

2017

## Using blended learning to improve undergraduate introduction to literature courses: A mixed methods approach

Julie Leigh Klein  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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USING BLENDED LEARNING TO IMPROVE UNDERGRADUATE

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE COURSES:

A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

---

Dr. Robert Boody, Co-Chair

---

Dr. Jeffrey Copeland, Co-Chair

---

Dr. Patrick Pease  
Interim Dean of the Graduate College

Julie Leigh Klein

University of Northern Iowa

December 2017

## ABSTRACT

Blended learning is being used more and more in higher education. However, for humanities and other loosely content structured areas, blended learning can be challenging. It has generally been reserved for subject areas such as computer programming, mathematics, business, science, and statistics--courses where competence is commonly assessed by administering work on which performance is either right or wrong. Furthermore, agreement has not yet been reached on how to best incorporate the face-to-face and online teaching resources. This study examines one approach of implementing web-based instruction to improve undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses at a midsized Midwestern university.

This study was designed to accomplish three goals. The first was to discover whether an undergraduate Introduction to Literature course based upon the recommendations of Rosenblatt (1994) and Perkins and Unger (1999) can meet the needs of students in a BL environment. The second goal of this study was to measure the students' perceptions of the blended Introduction to Literature environment with respect to its productiveness in terms of their attitudes and achievements. The third and final goal was to discover how students experience the teacher's practice and behavior and the extent to which these factors affect student perceptions of the course and BL environment in general. These goals were examined through the CABLS lens designed by Wang, Han, and Yang (2015).

The mixed methods study gathered the data through multiple data points. These included student surveys, student interviews, students' pre-and post-tests, student

assignments, the university's student evaluation of teaching, classroom observations, videos, and the researcher's action research of the experience. Overall, the approach used for the blended Introduction to Literature course met with positive outcomes in terms of both student perceptions and achievement.

Conclusions and implications of using the blended learning format for an effective introductory literature course including realizing blended learning is a complex adaptive system, may help learners gain new positive learner identities, may supply a more accurate assessment of student learning, may not be for everyone, requires teachers to take on multiple identities, is challenging, requires plenty of supports, and may not be cost saving.

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Dr. Jeffrey Copeland, Co-Chair

---

Dr. Linda Fitzgerald, Committee Member

---

Dr. Sohyun Meacham, Committee Member

Julie Leigh Klein

University of Northern Iowa

December 2017

## DEDICATION

I would like to acknowledge all the great teachers in my life. There have been many. In fact, as Craig Harper has said: “The world has been my classroom. Each day is a new lesson, and every person I meet is my teacher.” A person is a product of all her life experiences, and this dissertation is a result of my life experiences so far. Thanks, all of you, for the education, guidance, and inspiration.

Specifically, I would like to acknowledge those who have assisted me throughout my doctoral studies. I would like to first acknowledge my dissertation committee. Endless thanks for my co-chair Dr. Jeffrey Copeland for being not only my teacher, but being my mentor, my friend, and “big brother,” too. Words are not adequate to express all that you have done for me. Also, I would like to acknowledge my other co-chair, Dr. Robert Boody. Your wisdom, patience, and feedback have transformed me. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Linda Fitzgerald and Dr. Sohyun Meacham for agreeing to serve on my dissertation committee. I am eternally grateful for all their time and assistance as I navigated this process.

Second, I would like to thank all the faculty and staff who have worked with me at the University of Northern Iowa. An institution is only as good as its people. And this institution has some of the best. I am the third generation to go to this great institution and this is the third degree I have earned here. I am purple and gold for life!

Third, I would like to acknowledge all my relatives and friends for their support and the lessons they have taught me to make me the person I am today. I especially want to mention my late parents, who were my first teachers. My mother opened up the world

of reading to me. She, believed like Dr. Seuss: “The more that you read, the more things you’ll know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.” My father always believed in me. He said I could accomplish anything I wanted to if I believed hard enough and worked at it. Another person who needs to be mentioned here is Phyllis Gray, my “teacher mama.” She taught me what friendship means and exemplified education at its finest.

Lastly, and most of all, thank you to my husband Lee. I have so many things my heart and soul want to say to you, all of which can be summed up in three words...Thanks for everything!



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LIST OF CREATIVE WORKS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

When I began my research about trying to improve undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses through a blended learning (BL) approach, I was frustrated by the literature. It did not appear to adequately reflect what I was experiencing teaching these courses. None of the research I had read provided me with a complete view of what constitutes BL and how different components of BL work together over time to achieve an integrated whole. It was not until I came across Wang, Han, and Yang's (2015) work viewing BL as a complex adaptive system, that I was better able to understand the data I collected for this study. (See Chapters 4, 5, and 6 for my analysis.) This study details my research from the perspective of using BL as a complex adaptive system to help improve an undergraduate Introduction to Literature course. It takes the framework by Wang et al. a step further by applying the perspective of a complex adaptive system to an actual BL course.

To help introduce my study, this chapter first provides reasons for the rapid growth in online learning in an effort to see how it led to BL. This chapter then briefly describes BL's potential, BL as a complex adaptive system, and the supporting frameworks I used to teach the blended Introduction to Literature course. The chapter concludes with the study context, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and organization of the dissertation.

### The Rapid Growth in Online Learning

Education is changing for higher learning institutions. In today's competitive educational environment, colleges are seeking alternative educational opportunities. One alternative is online learning (Kang, 2014). Most higher learning institutions in the United States (U.S.) offer online courses (Parsad & Lewis, 2008). In fact, enrollments in online courses have been growing faster than overall higher education enrollments. According to Allen and Seaman (2013), in the fall of 2011, over 6.7 million students, which is almost a third of all U.S. higher education students, had enrolled in at least one online course. As of 2012, one in ten U.S. higher education students were taking courses exclusively online (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015). The Sloan Consortium's report for 2010 about online learning in this country stated that 63% of 2,500 of colleges and universities surveyed reported online learning as "a critical part of their institution's long-term strategy" (Allen & Seaman, 2010, p. 2).

Why this rapid growth in online learning? Means, Bakia, and Murphy (2014) state four reasons. First, expanding technology capabilities have become more affordable and mobile, thereby increasing the number of people able to live more of their lives online. For example, a smart phone has almost the same computing powers and features of a desktop computer from ten to fifteen years ago. Due to the constantly expanding capabilities and possibilities of newer and faster computer and Internet connections, it is difficult to imagine an institution of higher learning that does not maintain several computer labs for instruction and provides their instructors with one or more learning management systems such as Moodle or Blackboard. At the same time, since the Internet



has developed very quickly the last decade or so, it has become a major resource for research, learning, and socialization for most students.

