and despite my lack of experience as a virtual teacher, my students experienced a substantial level of success.

However, while student conferences were successful with in-person students, the Webex video conferencing platform used with VLA students did not allow privacy. I attempted to simulate individual meetings by using the chat box tool to send private messages; however, it did not produce the personal connection that individual conferences cultivate (Atwell, 2015; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983). This issue added to the collection of existing problems that my VLA students experienced with limited technical and emotional support. To understand what supported and limited my virtual population’s perceived self-determination during this instructional intervention, I conducted focus group interviews.
VLA Student Focus Group

While the student response tool had an overall positive impact on both student populations in my concurrent ELA classroom, I could not ignore that my VLA students were experiencing problems that my in-person students did not have to overcome. Throughout the unit and following the review of the field notes, student documents generated from Pear Deck, and survey responses, I recognized my VLA students were at a greater risk of being disengaged and unmotivated. As a result, I formed a focus group of five VLA students to gather their views and perceptions of the digital intervention. Through an interactive discussion via WebEx videoconferencing software, VLA students could share their stories and overall experiences as a virtual student. Because two of the participants could not meet during the focus group time, I conducted two additional semi-structured WebEx interviews. While most of our discussion was unstructured, I used their survey responses to generate individual questions to determine if the instructional approach met their three innate psychological needs of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Their stories enlightened and humbled me as a teacher and member of society. To preserve their anonymity, I decided to remove some details from their individual accounts; however, I want to emphasize that in addition to isolation from the pandemic, most of the VLA students from my focus group were facing additional circumstances that could significantly contribute to their marginalization in school. For instance, two of my focus group students live in homes away from their biological parents due to death or welfare concerns. An additional VLA student’s aunt and uncle were the legal guardians, but the student did not specify why. Also, two of the students identified as members of
the LGBTQ+ community and reported finding it sometimes easier to separate from their school-aged peers.

**VLA Student #1: Drake**

Drake is a VLA student in one of my accelerated classes. Although he has encountered many obstacles in his life, his positive outlook and kind demeanor never hint at an ounce of harbored bitterness. To describe his educational experience to me in his introductory letter at the beginning of the school year, he wrote:

I’m usually a fast worker but sometimes I’m really slow when it comes to ELA. I try to help other people when I can. I actually like to go to school I always have until I hit six [sic] grade.

Since some of his household members are elderly, Drake’s family decided to enroll in our school’s Virtual Learning Academy for the school year. When I interviewed Drake, his attitude exemplified social responsibility. He said he could not risk getting infected or infecting someone else with the virus while he would rather be at school. He added, “It’s just what we’ve got to do right now.”

He admits he is very active and impatient; therefore, when he encountered connectivity problems while using WebEx, Drake felt discouraged, as expected (Minero, 2020; Povich, 2020). Many of our VLA students have unstable WiFi that does not always support WebEx and Pear Deck’s simultaneous launch on the school-issued iPad. At times, instead of focusing on his work and viewing his classmates’ variety of responses and annotating styles, he spent the class troubleshooting. During his interview, he shared, “[s]ometimes, you move on before I have had a chance to respond, so I miss my
opportunity.” Also, he shared that he cannot hear his in-person classmates when we engage in class discussions.

However, many of his experiences using Pear Deck during the short story reading and writing unit were positive. During his post-unit survey, Drake indicated that hearing my immediate feedback was a key benefit of using Pear Deck: “If I get it wrong, Mrs. Cobb will give me some helpful info.” Also, receiving positive feedback about his writing in front of his classmates was empowering: “It made me feel proud when you would point out the good things about my writing” and “it makes it fun when you get your writing singled out by the teacher.” Most importantly, Drake’s experience with Pear Deck made him feel connected to his peers. First, he indicated through his post-unit survey that using Pear Deck “is more engaging and fun compared to quiet rooms and not knowing if you’re the only one that got something right or wrong.” He added during his interview: “Having my responses displayed made me feel like a part of the class.” Finally, he repeated throughout his survey and interview the advantages of viewing his classmates’ responses. For example, Drake revealed: “it helps people when you can see more than just the teacher’s example.” He also said: “My classmates and I make similar mistakes, so, sometimes, I can fix the errors in my writing before it is my turn.” Lastly, he reported: “Seeing different people’s perspectives and ways of writing motivates me to improve my writing.”

Before ending my WebEx interview with Drake, we had a wonderful conversation about his newfound appreciation for the amount of thought and skill an author uses to create characters and meaningful stories. He shared his aspirations of becoming a fiction author and accounts of using his close reading skills in his free time. As a result, Drake
said he has noticed he feels more connected to the characters, which is a true gift during a
time of such isolation.

**VLA Student #2: Tara**

Tara moved to the community in third grade when a fire destroyed her family’s home. She chose to return to school this year as a VLA student since one of her family members, who is immuno-compromised, works long hours at a center for disabled adults. Tara’s desire to learn other people’s perspectives and connect to her heritage showed great wisdom beyond her years. In her introductory letter, she wrote:

I think of myself as an open-minded person and I’m always open to learn new things and hear other people’s opinions… I hope to learn Cherokee because my grandma is Indian and some of the older Indians are dying, so even though I don’t have much Indian in me I want to be able to learn the language and keep it going longer.

She aspires to attend college, obtain a teaching degree, and settle down with a spouse.

During our interview, she expressed her frustrations with virtual learning and admitted her grades had suffered this school year. Tara says most teachers take attendance for VLA students and forget about them. She says her ELA grades are the best, and most of her comments regarding the use of Pear Deck during virtual learning were positive. In her survey, Tara wrote that Pear Deck keeps her focused, and breaking up the close reading passages and writing assignments into smaller chunks on Pear Deck is helpful to her. In the interview, Tara said, “the immediate feedback motivates me to do my best writing.” Furthermore, she finds it beneficial to see her classmates’ responses to get ideas for her writing: “It helps know what to look for and what not to do.” Finally,
Tara appreciated how Pear Deck keeps her responses anonymous to her classmates: “I know that sometimes my writing sucks so when you say something critical, I don’t want everyone to know that it’s me.”

On the other hand, Tara offered some constructive feedback on the end-of-unit survey. Pear Deck was slightly tricky for her to navigate and “seeing everyone’s annotations can be overwhelming.” In the interview, she said Pear Deck lags when initially connecting or transitioning to a new slide, and she received frequent error messages that prevented her from completing her work.

Most significantly, the connection formed during the focus group signaled a shift in Tara’s behavior. After the focus group, when she needed clarification or additional support, Tara began emailing me often, her attendance increased, and she made a conscious effort to make up missing assignments. Tara’s changed behavior from this opportunity for a small-group interaction solidified the positive impact of making individual connections with VLA students.

**VLA Student #3: Katie**

Despite the hurdles, Katie has found ways to stay engaged and motivated in Language Arts. During her survey, she wrote, “I had a lot of iPad problems, however even if I couldn’t connect, you always found a way for me to participate.” Katie also appreciated the adjustments I made to the Pear Deck slide when I realized the text boxes were hindering the students’ ability to connect ideas: “When you got rid of the separation between the boxes, that was super beneficial.” While she graciously awards credit to me for keeping her focused, she deserves accolades for her perseverance. For instance, she noted: “Even though I wasn’t on [Pear Deck] when I was doing it on the side in my
notebook, and I was getting a lot of info from the other people’s writing when you were correcting theirs.”

Katie’s responses during her survey and interview provided the most profound insights on this formative approach’s ability to foster a growth mindset that shifted her fear of failure. For example, she indicated her survey:

I get to fix my answer and if there will be a next time with that same passage or prompt and I’ll be ready. It’s also not a grade, so it’s a lot easier to except [sic] the feedback knowing I’m not getting a bad grade because I messed up.

Also, in her interview, she said:

I enjoy being able to put whatever I think is the right answer without fear that you’re going to correct me in front of class and everyone’s going to know it’s me. However, I do like that you know that it’s me. Also, I’ll get feedback right then and that I get to see other people’s responses in the class.

When I asked Katie what she found beneficial from seeing other classmate’s responses, she elaborated:

I like seeing all of them because I understand some of the mistakes that others are making or the stuff that was good in their writing. It has helped to strengthen my writing seeing all of the responses and listening to your feedback. I’m really bad at annotating because I highlight [the] entire thing usually, however seeing all the different annotations kind of gave me an idea of what I’m supposed to do which helped me a lot.
I admire Katie’s relentless will and determination to continue to excel despite these temporary roadblocks. She has re-invigorated my pursuit to discover ways to motivate and engage students even when our circumstances make it seem unachievable.

**VLA Student #4: Prisha**

Prisha transferred to my school in September. While Prisha says she enjoys attending school, all of her cousins are students in the Virtual Learning Academy, so her family decided she would be a virtual student. Prisha, a wonderfully conscientious and bright young lady who fluently speaks two languages, suggested her previous teachers had a deficit view of her (Beers & Probst, 2017). When I asked her to share her previous school experiences in her introductory letter, she wrote, “Since I speak two languages, teachers thought that a little kid can’t speak two fluent languages.”

Prisha has potential to bring a much-needed diverse perspective to our small community; however, being a virtual student has been a struggle for her. She shared during her interview: “It is difficult to ask questions. It is awkward, and the teachers don’t always hear you. Also, teachers don’t answer emails.” She added, “while the teacher is teaching, and I’m switching between apps, the WebEx audio will disconnect. By the time it connects, the teacher has moved on, and I missed out on the instruction.”

During the post-unit survey, Prisha expressed a mostly favorable view of using Pear Deck. She wrote, “It is like a presentation at school, and makes it easier to do the work because it keeps me engaged and on-task.” In our focus group interview, in response to an inquiry on the difference between lessons that use the student response tool and traditional instruction, she added, “It’s nice that I am not ignored.” When asked about the effects of seeing her classmates’ responses and hearing my feedback, she
replied: “If my classmates have the same answers as me and they are incorrect, I know what my problem is and I could fix it. Also, if I am stuck I can use the student responses to help me get started.”

On the other hand, in her survey and interview, Prisha expressed frustrations with Pear Deck, especially the student view that hides the students’ names. Prisha said that while she liked not feeling embarrassed if she was not happy with her response, “the anonymity sometimes makes it difficult to recognize if your response is being shown.” During her interview, she recommended that I say the name of the person.

Additionally, Prisha made a brief comment during her interview that she liked receiving the immediate feedback: “Then I can fix my writing to what the teacher prefers.” This initiated critical self-examination regarding my feedback: Am I discouraging aesthetic responses to the text? How am I honoring a variety of writing styles and perspectives? Am I focusing too much on language conventions?

Prisha’s generic text-to-self connections in her writing suggested students take longer to safely express authentic real-life experiences that relate to characters in the selected stories. For example, in the conclusion of her final essay, she writes:

To sum it up, in the story, the author uses a big variety of different elements to pull the story together. The theme of the story is “Life is not always easy.” Jimmy had to choose between friendship and the law. Just like in real life you have to make big decisions especially when you’re an adult.