Second, online instruction can be economical. Bacow, Bowen, Guthrie, Lack, & Long, (2012) reported that the most common rationale for developing online programs is revenue growth. Consistently, studies have reported that the costs of online instruction are lower than those of face-to-face instruction, although expenses for both options vary greatly, depending upon student-instructor ratio, the way such courses are staffed, the type of online learning, and the amount of money spent in developing online courses or modules. Other institutional motivations for promoting online courses may focus on the potential cost savings by reducing the need for physical meeting space and classrooms with their associated costs such as maintenance, heating, and cooling.

Third, online courses may address some of education's challenges. Not only can online courses, as just mentioned, reduce expenses, they can free up crowded and heavily booked classroom spaces, and teach to a larger audience. The following details illustrate this point. According to the Pew Research Center (College Enrollment, 2009), U.S. college enrollment for 18-to 24-year-olds had increased to 39.6% for this age group in 2008. This shows an increase of 0.8% since 2007 and 15.6% since 1973. This growth in enrollment has taken place during a time of a severe national recession that has felt the effects of drops in funding but increases in tuition. During the academic years of 1999-2000 to 2009-2010, tuition increased by 4.9% per year beyond general inflation for public four-year colleges and universities (Fry, 2009). At the same time, the average state support for higher education dropped 1.9% between fiscal year 2009 and fiscal year 2011

(Palmer, 2011). In other words, college administrators have more students to teach with less money to do it. On the other hand, another problem with demand and access is that some institutions of higher learning are lacking a substantial population base from which to attract potential students (Bates, 2000; Dunn, 2000; Shoemaker, 1998). Online learning could increase the population base by connecting to students at a distance from the higher learning institution.

The fourth driver for online courses is the belief that online learning can provide better learning experiences. For instance, Hiltz and Turoff (2005) think that the introduction of asynchronous learning networks to colleges and universities will come to be viewed as a substantial development in the improvement of education. Due to diverse backgrounds, such as nontraditional students and the expanding multicultural demographics of the U.S., as well as time constraints because of jobs and extra-curricular activities, many college students are seeking course delivery methods to accommodate them without sacrificing the rigor necessary for accreditation (Council for Higher Education Accreditation 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Allowing maximum involvement by all participants (Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2000), such courses free up time constraints by allowing students to respond at their own convenience to course materials and readings, embedded and streamed multimedia, and external web sites. Furthermore, online learning could promote personal agency and increase learners' responsibilities for their own learning. Also, such classes let students participate in facilitated discussions, complete assignments individually and/or collaboratively (Web Based Learning Resources Library, 2002).

Some other educational benefits argued for online learning are for students with shared interests to form and sustain relationships and communities (Hiltz, 1998); that computer-mediated asynchronous instruction has the qualities to support collaborative learning and cooperation between and among the participants (Curtis & Lawson, 2001; Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, & Turoff, 1995; Palloff & Pratt, 2003); and, to help retain students in academic programs (Brown, 2001; Eastmond, 1995; Garrison, 1997).

However, at the same time that these aforementioned motivations for online learning have fueled its rise in education, questions have been raised about the quality of online learning experiences, inspiring strong pro and con views. Depending on which media accounts one reads, the growth of online instruction portends either a transformational increase in educational access and personalization (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Swan, 2003) or the cynical degradation of educational quality at public expense (Glass, 2009). As a “middle ground,” many educators have touted the benefits of an online and traditional face-to-face marriage. This approach, referred to as BL, or also known as hybrid instruction, mixed-mode learning, or technology-mediated/enhanced learning has currently become more prominent and tries to unite the “best of both worlds” by combining the advantages of both digital and in-person pedagogy. These advantages are the face-to-face interaction desired for effective teaching and learning that is found in traditional teaching yet eliminating the significant time commitment required by in-class presence through the popular information Internet medium (Graham, 2005; King & Arnold, 2012).

BL has been defined and redefined by different studies, but as stated earlier, none before the Wang et al. (2015) study have given me a complete view of what constitutes BL and how its various components work together over time to attain an integrated whole. Perhaps the most widely held understanding of BL is that it is “any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace” (Staker & Horn, 2012, p. 3). This definition is, however, simplistic and will be amended and explained in greater detail in Chapter 2.

### Blended Learning’s Potential

Documented in a growing body of literature is the fact BL is being used more and more in higher education (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2006; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Graham, 2006; Murphy et al., 2014; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Shea, 2007). The literature further suggests that BL is not only an acceptable pedagogical approach, but it has the potential to transform higher education, too (Bransford et al., 2006; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

Going even farther, Masie (2006) claims BL will become so commonplace and integrated into everyday instructional practice that educators will eventually drop the “blended” prefix and simply label it as learning. Finally, Ross and Gage (2006) argue that:

In the long run, almost all courses offered in higher education will be blended.... It is almost a certainty that blended learning will become the new traditional model of course delivery in ten years.... What will differentiate institutions from one another will not be whether they have BL but rather how they do the blending and where they fall on the BL spectrum. (p. 167)

Considering such declarations as these, it makes sense to state that BL is an instructional approach that deserves in depth research. Thus, literature courses will likely adapt more and more to this trend (Lancashire, 2009). Literature is the BL subject area this dissertation will focus on. More will be discussed about this in upcoming chapters.

### Blended Learning is a Complex Adaptive System

However, in spite of BL's potential, an agreement has not yet been reached on how to best incorporate the face-to-face and online teaching resources (Wang et al., 2015). Creating successful BL courses is tricky. Questions about quality arise, although BL has been critically evaluated to be at least comparable and at times better than conventional formats (Chute, Thompson, & Hancock, 1999; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Yen & Mashhadi, 1999). Likewise, concerns exist whether virtual instruction, in its asynchronous format, has changed the fundamental nature of collegiality and community development amid participant students, and how that has affected student persistence. The root of such anxiety has at least two views: One is that the on-campus experience, reputedly, encourages persistence in an academic program (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Golde, 2005). The other links to off campus students being less likely to receive the full benefit of student services programs which include: advising, extracurricular activities, financial aid, health services, recruitment, registration, and associated organizations for alumni and foundations (Brigham, 2001; Hollowell & Schiavelli, 2000; Middaugh, 2000; Rames, 2000; Taylor, Canning, Brailsford, & Rokosz, 2003; Winston, 1998.)

The issue of how to best incorporate the face-to-face and online teaching resources is further muddled by instructional design/theory. Without a systems approach,

instructional design/theory can only explore some basic linear relationships between the learner, teacher, content, technology, learning support, and institution components of BL, leaving the more complex and non-linear relationships untapped. Due to BL's complexity, it is critical to investigate the more intricate interaction and inter-dependence among these components, because this determines how well they blend or work together into one larger system. In other words, BL is not a simple combination or mishmash of face-to-face learning and technology-mediated instruction. Rather, BL needs to be viewed as a complex system that seamlessly fuses face-to-face learning with technology-mediated learning.

Furthermore, even though it may be easy for experienced instructional designers to identify good courses on the Web, it is also obvious that some online courses lack basic design consideration and that the Web is merely being used as a medium for the delivery of instruction created within another framework. Such change from one medium to another may have partial value in reaching particular outreach goals, but it also runs some significant risks of diluting the original instruction and perhaps rendering it unsuccessful.

But before being able to diffuse such anxieties, a better understanding of BL is required. To achieve this aim, I needed a framework grounded in the complex adaptive systems theory. The term *complex adaptive systems* is commonly used to describe the loosely organized academic field that has grown up around the study of such systems. Complexity science is not a single theory; it encompasses multiple theoretical frameworks and is highly interdisciplinary, seeking the answers to some fundamental

questions about living, adaptable, and changeable systems (Gupta & Anish, 2012). Some of the most important characteristics of complex systems are:

- The number of elements is sufficiently large that conventional descriptions (e.g. a system of differential equations) are not only impractical, but cease to assist in understanding the system. Moreover, the elements interact dynamically, and the interactions can be physical or involve the exchange of information.
- Such interactions are rich since any element or sub-system in the system is affected by and affects several other elements or sub-systems.
- The interactions are non-linear: small changes in inputs, physical interactions or stimuli can cause large effects or very significant changes in outputs.
- Interactions are primarily but not exclusively with immediate neighbors and the nature of the influence is modulated.
- Any interaction can feed back onto itself directly or after a number of intervening stages. Such feedback can vary in quality. This is known as recurrency.
- Such systems may be open and it may be difficult or impossible to define system boundaries.
- Complex systems operate under far from equilibrium conditions. There has to be a constant flow of energy to maintain the organization of the system (Cilliers, 1998).
- Complex systems have a history. They evolve and their past is co-responsible for their present behavior.

- Elements in the system may be ignorant of the behavior of the system as a whole, responding only to the information or physical stimuli available to them locally.

A complex adaptive systems perspective approach of BL was proposed by Wang et al. (2015). Known as CABLS (complex adaptive blended learning systems), it is useful because it promotes a systematic and holistic perspective of BL. CABLS sees BL as a system consisting of six essential subsystems (the learner, the teacher, the content, the technology, the learning support, and the institution). All of these subsystems relate to and interact with one another.

Such a perspective might help explain why no single BL ideal formula exists (Owston, 2013). Rather, there may be many possible ways to design a successful BL course. Furthermore, the CABLS framework might help to account for some of the conflicting results about BL in research studies, because according to CABLS, it is impossible to extract and measure single factors that contribute to BL because they all interact.

#### Supporting Frameworks

CABLS served as the lens to view the BL design for the Introduction of Literature course. However, since BL is a complex adaptive system, two additional frameworks were necessary in designing and implementing the course. One was to help me as the teacher with the pedagogy and content to teach literature. (Note the CABLS subsystems mentioned: teacher and content.) This was the transactional reading model argued by Rosenblatt (1994) and endorsed by the National Council of Teachers of English's 1998-2015 [NCTE] policy. The other was to help unite the online portion with the face-to-face



portion. This was the instructional design framework as developed by Perkins and Unger (1999). Each of these will next be described briefly, with further details in Chapter 2.

The first of these supporting frameworks is the transactional model of the reading process. It focuses on the active role of the reader in creating meaning from text. Rosenblatt, credited for developing this theory, was a reader-response theorist who challenged the view that meaning can be found only in the text or that the reader's job is to figure out what the author means (1994). Rather, Rosenblatt and other reader-response theorists (e.g. Bleich, 1975; Britton, 1970) believe that the reader and the text/author construct meaning together. Rosenblatt wrote that making meaning while reading and responding is "a complex, to-and-fro, self-correcting transaction between reader and verbal signs which continues until some final organization, more or less complete and coherent, is arrived at and thought of as corresponding to the text. The 'meaning'—whether, e.g., poem, novel, play, scientific report, or legal brief—comes into being during the transaction" (1986, p. 123).

This process was described by Rosenblatt (1994) as a "two-way transaction" or "live circuit" between reader and text. The term *transaction* was taken from John Dewey, who defined it as a reciprocal relationship among the parts in a single situation. This contrasts to *interaction* which involves two separate entities acting on one another. "Language ... should not be seen as self-contained, ungrounded, ready-made code of signifiers and signified, but as embodied in transactions between individuals and their social and natural context" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 122).

Obviously, this theory not only gives readers more choice and control and an opportunity to use their voices in response to literature; it also gives them more responsibility. Even though the instructor may initiate the experiences with the literature, he/she will not predetermine outcomes such as having all the students agree on what the author meant in the story. In other words, the focus of learning and teaching is on the students' responses or personal evocations of the text, not on the instructor's interpretation.

The second supporting framework used in designing the undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses for this study deals with course design as developed by Perkins and Unger (1999). It is called Teaching and Learning for Understanding (TfU). Perkins' and Unger's theory focuses on understanding as the important learning outcome. The theory incorporates a teaching methodology that makes practical sense to instructors, operationalized in an accessible way through a broadly constructivist approach to teaching and learning. In *Instructional Theories and Models: A New Paradigm of Instructional Theory*, Perkins and Unger (1999) note:

The primary *goal* of this theory is the cultivation of understanding as a performance capability. Therefore, it is intended only for situations where understanding is a central concern.... Some of the values upon which this theory is based include:

- being able to deploy knowledge with understanding
- learning topics that are central to the discipline or domain
- motivation (genuine involvement, commitment, and emotional response)
- active use and transfer of knowledge

- retention of knowledge
- organized, systematic approaches to constructivist teaching
- a broad and flexible range of pedagogical styles, including direct instruction
- students providing feedback to each other (p. 91)

The key *elements* of this theory are:

- generative topics (topics selected central to the discipline, accessible and interesting to the students, interesting to the teacher, and connectable to diverse themes)
- understanding goals (specifying what is to be understood about a topic)
- understanding performances (activities that will display and advance learner's understanding)
- ongoing assessment (assessment practices that provide timely and frequent feedback for learners' actions throughout the learning process) (pp. 92-93)

### Study Context

The context for this dissertation study was four co-taught general education sections of Introduction to Literature at a mid-sized Midwestern U.S. university. This environment was selected for many reasons. First and foremost, my background in teaching literature provided good insight into this particular environment, including the challenges faced by teachers and the needs and desires of students. As described in

Chapter 3, these students, from various majors, were males and females generally in their first and second years of their undergraduate degrees who enrolled in these courses to fulfill a general education liberal arts requirement. Second, there is not a sizeable body of research on the application of BL for introducing literature to general education undergraduate students. Third, this particular university's English department has experienced problems working with students with busy schedules due to demands from their jobs and extra-curricular duties. Finally, the university is very open to the idea of BL and has encouraged staff to try it since this appears to be "the wave of the future."