Prisha’s perspective of using a student response tool for reading and writing instruction uncovered what I had previously resisted recognizing: a digital response tool has many
benefits but cannot be an isolated strategy to promote critical reading and writing skills, especially when previous school experiences have discounted the student’s voice.

**VLA Student #5: Austin**

Austin, an eager, capable, and active young man, chose the Virtual Learning Academy for this school year to minimize the chances of contracting the Covid-19 virus. During his interview, he expressed that the virtual learning environment has made it easier for him to be his true self. Additionally, he painted a bleak picture of his face-to-face school experience the previous year that was riddled with disciplinary infractions, trouble focusing and staying motivated, and encounters with bullies. Some of his writing from the short story unit reflects his personal experiences:

My definition of bullying or being bullied is someone being picked on hurt physically or mentally by another adult, student, or just a “friend” (but they just want to never stick up for u). In art last year I got bullied just for how I acted. I know I didn’t do anything wrong but they still were mean. My role was the kid being bullied.

Even though Austin started the school year in a deficit, he is thriving as a VLA student. I have watched his writing ability and confidence soar during the year. During his post-unit survey and interview, Austin reports that using Pear Deck has helped him stay engaged in the class because “it is more interactive and interesting” than his previous reading and writing units. He also benefitted from seeing his classmates’ responses. During his interview, he shared that he would edit and revise his writing based on his classmates’ writing strengths and mistakes.
Furthermore, Austin enjoyed writing the post-reading responses because “it jogged [his] memory about the text.” Also, he noted that seeing all of his classmates’ reader responses gave him a better understanding of the text. However, it was difficult for him to understand the overall benefits of keeping the answers anonymous. He indicated in his survey that “they shouldn’t have to hide their identity,” and he added that one way I could improve Pear Deck was to show people’s names. Finally, Austin appreciated the immediate feedback that using a student response tool such as Pear Deck permits. In his survey, he wrote, “Your feedback helps me to know what I need to fix BEFORE I do the final.”

The most problematic tool for Austin to use on Pear Deck was the slide-drawing feature for the text annotations. During his interview, he said that it was helpful to see his classmates’ annotations, but the app would freeze up, kick him out of the lesson, or delete his work. While I used annotations as examples of questioning the text (see Figure 4.75) and making text-to-text connections (see Figure 4.76), some of his slides were blank due to the glitches. These malfunctions were frustrating to a student like Austin, who enjoys showing his work and being active during the lesson.

![Pear Deck Interactive Slide](image)

*Figure 4.75. Austin’s Close Read of “After Twenty Years” – Questioning the Text*
Austin’s eagerness to show his identity and see his classmates’ identity while using the student response tool revealed that while the response tool’s anonymity allows most students the autonomy to take risks, it could leave others, especially VLA students, feeling disconnected from their peers.

**Analysis of Focus Group Findings**

**Relatedness.** People need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Initially, the VLA was a short-term solution to the pandemic; therefore, the district did not invest in the proper equipment (microphones, cameras, laptops) to merge two student populations into one. When the hybrid schedule ended and in-person learning resumed 5 days a week, the VLA students felt overlooked and disconnected from their peers. However, the student response tool allowed the VLA students to share their responses and see their classmates’ responses. This interaction enabled these students to be active participants and members of the class. To illustrate how my VLA students felt connected to their teacher and peers, they said:
Drake: Seeing different people’s perspectives and ways of writing motivates me to improve my writing. […] Having my responses displayed made me feel like a part of the class.

Tara, on seeing her classmates’ responses to get ideas for her own writing: It helps know what to look for and what not to do.

Katie: I like seeing all of them because I understand some of the mistakes that other are making or the stuff that was good in their writing.

Prisha: It’s nice that I am not ignored.

Austin: I would edit and revise my own writing based off of what other people did right or wrong.

**Autonomy.** Autonomous classrooms are learning environments with a reduced fear of embarrassment or failure and increased pathways to success (Black & Deci, 2000; Katz & Assor, 2007). My VLA students were in a new learning situation and lost control of many choices; however, the digital intervention promoted their need for autonomy. For instance, my VLA students said:

Drake: If I get it wrong, Mrs. Cobb will give me some helpful info.

Tara: I know that sometimes my writing sucks so when you say something critical, I don’t want everyone to know that it’s me.

Katie: I enjoy being able to put whatever I think is the right answer without fear that you’re going to correct me in front of class and everyone’s going to know it’s me.

Prisha: If my classmates have the same answers as me and they are incorrect, I know what my problem is and I could fix it. Also, if I am stuck I can use the student responses to help me get started.

Austin: Your feedback helps me to know what I need to fix BEFORE I do the final.

**Competence.** Students will more likely internalize a goal if they have the relevant skills to succeed (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Collectively, the digital intervention enabled the
successful facilitation of best practices in reading and reading, and as a result, empowered the VLA to complete complex reading and writing tasks independently. For illustration, my VLA students said:

Drake: It made me feel proud when you would point out the good things about my writing.

Tara: Pear Deck keeps me focused, and breaking up the close reading passages and writing assignments into smaller chunks on Pear Deck is helpful to me.

Katie: I get to fix my answer and if there will be a next time with that same passage or prompt and I’ll be ready.

Prisha: It makes it easier to do the work because it keeps me engaged and on-task.