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to study the approach my co-teacher and I implemented for using web-based instruction to improve undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses in a productive BL environment. A productive BL environment is, for the purposes of this study, defined as a setting in which students can learn and which provides them with a positive learning experience. A positive learning experience for students is defined as one that meets their values, priorities, and needs. The course design for the Introduction to Literature course was supported by the transactional reading model argued by Rosenblatt (1994) and the TfU model developed by Perkins and Unger (1999). More specifically, this study was designed to accomplish three goals. The first was to discover whether an undergraduate Introduction to Literature course based upon the recommendations of Rosenblatt (1994) and Perkins and Unger (1999) can meet the needs of students in a BL environment. The second goal of this study was to measure the students' perceptions of the blended Introduction to Literature environment with respect

to its productiveness in terms of their attitudes and achievements. The third and final goal was to discover how students experience the teacher's practice and behavior and the extent to which these factors affect student perceptions of the course and BL environment in general. These goals were examined through the CABLS lens designed by Wang et al. (2015).

### Research Questions

This dissertation was designed to study an approach to create a productive BL environment with the aim of providing a positive learning experience for students in an undergraduate Introduction to Literature course. Specifically, the following potential research questions were addressed:

1. What impact did the BL instructional design developed for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes?
2. What impact did the BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student achievement?
3. How do students perceive their teacher's practice and behavior in a BL environment in the Introduction to Literature course?
4. To what degree does teacher practice and behavior affect students' perceptions of the course?
5. What insights did I gain while co-teaching this blended Introduction to Literature course?

### Significance of the Study

Findings from this study will contribute to the fields of BL research, teaching literature, and teacher education. It presents an example of viewing a blended undergraduate college course through a complex adaptive systems perspective called CABLS. Hopefully, this research will promote a more comprehensive understanding of BL in terms of both research and practice. Also, this study provides a methodologically well-founded approach using the transactional theory of reading and the TfU model to preparing instructors for teaching introductory literature courses to undergraduates in a BL environment, which few, if any, studies have investigated thus far. This, in turn, allows this study to make possible recommendations to institutional administrators and program directors on how to best prepare and support teachers for teaching a blended undergraduate course generally and in a blended Introduction to Literature learning environment specifically. This is a valuable contribution because the already ongoing trend of transitioning college courses to a BL model is likely to continue and even significantly increase in the coming years.

### Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The first chapter provides a detailed introduction to the study including a definition of BL, the conceptual frameworks used, and the study's purpose and significance. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature about the pedagogies for teaching literature, instructional design, and BL. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the mixed methods research methodology, a description of the context and participants, and a detailed overview of the research procedures, including

the data collection materials and analysis. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the results for the research questions, and Chapter 7 discusses these results in light of the literature. It ends with a discussion of implications and limitations of the study, before finally providing a conclusion and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research is to study the approach my co-teacher and I implemented for using web-based instruction to improve undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses in a productive BL environment. The study primarily focuses on learners' satisfaction in a BL course, their preferences for particular aspects of blended learning, and their achievement in a blended course format. This makes my study significant for four reasons.

First, the perceptions and attitudes of learners about BL helps instructors to evaluate the teaching-learning process. Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu (2015, p. 42) said that "The degree of learners' expectations, satisfaction, opinions or views on courses has played an important role in evaluating the effectiveness of learning processes." Akkoyunlu and Yilmaz-Soylu add that when learners "perceive their experience as enjoyable, satisfying, and personally fulfilling, they tend to interact more, which results in enhanced learning" (2015, p. 42).

Second, whether learners achieve higher in BL environments compared with either fully face-to-face or fully online courses is unclear. According to the literature, students frequently report increased subjective learning gains and improved understanding of subject matter in blended courses, while teachers observe no significant difference in the impact of the blended course on test results when compared with traditional face-to-face or fully online course delivery (Alonso et al., 2011; Collopy &



Arnold, 2009; Lim et al., 2006; Moore & Gilmartin, 2010; Poon, 2012; Woltering et al., 2009). This relationship between learners' perceptions of BL and achievement is unexplored in the literature. A better understanding of this relationship will be beneficial as institutions of higher education begin to scale up BL.

Third, the literature reveals that the issue of how to best incorporate the face-to-face and online teaching resources is muddled by instructional design/theory (Wang et al., 2015). BL research for humanities and other loosely structured content areas was basically neglected in the literature. Before this study, almost all of the BL examples in the literature came from subject areas such as computer programming, mathematics, business, science, and statistics. Therefore, using the transactional theory of reading as the framework for teaching literature in the BL format is significant. I had predicted this theory would work well in a blended Introduction to Literature course, because it not only gives student readers more choice and control and an opportunity to use their voices in response to literature, it also gives them more responsibility. BL demands students take responsibility for their learning if they are to be successful in such an environment.

Fourth, as also stated in Chapter 1, the literature generally seemed to reflect little understanding about BL. Deeper understanding of BL through the CABLS perspective is useful in scaling up BL's implementation in higher education (Wang et al., 2015). Four reasons exist in support. First, the application of the CABLS framework promotes a systematic and holistic view of BL, providing educators and researchers with a more complete picture of such learning. Differing from the existing models in much of the literature that see only parts of BL in isolation and ignore its dynamic qualities, this

framework allows a view of the various subsystems in relation to each other as an integral whole so that the big picture will not be lost from view. Second, the CABLS framework illustrates the ways in which the subsystems within BL interact with, and impact upon, each other to grow as a healthy system. This may have practical implications for BL practice because it may compel researchers to investigate the feedback loop of the systems (Cleveland, 1994) and the interaction between the subsystems to avoid one-way interpretation of causality. Third, it is the hope that the CABLS framework will facilitate a deeper, more accurate understanding of the dynamic and adaptive nature of BL. With an understanding of why and how temporal stability is constantly disturbed, and new balance is reached from the interaction and collaboration of the subsystems in BL, a better grasp of BL's developmental stages may help in attaining a deeper understanding of BL's potential. As a result, educators could be better prepared to meet the challenges ahead in their effort to scale up and eventually normalize BL in higher education. Fourth, the CABLS approach used in this study, reveals untapped potential and crucial issues to be further investigated in future research, such as the provision of learning support, the promotion of institutional involvement, and the non-linear relationships of the subsystems in BL.

A closer look of these aspects is presented in this chapter's literature review. A literature review involves the systematic identification, location, and analysis of documents containing information related to a particular research study. Also, it is used to describe the written component of a research plan or report that discusses the reviewed documents (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). A review of previous research and theories

relevant to this study can provide a foundation for understanding how course design and pedagogical philosophy of teaching literature may affect the students' perceptions and achievements in a BL environment for an undergraduate general education Introduction to Literature course. This chapter is organized into three main sections each containing a literature review about: (a) the teaching of literature, (b) instructional design, and (c) BL.

### Teaching of Literature

The content area for the courses examined in this study is literature. Literature is defined here as "a group of selected texts, belletristic rather than popular, approached critically from a variety of enlightening perspectives and conveyed reverentially from generation to generation" (Taylor, 2006, p. 200). Since one of the three frameworks used for the Introduction to Literature course was based upon Rosenblatt's (1994) ideas about teaching literature, the next section will be devoted to this topic.

### Rosenblatt and the Teaching of Literature

British scholar and novelist C. S. Lewis (1961) said, "Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become." These words describe the importance of literature. As stated in the Lewis quotation, literature not only describes reality but adds value to that reality. Literary works mirror the thinking patterns and social norms prevalent in society. They depict different facets of the human race. They serve as food for thought and a playground for imagination and creativity. Exposing an individual to fine literary works is equivalent to providing him/her with the finest of educational opportunities. Thus, lacking an exposure

to literature is equal to depriving a student an opportunity to grow as an individual. And since literature is meant to be read, we use it “to better understand ourselves, others, and the world around us; we use the knowledge we gain from reading to change the world in which we live” (NCTE, 1998-2015).

Furthermore, the cornerstone of academic growth is reading. According to the Commission on Reading (Anderson et al., 1985), reading is vital to success in life. “Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost” (p.1). Therefore, a student’s journey to lifelong reading competence, even though it usually begins in elementary school needs to be fostered at the higher learning level as well.

However, as wonderful as literature is, many students struggle with it. Some do not have positive attitudes toward reading. They may avoid it and turn to stimuli such as television, iPods, Internet, video games, etc. Back in 1998, Fowler suggested that the distractions of society inhibit students’ reading willingness:

There are an incredible number of distractions which are imposed on society, many of which are the result of the explosion of technology. Lifestyles are greatly affected by this overstimulation of things to do, places to go, and tasks to perform. Too often, this leaves precious little time for pastime reading. (p. 4)

Today, the situation is even worse. After all, only seven-in-ten American adults (72%) read a book in 2014, whether in whole or in part and in any form. That figure fell from 79% in 2011 (Rainie & Perrin, 2015).

Moreover, today’s college instructors face the difficult challenge of engaging students in classical texts that are geographically, historically, and linguistically “alien” to them (Youssef, 2009).

Then on top of this, current politics in curriculum decisions have put numerous pressures on high school literature teachers. According to multiple sources, including Goldberg (2004), Hamilton and Stecher (2004), and McNeil (2000), teachers in many states and school districts are required to use:

- High-stakes tests for all students, causing teachers to teach to these tests
- Standardized curricula with content listed by grade level, including performance indicators of specific degrees of proficiency
- Commercial curriculum matching state and district standards
- Specific instructional plans for curriculum
- Materials introduced at workshops that are monitored by principals and facilitators to ensure their adoption

This makes teaching literature at the college level tough. Research has indicated that pressures such as those just mentioned, has led literature classes to be taught and tested in a nonliterary manner, as if there is only one right answer. For example, Applebee's (1993) study of English classes across the United States indicates that literature is often taught as if there is a point or predetermined interpretation the reader must build toward with no room for the students' explorations to be sanctioned or to take form. Also, studies at the Literature Center (e.g., Brody, DeMilo, & Purves, 1989) indicate that literature tests (in anthologies, statewide assessments, SATs, and various achievement tests) treat literature as content, with a factual right answer rather than with possibilities to ponder and interpretations to develop and question and defend. Such methods call for superficial readings rather than thoughtful interpretations, or the

weighing of alternative views. This is the opposite goal of a thought provoking literature class which is an:

environment where students are encouraged to negotiate their own meanings by exploring possibilities, consider understandings from multiple perspectives, sharpen their own interpretations, and learn about features of literary style and analysis through the insights of their own responses. Responses are based as much on readers' own personal and cultural experiences as on the particular text and its author students are able to react to others' ideas (including established interpretations) through the lens of their own considered understandings as well as the understandings of others -- reaching interpretations which continue to be treated conditionally, always subject to further development. (Langer, 1994, p.6)

So how do undergraduate college instructors encourage their students to spend time critically reading their literature assignments, engage in classroom discussions, and create assignments that are meaningful and interesting to them? Several models and theories of reading to overcome such a dilemma exist. One, which is focused upon for this study, is the transactional theory of reading developed by Louise Rosenblatt. Some advantages of this approach are revealed in the following:

Instead of ... the dualistic, mechanistic, linear, interactional view, in which the text, ... and the personality of the reader ... can be separately analyzed, with the impact of one on the other studied in a vacuum, we need to see the reading act as an event involving a particular individual and a particular text, happening at a particular time, under particular circumstances, in a particular social and cultural setting, and as part of the ongoing life of the individual and the group. We can still distinguish the elements ... not as separate entities, but as aspects of phases of a dynamic process, in which all elements take on their character as part of the organically-interrelated situation. (Rosenblatt, 1995, p.100)

Rosenblatt's ideas promote a student and response centered approach, opposed to a teacher and text-centered one (Beach, 1993). For instructors, this shift involves changing not only the types of texts they use, but how they use them (Langer, 1994).

The Introduction to Literature courses used in this study tie together the worlds of the text, author, and the reader by using Rosenblatt's transactional theory as a guide. Both of her works *Literature as Personal Exploration* (1995) and *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1994), state that the act of reading involves a dynamic transaction between the reader and the text. In other words, each "transaction" is a unique experience in which the reader and text continuously act and are acted upon by each other. Thus, a written work, (often referred to as a "poem" in Rosenblatt's writing) does not have the same meaning for everyone, as each reader brings individual background knowledge, beliefs, and context into the act of reading. The reader's background knowledge, beliefs, and context are based upon his/her literacy skills, lived experiences, and educational background.

The text is simply paper and ink until a reader reads it. When the text is brought into the reader's mind, symbols are created, evoking in the transaction images, emotions, and concepts. This occurs only in the reader's mind. It does not take place on the page nor in the text. It only happens in the act of reading. Rosenblatt (1994) said, "the reader's attention is primarily focused on what will remain as a residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out (p. 23)." She further stated, "In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (1994, p. 25).

Therefore, readers actively, not passively, engage in creating, not discovering, meaning during reading. "Even the critic who judges a new work, the writer who

conceives of his work in light of positive or negative norms of an earlier work, and the literary historian who classifies a work in its tradition and explains it historically are first simply readers" (Jauss, 1982). And since meaning is created by individual readers, no single correct meaning of any literary work exists.

NCTE endorses Rosenblatt's ideas. Its policy (1998-2015) states: "Reading is the complex act of constructing meaning from print... All of us bring our understanding of spoken language, our knowledge of the world, and our experiences in it to make sense of what we read."

Mellor and Patterson (2000) add that when students study literature, they should not only read, but also think about *how* they are reading a text and the reasons behind divergent interpretations by different critics and readers such as the contexts, social factors, historical background, personal biases, etc. involved in the shaping of interpretations.