Austin: Your feedback helps me to know what I need to fix BEFORE I do the final.

While there was evidence the student response tool provided a level of competence, relatedness, and autonomy to nurture self-relatedness in each of these VLA students, their interviews and surveys indicated they required additional supports to continue thriving in this setting. My VLA students needed time to meet with their teachers individually to build relationships, express concerns, and ask questions. For example, Prisha said, “Sometimes I need your attention when you are helping another student, and you are nowhere to be found.” Despite my attempts to include them through a student response tool, my VLA students did not feel wholly connected to their peers and teacher. For illustration, Austin indicated he could not hear his peers’ oral responses to class discussions. Katie added to Austin’s constructive comments by expressing a desire to have more collaborative activities among the VLA students and between the two populations. Even more enlightening were Tara’s positive changes in behavior following
the focus group interview, suggesting the small-group interaction established a relationship that made her feel safe to reach out for additional support. Finally, there were technical factors that were beyond my control and expertise. For instance, the iPad is a great tool to facilitate in-person instruction and asynchronous learning; however, it does not support WebEx Classroom in conjunction with other apps. Also, the district technology support line created to fill the gaps of digital illiteracy in the VLA student population did not provide timely solutions, resulting in the loss of instructional time for these students.

**Summary of Findings**

Overall, using a student response tool to facilitate the text-dependent writing process positively impacted my students’ self-determination. The student response tool promoted a student-centered approach to reading and writing instruction. This digital instructional intervention sustained the necessary levels of engagement required for critical thinking and increased writing achievement by serving as an external stimulus of accountability that fulfilled the students’ intrinsic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

**Autonomy**

People need to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This sense of taking direct action that will result in real change plays a significant part in helping people feel self-determined (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Incorporating a digital student response tool as a facet of a formative assessment system allowed me to efficiently use best practices in reading and writing instruction such as the gradual release of responsibility method, student mentor texts, formative feedback, and close reading
strategies. These pedagogies provided students with the skills they need to be in control of their performance. Also, their survey and interview answers revealed a shift from a fixed to a growth mindset. For instance, the projected student view that is anonymous encouraged students to take risks in their writing without the fear of embarrassment or failure.

**Relatedness**

SDT suggests that when students feel connected to a group, peer, or teacher, they are more willing to engage in that association’s valued behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Furthermore, SDT posits that students experience relatedness needed for growth, exploration, and action through interaction or attachment with individuals or a social community (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The digital instructional intervention was designed to increase peer interaction to activate students’ social construction of knowledge and move them into their ZPD. Furthermore, the student response tool features allowed me to utilize student responses as instructional resources instantly. As a result, the students appreciated the organized and systematic approach to reading and writing and found value in seeing their peers’ responses.

**Competence**

According to Ryan and Deci (2017), people need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. When people feel they have the skills required for success, they are more likely to take action to help them achieve their goals (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The student response tool features allowed me to embed on-going formative assessments throughout the unit to diagnose student deficits quickly, monitor and adjust instruction, and provide instant and individualized feedback. The guided practice empowered the
students to feel confident when they were released to read and write independently. Also, they grasped the power and necessity of revising and editing, two elusive steps to the writing process that have been difficult to achieve with my former middle school students. These opportunities to revise their responses after seeing additional examples and feedback promoted a growth-mindset necessary for them to improve as writers.

While most of the data indicate a student response tool can help students achieve what they cannot do independently, analysis also revealed that a student response tool does not remedy all of the instructional challenges of a concurrent ELA classroom. For example, some students rely on various digital tools to keep them motivated and engaged, presenting a challenge for teachers who learn to navigate and troubleshoot new digital resources. Using digital tools increases the chances of losing valuable instructional time due to connectivity issues and unexpected problematic updates. Many students lost motivation and experienced frustration when certain features malfunctioned, deleted their work, and decreased user-friendliness. Also, some students were distracted by the tool’s interactivity. Finally, critical populations, such as VLA learners, need additional supports to sustain the motivation required to meet their full potential.
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

While the 2015 SC College and Career Ready ELA Standards initiated the instructional shift that promoted technology to achieve a student-centered, process-oriented blended reading and writing classroom, the COVID-19 pandemic deemed teachers essential workers, and instructors of virtual or concurrent classrooms had to seek innovative applications of technology. This study began as a mission to identify best practices of an instructional intervention (literary analysis writing instruction enhanced through a digital student response tool) in ELA to increase achievement and fill the gaps in the existing collection of literature. However, action researchers have the social responsibility to bring awareness and advocate for students who are outside of the dominant group in society; therefore, the overnight transition from in-person learning to concurrent teaching for an indefinite period compelled me to add a layer to my study to understand the unique needs of my Virtual Learning Academy students.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The goal of this qualitative, phenomenological action research study was to understand the motivational effects of a student response tool used to facilitate reading and writing instruction in my seventh-grade ELA concurrent classroom. While many studies explore the benefits of the reading and writing workshop model and technology separately, this study aimed to identify best practices of technology-enhanced text-dependent writing instruction in a middle school ELA classroom to fill the gaps in the existing collection of literature. By gathering students’ perspectives, student work
samples, and field notes, my inquiry aspired to maximize the powerful combination of the teacher’s instructional expertise with the advancements in technology provided through a mobile student response system. Throughout, I was guided by the following research question: What is the impact of a digital student response tool embedded into text-dependent writing instruction on seventh-grade students' self-determination in a concurrent classroom?