Literature instructors need to keep in mind that readers grow in their abilities to comprehend, interpret, and think critically about reading through skills and strategies. To guide students toward discovering literature on their own, the steps of a literary analysis need to be simply introduced. Literary analysis is a *process* with no right or wrong interpretations. Understanding this concept will hopefully help to empower students to be passionate about reading and encourage them to look beyond the words on the page. A good way to do this is to use the elements of literature. This is the strategy used in the Introduction to Literature classes that were a part of this study.



All stories contain elements of literature. These elements are usually recognizable to a literary critic, but often misunderstood by a learner. When students *can* identify the elements of literature, the story is often appreciated at a higher level and leads to a deeper examination of the text. Once a student understands any given element, they can recall their understanding during any new read (Vari, 2006).

Once the Introduction to Literature content's philosophy was established, the next step was to come up with an instructional design. The following section contains a literature review about instructional design and the framework used in this study.

### Instructional Design

“Without instructional design, the learner might or might not get the information they need. Because of instructional design (ID), you can get the learners to cut through a lot of extraneous information and get right to the important stuff” (Kuhlmann, 2008). Solid ID can make learning happen faster and more efficiently than what might happen more organically. ID is defined here as the “practice of creating instructional experiences which make the acquisition of knowledge and skills more efficient, effective, and appealing (Merrill, Drake, Lacy, & Pratt, 1996). Generally, the process determines the state and needs of the learner, defines the instruction's end goal, and creates some “intervention” to assist in the transition. ID, as a field is historically and traditionally rooted in cognitive and behavioral psychology, though recently Constructivism has been a strong influence (Mayer, 1992; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). ID is important for this study because it was used to develop the BL Introduction to Literature classes that generated the data.

The ID process usually is based on one of several theory models. Even though no single model is ideal, identifying and being consistent with a model/s may help support cohesion and clarity with ID.

Many good ID models have to resist today's U.S. educational systems which are standardized and bureaucratically controlled in a hierarchical structure. Typically, as a result, students have become passive learners and members of their school communities. Learning is also compartmentalized. This is counterproductive to learning (Reigeluth, 1996). Needed is a student-centered, performance-driven system. Knowledge, skills, and understanding are the three important ingredients of learning and the ties among these set the guidelines for instructional designers (Skelton, 2002).

Specifically, literature teachers want more from their students than remembering the name of the author for "The Cask of Amontillado". They want their students to understand what they are learning, not just to know about it.

Why educate for understanding? Devlin (2006) proclaims education must aim for active use of knowledge and skill. Unfortunately, research reveals the opposite. For example, studies about students' reading abilities show that, even though they can read the words, they have difficulty making inferences and interpreting the text. Moreover, studies of student writing show that most students cannot formulate cogent viewpoints well supported by argument (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1981). Indeed, students tend to write essays that do not express a viewpoint, but instead just reiterate what they know about the topic (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1985). They also have

problems shifting perspective (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). But this can change.

Teaching for understanding is an approachable agenda for education.

In brief, “understanding a topic of study is a matter of being able to perform in a variety of thought-demanding ways with the topic, for instance to: explain, muster evidence, find examples, generalize, apply concepts, analyze, represent in a new way, and so on” (Gardner, 1991; Perkins, 1992).

One such model or framework used to create the Introduction to Literature classes for this study is the Perkins and Unger’s Teaching and Learning for Understanding (TfU) model (1999). According to Perkins and Unger, the key elements in the design instruction for understanding are to: use generative topics, understand goals, understand performances, and have ongoing assessment. Following is a more complete explanation of each of these key elements.

In the Perkins and Unger TfU model (1999), topics are generated to help with students' construction of their understanding. Four basic attributes serve as criteria for generative topics. One, they must be central to a domain or discipline. Two, topics must be accessible and interesting to students. Third, the generative topics must be interesting to the instructor. Fourth, the topics should connect diverse themes within and beyond the disciplines, and the topics should also connect to students' prior experience. The topic selection should emphasize the relevance to the discipline as well as to the learners, the authenticity of the topics, and the complexity of the topics.

The second key element in the Perkins and Unger TfU model (1999) is to understand goals. Course designers need to ask, “What is it that learners should strive to

understand in the generative topic?" Therefore, goal descriptions need to be explicit and public, nested to include multiple themes, and the focused enough to cover the content knowledge, methods, purposes, and forms of expression in the domain.

The next key element in the Perkins and Unger TfU model (1999) is to understand performances. A sequence of performance should allow learners ready entry to the topic, advance their understanding and bring them to a contextually appropriate level of understanding. Learners need to be provided with opportunities to explore and to perform in a variety of thought-demanding ways with the topic, for instance to: explain, muster evidence, find examples, generalize, apply concepts, analogize, represent in a new way, and so on; concluding with a phase in which the learners carry out a culminating performance to demonstrate their understanding. Furthermore, the understanding performances should meet the following criteria:

- Relate directly to understanding the goals
- Develop and apply understanding through practice
- Engage multiple learning styles and forms of expressions
- Promote reflective engagement in challenging, approachable tasks
- Publicly demonstrate understanding: the principal performances need to be visible at least in their outcomes

The last key element in the Perkins and Unger TfU model (1999) is ongoing assessment. This recognizes the importance of feedback in learning. Instead of end-unit assessment, TfU proposes teachers develop ongoing assessment early and often in the learning process to give students informative feedback. Students are assessed on the

sequential understanding performances instead of separate tests. Multiple sources of feedback are encouraged, e.g., peer evaluation. The planning of the ongoing assessment needs to consider who should give feedback and when as well as the sufficient time for feedback and follow-up rethinking. Ongoing assessment is part of the learning experience and meets the following standards:

- Criteria are relevant, explicit, and public
- Occurs frequently
- Multiple sources
- Gauges progress and inform planning: the results of the assessment should provide revision and planning to address particular needs or emergent problems.

Also, Perkins and Unger (1999) suggested asking four major questions in planning:

1. What do you really want your students to understand?
2. What can you do to help them build those understandings?
3. What actions can they take to help themselves to build their own understandings?
4. How will we, and they, know that they understand?

ID is important in creating a BL course. The purpose of any effort toward blending an Introduction to Literature course should be transformative, resulting in better learning than previous modes of delivery. The next portion of this chapter is a literature review about BL.

### Blended Learning

Education needs to keep up with the times. During the 2000s, online learning became popular (Reiser & Dempsey, 2012; Braine, 2010). With the rise of the Internet,

educators had an impressive tool for information retrieval and for supplying interactive, dynamic, multimedia instruction (Khan, 1997). From online instruction came BL. In fact, BL is considered among the best of the online learning options (King & Arnold, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). For this and many other reasons, the use of BL is on the rise in higher education (Bliuc, Goodyear & Ellis, 2007; Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2006; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Graham, 2006; Oh & Park, 2009; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Shea, 2007). Moreover, using asynchronous learning networks with college campus courses may be a substantial development in the improvement of learning (Hiltz & Turoff, 2005) which, as stated in Chapter 1, may eventually lead to all learning being blended, causing the “blended” prefix to be dropped (Masie, 2006; Massy, 2006; Ross & Gage, 2006). But what is it that is so attractive about BL? What are its advantages? Its disadvantages? How do educators increase BL efficiency for courses such as the Introduction to Literature? Before turning to these questions, it will be beneficial to discuss in more detail how BL may be defined and its history.

#### Definition of Blended Learning

The literature is split whether to use the term “hybrid” or “BL”. Much of the literature and several universities such as University of Wisconsin sees no difference between the terms. However, as recent studies are selecting “BL”, this study will use the term “BL”. Also, the literature contains many ways in which traditional or face-to-face classroom and online instruction can be combined. Education researchers have different views and definitions of BL, which according to Oliver and Trigwell (2005) ‘is ill-defined and inconsistently used’ (p. 24). Consequently, educators have no uniform

understanding of BL, and hence, academic practice is often underpinned by individuals' own interpretations of the term rather than a consistent approach across an institution (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2013). These inconsistencies revolve around design, pedagogical approaches, ratio of online versus face-to-face time, purpose of blending, and the technology's function. But, even though there seems to be no single definition of blended, the following definition from the Horn and Staker report *The Rise of K-12 BL* (2011), as mentioned in Chapter 1, will suffice for this study:

BL is any time a student learns at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home and at least in part through online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace. (p. 3)

But keep in mind this definition is simplistic and has shortcomings. First, it does not take into account the variety of BL environments. For example, a course might have three weekly contact hours of which two are conducted online, or an instructor may decide that students will meet alternate weeks face-to-face and online, or meet the first half of the semester face-to-face and the last half online as did the Introduction to Literature classes used in this study. Yet, other BL classes may be conducted primarily online and require only one or two face-to-face meetings, in which students conduct group work and presentations. Criticism has also been leveled at the term "BL." Oliver and Trigwell (2005) claim BL is not about learning but more about teaching. Instead, they feel terms such as "blended pedagogics," "blended teaching," and "learning with blended pedagogics" better capture the true meaning. In addition, Garrison and Kanuka (2004) point out that defining BL raises issues about implementation, design, and context:

At its simplest, BL is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with on-line learning experiences. At the same time, there is considerable complexity in its implementation with the challenge of virtually limitless design possibilities and applicability to so many contexts. (p. 96)

The next section deals with BL's history. Having a historical context of blended learning gives a background and contrast for today's educational needs and challenges.

### History of Blended Learning

Historically, BL is not a new concept. It has been used for decades by educators at every level. In its purest sense, BL simply means using more than one method of delivering a lesson to a student. Long before the advent of computers and social networks, teachers created BL experiences using simple technologies such as paper and pencil. Educators have always crafted learning experiences that incorporate a variety of activities in different environments for the purpose of reinforcing learning material. For example, consider apprenticeships. Prior to the hands-on experience, the apprentice studied the work of the master through observation, conversation, and possibly through reading (Graham, 2006).

Another example is the printing press. Invented during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, it enabled the blending of face-to-face, teacher-led instruction with reading homework.

But today's tools are new. Throughout time, BL has been a combination of distance learning and face-to-face instruction with whatever technology prevalent at the time. For example, the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the birth of audio recordings, television transmissions, online text-based databases and discussion boards, etc., which "imaginative educators, with the assistance of technical experts, have found ways to



exploit and combine (or blend) ...to meet their learning objectives” (Hoffman, 2006, p. 29).

In the 1960s technology-based training on mainframes and mini-computers emerged as an alternative to instructor-led training (Bonk & Graham, 2005). One in particular is PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations), a system developed by the University of Illinois and Control Data. It offered coursework from elementary to the college level, not to mention a long history of innovations (Plato Rising, 1984).

Mainframe-based training then gave way to satellite-based live video in the 1970s. The advantage was serving people who were not as PC-literate. The major obstacle was the finances required to make this work (Bergin, 2000).

Next, Wiki Technologies such as CD-ROM (a pre-pressed optical compact disc which contains data) in the early 1990s made it possible to create new environments for learning, new opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous collaboration, and new modes of delivery for learning materials, self-directed guides, and tutorials. However, bandwidth through 56k modems were not able to support high quality sound and video (Graham, 2006). The limitation to CD-ROMs was tracking completion of coursework, thus learning management systems emerged. The aviation industry, Boeing for one, relied on this heavily to provide training for personnel (Graham, 2006).

Since 2000, BL figured prominently in online learning talk. In this context, BL represents a convergence of online and face-to-face experiences. Interactions across both environments are mitigated by space, time, fidelity, and personal interaction (Graham,

2006). Modern BL is delivered generally online. Some examples of channels through which online BL can be delivered include webcasting (synchronous and asynchronous) and online video (live and recorded; Graham, 2006). Personal learning resources such as Khan Academy have been used in classrooms to serve as platforms for BL (Coach Resources, 2012).

No matter the history, both an irrational exuberance and a deep set fear about any type of online learning have been reported in the literature (Brooks, 2012; Christensen & Horn, 2013; Shullenberger, 2013; Yuan & Powell, 2013). The next two sections will take a look at the advantages and challenges of using BL in higher education.

#### Blended Learning Advantages in Higher Education

As reported throughout this study, BL involving various combinations of online and face-to-face interaction is a major trend in higher level education. Many feel BL offers the best of these two formats. BL courses allow students and faculty to take advantage of much of the flexibility and convenience of an online course while retaining some of the of the face-to-face classroom interaction between instructor and student (King & Arnold, 2012). According to Osguthorpe and Graham (2003), BL in higher education has several other advantages.

- Pedagogical richness
- Flexibility/access to knowledge
- Social interaction
- Personal agency
- Financial

- Revision ease

Of these six advantages, Graham, Allen, and Ure (2003) found that BL was primarily implemented due to (a) improved pedagogy, (b) increased flexibility/access to knowledge, and (c) financial savings. Knowing why BL is often used in college courses brings up at least three questions: Who is promoting BL use? How is BL being integrated into college courses? And is BL successful?