**Theoretical Framework**

To gain insight into my problem of practice, I studied the historical context and examined studies that applied Rosenblatt’s (1938, 1978) reader-response theory and Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory to student-centered, process-oriented reading and writing pedagogical approaches. Additionally, while I explored the benefits of using the writing workshop model to merge practical applications of these two theories, I studied the uses of technology to address the problems cited from this approach. Existing research suggested digital platforms can diminish the limitations of teaching text-dependent writing as a process created by large classroom sizes, dual audiences, and limited time. Furthermore, after a shift to a concurrent classroom, I revisited publications to understand and determine factors that contribute to my students’ intrinsic motivation through Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory. From the collective review of literature, I designed a reading and writing unit that uses a student response tool to facilitate the reading and writing workshop model and studied the effects of this approach on self-determination in my seventh-grade ELA concurrent classroom.
Methodology

During this phenomenological action research study, I used a qualitative approach to gather data from student open-response surveys, student and teacher artifacts, and observation field notes. After initial analysis, I formed a focus group to interview. The multiple data sources contributed to the study’s validity and trustworthiness through triangulation (Efron & Ravid, 2013). My study participants were my first-block seventh-grade English Language Arts class, which consisted of a blend of 22 in-person and six virtual learning students. My intervention embedded a student response tool into the digital presentations delivered throughout the short story reading and writing instructional sequence. Analysis of the students’ work and learning experiences while using technology uncovered the potential benefits and challenges of teaching with digital tools. This chapter reviews my findings; frames the analysis within the context of previous research in the field; and suggests some implications related to existing theories and current publications, practitioners, and administrators. I conclude with recommendations for further research, limitations of the study, and my final thoughts.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the study found that incorporating a digital student response tool into text-dependent writing instruction positively impacts students’ self-determination in this concurrent classroom. By serving as an external stimulus of accountability that fulfilled the students’ intrinsic needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, this digital instructional intervention sustained the necessary engagement levels essential for critical thinking and increased writing achievement. The student response tool features allowed me to embed on-going formative assessments throughout the unit to diagnose student
deficits quickly, monitor and adjust instruction, provide instant and individualized feedback, and utilize student responses as instructional resources.

With proper facilitation of the student response tool, students could share their responses and see their classmates’ responses. The students appreciated the organized and systematic approach to reading and writing and found value in seeing their peers’ responses. While both audiences reported that the digital tool enabled interaction and opportunities to be active participants and members of the class, the VLA students especially appreciated the increased relatedness after feeling overlooked and disconnected from their peers in other VLA classes. Next, the study found that the instant feedback, opportunity to revise responses after seeing examples, and anonymity that the student response tool created increased the students’ power to control their performance. As a result, both in-person and virtual learners’ responses indicated a shift from a fixed to a growth mindset. For instance, students started taking risks in their writing without the fear of failure or embarrassment. Also, they grasped the power and necessity of revising and editing, two elusive steps to the writing process that have been difficult to achieve with my former middle school students.

The data analysis also revealed that a student response tool does not remedy all of the instructional challenges of a concurrent ELA classroom. For example, some students rely on a variety of digital tools to keep them motivated and engaged, which can present a challenge for teachers learning and troubleshooting new digital resources. Using digital tools increased the chance of losing valuable instructional time to overcoming connectivity issues and unexpected updates that cause problems. Many students experienced frustration and decreased motivation when certain features from the student
response tool malfunctioned, deleted their work, or diminished its user-friendliness. Some students were also distracted by the tool’s interactivity.

More specifically to my VLA population, while there was evidence that the student response tool provided a level of competence, relatedness, and autonomy to nurture self-relatedness in these students, their interviews and surveys indicated they needed additional supports for this motivation to be sustainable. For instance, the WebEx Classroom did not permit the privacy to conduct individual conferences during class time. My VLA students deserved equal access to me to build relationships, express concerns, and ask questions. They also faced technical factors that were beyond my control and expertise. Last, the district technology support line created to fill the gaps of digital literacy in the VLA student population did not provide timely solutions, resulting in the loss of instructional time for these students.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications for Theory and Research

The findings from this phenomenological, qualitative action research study affirm the three theories (reader-response theory, social learning theory, and self-determination theory) used to frame this work and add to the existing literature on the interplay of technology and instruction. First, Rosenblatt (1978) argues that the meaning/poem is dependent on the reader’s interaction with the text, which is dramatically influenced by the reader’s prior knowledge and experiences, known as schemata, and not the text itself; therefore, meaning construction is an individualized, unique experience. Tyson (1999) explains,
reader-response theorists share two beliefs: 1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and 2) that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature. (p. 154)

The findings from my study support the implications of reader-response theory. I designed the pre-reading and post-reading questions for each short story to activate the students’ schemata, generate aesthetic responses, and initiate critical discussions (Christen et al., 1991; Graves et al., 2011; McCollough, 2013). The analysis of student close reads, written responses, and survey responses indicates most of my students gradually learned to interact with these stories about power, bullying, racism, loyalty, justice, and determination to make meaning based on their own experiences. These opportunities to create and share their aesthetic interpretations eventually translated to their ability to independently develop an extended piece of text-dependent writing. Additionally, the students found value in seeing and hearing others’ varied interpretations. Another practical application of reader-response transactions with the text is the active process of close reading. The acquisition of close reading skills supports the capacity to move beyond summarizing and toward critically examining the craft of writing but requires explicit instruction through modeling (Fisher & Frey, 2014). As my students became comfortable with the process of close reading, they noted it was helpful to return to their annotations to find relevant evidence and their interpretations when constructing written responses. My findings were consistent with existing literature on

Furthermore, my results show that my students would not have been able to acquire close reading skills and achieve personally meaningful, aesthetic responses to texts without the pedagogical approaches generated from Vygotsky’s (1978) social learning theory, which asserts that learning is enhanced in educational environments where teachers and students collaborate as a community of learners. According to Vygotsky, learning environments that promote collaboration create opportunities to move the learner into the zone of proximal development: “[T]he space between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 38). Reviewing studies that had used variations of the writing workshop model and addressed this approach’s shortfalls inspired my digital iteration of the writing workshop model. The model’s objectives were to foster a learning community, implement formative assessments needed to monitor and adjust instruction, and deliver the necessary scaffolds to move the learner into the ZPD and eventually independence when creating extended text-dependent responses.

During the 2 years of planning my theoretically-framed instructional intervention and research methodology, my projected participants were in-person learners; however, due to schools’ re-opening amid the Covid-19 pandemic, my new concurrent classroom consisted of a blend of in-person and distance learners. My VLA students’ transition to distance learning required additional supports and understandings. Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory suggested my students would welcome the challenge to
critically examine texts and create extended text-dependent writing if external factors were present to fulfill their personal needs of autonomy (the need to feel ownership of one’s behavior), competence (the need to produce desired outcomes and to experience mastery), and relatedness (the need to feel connected to others) (Ryan & Deci, 2017). My findings suggest the use of a student response tool during reading and writing instruction contributed to the autonomy, competence, and relatedness required to motivate these students intrinsically; however, the need for additional supports to initiate and sustain the desired levels of engagement and motivation in VLA students remains.

My study adds to the existing body of research to support the positive effects of digital tools to enhance student learning by adding a qualitative inquiry from the lens of a middle school ELA classroom to published literature that is predominately quantitative, STEM-based, or related to elementary and post-secondary audiences. Furthermore, this study examined a newly-developed, and as a result, a new public education phenomenon: a concurrent classroom in a middle school setting.

**Implications for Practice**

The results of this study offer a variety of implications for classroom practice. The positive impact of using a student response tool to facilitate instruction of the text-dependent writing process in this concurrent classroom suggests these benefits would transfer to other literacy units in a middle school classroom. Overall, this study found that a digital student response tool can promote a student-centered approach to learning. By embedding the student response tool’s interactive features into instructional slide shows, teachers can engage their students in the active learning process. Because the 2015 SC State Standards are aligned to CCSS and promote transdisciplinary literacy, this
recommendation extends beyond the ELA classroom into other content areas (National Education Association, 2013; South Carolina Department of Education, 2018).

However, a digital student response tool is only as useful as the teacher who utilizes the features it offers in conjunction with research-based pedagogies. First, one of the unique features of Pear Deck, the student response tool used during this study, was the projected student view that provided freedom from the fear of embarrassment and failure by displaying responses anonymously. Showing students’ work from the student response tool motivated them to contribute to their greatest potential, and the anonymity increased their ability to take risks in their writing. Next, displaying student responses should be an intentional process to show student exemplars, diagnose common deficits, offer constructive feedback, and generate rich class discussions that include various perspectives. Also, students need to be aware of the teacher dashboard that shows who has joined the session, displays their name next to their response, and lists students who have not responded. This layer of accountability increases participation and the quality of answers and deters students from using the tool in inappropriate ways. My results also suggest a digital student response tool can alleviate the common pitfalls of formative assessments by providing and organizing instant data that is usually difficult to manage in larger classrooms with limited class time. A student response tool helps plan and provide instructional scaffolds generated by the information from the formative assessments. These scaffolds can increase participation, motivation, confidence, and, when gradually removed, independence. Finally, my results indicate that when students can revise their responses after group and individual feedback from conferences, they employ a growth-mindset by utilizing this opportunity to strengthen their responses.
More specifically to distance learning, hybrid, and concurrent teachers, this study recognized that virtual students have unique needs that require additional supports to extinguish the inequities that in-person learners do not face. Incorporating a digital student response tool into instructional units contributes to the competence, connectedness, and autonomy required to foster intrinsic motivation in virtual learners and merge the two student audiences into one community. Using a student response tool to deliver formative assessments and scaffold instruction can empower virtual learners to independently perform critical thinking tasks at a similar level of success as their in-person classmates.

The results of this study also suggest teachers should not become too dependent on one single digital tool, but instead, they should regularly incorporate a variety of digital tools to keep students motivated and engaged. In addition to whole-class sessions and independent practice, in-person and distance learners should have ample opportunities for partner and small-group activities to increase peer-to-peer learning situations. To maximize the benefits of a digital, process-oriented classroom, teachers should periodically collect constructive feedback from students to gain insight for planning future instructional units. More specifically to VLA students, teachers should individually conference with distance learners periodically outside of classroom time via WebEx to build relationships and allow the students to express concerns and ask questions.

**Implications for School and District-Level Administrators**

While this study’s results indicate a student response tool can help teachers achieve what they struggle to do independently, they also suggest school and district-
level administrator supports should be in place for increased implementation and success. First, school administrators should foster a culture of collaboration and continuous learning by encouraging teachers to conduct regular peer observations to see the facilitation of digital learning tools in action. Next, school districts should have a dedicated team of technology professionals to ensure digital learning effectiveness. For instance, school districts should appoint instructional technologists or instructional leaders to identify appropriate educational technology tools for all types of classroom applications, collaborate with educators and administrators in curriculum design, and provide on-going professional development to teachers to introduce new technological tools and increase digital literacy. A district-level director of technology should also oversee the district’s network’s security, reliability, connectivity, and performance.

This study also added to the assertions that virtual learners have more significant needs than the average in-person learner; therefore, concurrent teachers should have significantly smaller class sizes to accommodate their students’ increased needs. Furthermore, each school should have a counselor dedicated to the virtual learning population’s social-emotional needs and a technical support specialist to help VLA students build digital literacy and offer troubleshooting assistance. Finally, virtual teachers and learners should have the proper equipment such as cameras, digital devices, microphones, and software to simulate in-person learning and seamlessly merge the concurrent classroom’s two groups of students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this qualitative, phenomenological action research study revealed the overall impact of a digital student response tool embedded into the instructional text-
dependent writing process in this seventh-grade English Language Arts blended classroom and how this approach influences perceived self-determination in seventh-grade Virtual Learning Academy students. The exploration of the impact of digital student response tools during this study was limited to one teacher’s perspective and one classroom of students in a single content area, yet the findings from this study unveiled possibilities for future studies.

The first recommendation for future research is to increase the study’s scope to include middle school ELA classrooms in neighboring schools and districts. In addition, the study could expand to include multiple content areas and elementary and high school settings. This expansion would allow the research to compare and contrast within and across school settings and increase the findings’ reliability and transferability. Also, expanding the scope could provide insights into barriers faced at various grade levels of implementation.

The next recommendation for future research involves exploring the same research questions through quantitative and mixed-methods paradigms. The multiple approaches will allow the researcher to examine different aspects of the same research question and ensure “a more rigorous evaluation of the action/intervention implementation through informed integration of multiple quantitative and qualitative data sources” (Ivankova, 2015, p. 58). Finally, since the end date of the COVID-19 pandemic has been undetermined, virtual, hybrid, and concurrent classrooms will be a part of K-12 public education for the unforeseeable future. Future research must focus on understanding the unique social-emotional and learning needs of virtual students in the K-12 setting and developing guidelines for this critical population.
Limitations of Study

I acknowledge multiple limitations of this qualitative, phenomenological action research study. First, while I practiced critical reflexivity with regard to setting, participants, and the topic during all stages of the research to ensure the outcome was not distorted, I fully acknowledge my preconceived ideas and assumptions (Efron & Ravid, 2013). Next, as stated in the previous section, exploring the impact of digital student response tools during this study was limited to the perspective of one teacher and one classroom during one instructional unit in a single content area. Therefore, the sample size, the length of the study, and the setting in a rural middle school in Upstate South Carolina limit the study’s transferability.

Additionally, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic added to the limitations of this study. First, mandatory social distancing guidelines eliminated small-group and partner collaboration planned during the instructional intervention and in-person interviews. Furthermore, unforeseen technical difficulties caused disruptions and abbreviated versions of some of the lessons. These roadblocks limited the students’ ability to experience the planned instructional intervention’s full impact and perhaps negatively affected their view of the student response tool.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

Couros (2013) captures the central theme of my study: “Technology will not replace great teachers but technology in the hands of great teachers is transformational” (n.p.). From this journey, I have learned that technology has become an essential part of K-12 education, and digital tools provide an additional solution to instructional challenges caused by large class sizes, limited time, and dual audiences. Digital response
tools can augment teacher and student performance, but they are only as effective as the instructional expert utilizing them. Furthermore, the same technological tools that incite motivation can also extinguish this drive without proper support. Also, disrupting the “Is this the right answer?” mindset is not an overnight endeavor, especially when a student has been marginalized by overt and systemic beliefs that have diminished his/her/their abilities. Finally, and most importantly, while this journey appears to be ending, it has created new questions and, therefore, is one small part of a larger mission. I am ready to begin the hard work.
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APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

ASSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

The Impacts of Reading and Writing Instruction Through Mobile Student Response Tools

I am a researcher from the University of South Carolina. I am working on a study about mobile student response tools, and I would like your help. I am interested in learning more about the impact of student response tools (NearPod and PearDeck) used during reading and writing units. Your parent/guardian has already said it is okay for you to be in the study, but it is up to you if you want to be in the study.

If you want to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:
• Meet with me in a small group once a week during the month of October. The talk will take place for 25 minutes before first block in the collaborative space where your core four team classrooms are located.

Any information you share with me (or study staff) will be private. No one except me will know your answers to the questions. I will audio record our meetings so that I can capture your answers, but I am the only person who will listen to your responses.

You do not have to help with this study. Being in the study is not related to your regular class work and will not help or hurt your grades. You can also drop out of the study at any time, for any reason, and you will not be in any trouble and no one will be mad at you.

Please ask any questions you would like about the study.

My participation has been explained to me, and all my questions have been answered. I am willing to participate.

Print Name of Minor Age of Minor

Signature of Minor Date
APPENDIX B: PARENT/GUARDIAN LETTER

WREN MIDDLE SCHOOL
1010 Wren School Road
Piedmont, SC 29673
Telephone: (864)850-5930
Fax: (864)850-5941

Principal
Jon Shoaffall

Assistant Principal:
J. Nicole Alford
Bobby McGowen

Parent Consent Form

Name of Study: The Impact of Reading and Writing Instruction Through Student Response Tools
Researcher: Lisa M. Cobb
Email: cobb@apps.andersen.org Phone: (864) 850-5930 ext. 26130

Dear Parents,

The challenge of keeping students engaged and motivated to learn, whether they are present at school for face-to-face instruction or at home logging into a virtual classroom, is at the forefront of educational research. I am in my final year of coursework and research requirements to complete my Doctorate in Education from the University of South Carolina, and the time has arrived for me to complete my research study.

The purpose of my study is to understand the impact of student response tools (NearPod and PearDeck) used during reading and writing units. While many published studies explore the benefits of formative assessments and technology separately, my study aims to improve my classroom practices and add to newly-developed existing literature on enhancing literacy analysis writing instruction with applications offered through our school-issued iPads.

While participating in this study, your child could be asked to be an advisor to my study by participating in a series of brief interviews during the month of October while I am collecting data to publish my findings. I will take measures to ensure that these interviews do not become a burden by conducting the meetings in a relaxed, small group setting immediately before first block begins at 8:05 a.m. to 8:25 a.m. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or phone. Additionally, you may contact the University of South Carolina’s Office of Research Compliance (803) 777-6670 if you have any questions about your child’s rights as a research subject.

Please read and sign the attached form if you consent to your child’s participation. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa M. Cobb
7th Grade English Language Arts Teacher
September 8, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

It is with great pleasure that we give permission for Lisa Cobb to proceed with her research study, "The Impact of Reading and Writing Instruction Through Student Response Tools".

Ms. Cobb is an energetic teacher that continually looks for opportunities to broaden the scope of how to reach today's students. This study is yet another example of how she engages with her students, keeping abreast of changing teaching methods, and researching the best way for each individual student to learn.

Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to give us a call.

Sincerely,

Jane Harrison
Assistant Superintendent
Instruction and Curriculum
APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH
DECLARATION OF NOT RESEARCH

Lisa Cobb
830 Main Street
Columbia, SC 29208

Re: Pro00103084

Dear Mrs. Lisa Cobb:

This is to certify that the research study entitled The Impact of Digital Student Response Tools During Reading and Writing Instruction: A Qualitative Action Research Study was reviewed on 9/30/2020 by the Office of Research Compliance, which is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). The Office of Research Compliance, on behalf of the Institutional Review Board, has determined that the referenced research study is not subject to the Protection of Human Subject Regulations in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 et. seq.

No further oversight by the USC IRB is required. However, the investigator should inform the Office of Research Compliance prior to making any substantive changes in the research methods, as this may alter the status of the project and require another review.

If you have questions, contact Lisa M. Johnson at lisa@mailbox.sc.edu or (803) 777-6670.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Lisa M. Johnson
ORC Assistant Director and IRB Manager
APPENDIX E: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Student Response Tool Survey

1. Using a student response tool (Pear Deck) during class to respond to a question/prompt motivates me to participate in the lesson.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

   Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.

2. Using a student response tool (Pear Deck) during class to respond to a question/prompt keeps me engaged (active) in the lesson.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

   Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.

3. Seeing ALL of the responses from my classmates is helpful to my reading and writing.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

   Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.

4. Seeing A SELECT FEW of the responses from my classmates is helpful to my reading and writing.

   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

   Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.
5. Hearing Mrs. Cobb's comments about MY written responses during a PEAR DECK lesson is helpful to me during the writing process.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.

6. Hearing Mrs. Cobb's comments about MY CLASSMATES' written responses during a PEAR DECK lesson helped me during the writing process.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.

7. Seeing my classmates' highlighted and annotated passages of text (close reads) during a PEAR DECK lesson is helpful to my reading.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.

8. The anonymity (your name isn't attached to your response that is shown to the class) had a positive effect on my writing.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.

9. How does the immediate feedback you receive from your teacher about YOUR responses during a student response tool (Pear deck) lesson differ from the written comments on a final draft of a writing assignment?

Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Provide a brief explanation of your selected response.

10. How does using a student response tool (Pear Deck) to analyze reading passages and construct written responses differ from reading and writing lessons that you have had in the past?
11. What is the key difference between analysis writing from other forms of writing?

12. Using a student response tool during the short story unit was most useful for which of the following:

- Pre-Reading Questions
- Reader's Response Questions (After Reading)
- Close Reading the Text and Seeing Classmates' Highlights and Text Annotations
- Breaking Down the Prompt (Unicorns Are Quick Runners)
- Writing a Hook
- Writing the Gist of the Story
- Writing a Claim
- Writing Body Paragraphs (Say, Mean, Matter)
- Writing a Conclusion

Explain your selected response to the last question.

13. I feel more confident about my ability to close read a text than I did at the beginning of the short story unit.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Undecided  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

14. I feel more confident about my overall writing ability than I did at the beginning of the short story unit.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Undecided  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

15. I feel more confident about my ability to write a claim/thesis statement than I did at the beginning of the short story unit.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Undecided  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

16. I feel more confident about my ability to support my ideas with evidence from the text than I did at the beginning of the short story unit.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Undecided  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

17. I feel more confident about my ability to organize a developed piece of writing than I did at the beginning of the short story unit.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Undecided  Disagree  Strongly Disagree
18. I feel more confident about my ability to write an introduction to an essay than I did at the beginning of the short story unit.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Undecided  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

19. I feel more confident about my ability to write a conclusion to an essay than I did at the beginning of the short story unit.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Undecided  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

20. In future reading and writing units, how could Mrs. Cobb improve the use of Pear Deck?

21. Mrs. Cobb should continue to use Pear Deck for the short story reading and writing unit for future students.

Strongly Agree  Agree  Undecided  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

Explain your selected response to the last question.