Improved pedagogy. Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) believe instructors may be attracted to BL because it can improve pedagogy. Much of the literature suggests blended courses are more effective than either face-to-face or online instruction. A 2009 U.S. Department of Education report reviewed 51 empirical studies comparing online courses to traditional face-to-face courses and concluded, “students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course ...face-to-face” (Yates et al. 2009, p. xiv). Also, the same report compared BL courses with those fully online and found that “instruction combining online and face-to-face elements had a larger advantage ... than did purely online instruction” (p. xv). It was also found BL had a positive effect on student achievement, perceived cognitive flexibility levels, and self-regulated learning skills (Ates Cobanogku & Yurdakul, 2014). Additionally, the same study claimed BL encouraged students to think, inquire, and explore the subject matter; share, discuss, and appraise theirs and others’ opinions; gain more perspectives; and engage in deeper critical thinking. After all, BL “removes boundaries for learning and offers virtual libraries and schools without walls” (Askar & Altun, 2008; Halis, 2001). It supports individual learning by allowing the reviewing of materials/lessons if needed and

better understanding by visualization (Kiriscioglu, 2009; Tan & Erdogan, 2001; Yahn, 2000). Moreover, BL studies suggest BL helps students transfer theoretical knowledge to real life (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Other studies show pedagogical richness in other ways. For example, Forsey, Low, and Glance (2013, p. 481) claimed “students feel more accountable regarding the ideas and theories explored in class.” The development of “metacognitive ability in comprehension, argumentation, reasoning and various forms of higher order thinking” was seen by Hsu and Hsieh (2014, p. 233). McLaughlin, Griffin, Esserman, Davidson, Glatt, and Roth’s 2013 study concluded that “The flipped classroom promoted student empowerment, development, and engagement” (p. 196). Stein and Graham (2014) remarked that even though there are no complete answers why BL is as or more effective than onsite courses, some ideas include the following.

- Improved instructional design because BL courses often include instructional designers or educational technologists who support faculty in the redesign process.
- Increased guidance and triggers because students receive guidance from both the instructor face-to-face and the syllabus online as to resources, activities, and assessment.
- Easier access to learning activities because placing resources and activities online allow students to engage with these on their own schedule, which may lead to more complete learning.

- Individualized learning opportunities and automated assessments because digital materials can be accessed for students' individual needs, give immediate corrective feedback, and can be reviewed upon demand.
- Intensified student focus because of the access and time on task to online materials can be tracked with almost "every click" (Perez, Lopez, & Ariza, 2013; Kiviniemi, 2014).

The majority of studies have confirmed learners' positive responses to BL (see Perez, Lopez, & Ariza, 2013; Kiviniemi, 2014). BL has been found to reduce drop-out rates, enhance student achievement, and improve student understanding. For example, in the 2011 Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, and Rodriguez-Ariza study, 985 first-year University of Grenada students in a BL general accounting course discovered that by utilizing various kinds of online materials and exercises to consolidate the content of the face-to-face lessons, including online evaluations, they experienced lower drop-out rates, improved final grades, and increased pass rates. Furthermore, effective teaching planning takes into account students' characteristics and necessities (Simsek, 2009) which BL takes into account with its flexible learning environment.

In a 2014 meta-analysis (Bernard et al., 2014), it was concluded that BL and technological interaction enhanced student achievement. This mirrored the Means et al. (2010) study evaluating evidence-based practices in online learning for the U.S. Department of Education.

Student motivation and satisfaction is another reported benefit of several BL studies. Student motivation is crucial to achievement (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). It

affects the acquisition and demonstration of higher-order thinking skills (Facione, Facione, & Giancarlo, 2000; Paul & Elder, 2008). In a review of 30 previous studies examining student motivation and satisfaction in Internet-Supported Learning Environments, it was found that students were generally satisfied with BL environments (Bekele, 2010). In another example, Collopy and Arnold (2009) researched the work of 80 undergraduate teacher candidates who participated in modules delivered in one of three ways: online only, partially blended, and fully blended. Their results showed that learners in the two types of BL classes reported “significantly greater feelings of competence and comfort in putting what they learned into practice” (Collopy & Arnold, 2009, p. 97). In addition, students in the BL classes reported “significantly higher levels of learning” (p. 96). Other studies revealing students’ positive perceptions, views, and attitudes towards BL include Ates (2012), Gecer and Dag (2012), Tsai et al. (2011), and Yilmaz and Orhan (2010).

BL can also influence higher level cognitive skills. For example, NCTE (1998-2015) released its definition of 21st century literacies, along with six related learning objectives, hereby noting that “technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments.” First among NCTE’s learning objectives was the need to “develop proficiency with the tools of technology.” The remaining objectives implicitly refer to the potential learning outcomes of using the interactive tools of technology: collaborative, cross-cultural problem-solving; construction of knowledge to be shared globally; analysis and synthesis of multiple streams of simultaneous information; creation and evaluation of multi-media texts; and attention to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex

environments. These learning objectives fall within the top tier of Bloom's taxonomy—and together they present an important argument for technology-based pedagogy: its potential to allow learners not just to consume knowledge but to create it.

For instructor perspective about BL, Gerbic (2011) claimed that BL teachers recognized the benefits of technology to reinforce concepts and to recognize the importance of alignment of media with content and discussion. Also, instructors found that their role may change. Studies have reported that instructors saw themselves no longer as simply knowledge givers or class controllers, but facilitators, advisors, and promoters of learning (Xu, 2013).

Increased flexibility/access to knowledge. When properly designed and taught, BL courses allow for increased flexibility and access to knowledge without eliminating, and perhaps even enhancing the things most students associate with a satisfying learning experience such as building relationships with teachers and classmates. For students who have jobs, extra-curricular activities, a family to care for, etc. BL courses can provide more flexibility and freedom than totally onsite courses by moving a significant chunk of onsite class time online.

Furthermore, today's technology provides flexibility since students and instructors can participate in the course when most convenient. Devices such as Smartphones and tablets can support online interactions almost anywhere anytime. Yuen's (2011) study confirms this. It showed that students and instructors liked BL due to easier communication between parties and the constant availability of resources. Also,

when students were not able to contact the instructor, the technology aided self-learning time.

Lastly, an advantage for BL is increased instructional flexibility. Collopy and Arnold (2009) outlined how online modules were easy to share. This is crucial to promote consistency and flexibility of use between different instructors and course sections. Within courses, individual instructors could, too, mix and match face-to-face and online materials/resources, just as they could conduct both face-to-face and online discussions. These findings were echoed by So and Bonk (2010) in their study involving a panel of international BL experts whose opinions on the use of BL approaches in computer-supported collaborative learning environments were elicited using a web-based Delphi method. They agreed that BL “offers greater flexibility and opportunities for community building among students” and that “instructors can share their ideas and course materials more readily with each other” (So & Bonk, 2010, p. 197).

Financial savings. BL may help with educational productivity. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan asserted that educators have to face “doing more with less.” He urged educators to see this as an opportunity for innovation, especially when facilitated with technology.

Technology can play a huge role in increasing educational productivity, but not just as an add-on or for a high-tech reproduction of current practice. Again, we need to change the underlying process to leverage the capabilities of technology. The military calls it a force multiplier. Better use of online learning, virtual schools, and other smart uses of technology is not so much about replacing educational roles as it is about giving each person the tools they need to be more successful-reducing wasted time, energy, and money. (Duncan, 2010)



BL may provide a savings to instructors, students, and institutions by moving some classroom contact hours online (Dziuban & Moskal, 2001; Oh & Park, 2009). Instructors and students may benefit from less travel time, transportation savings, and fewer parking costs (Stein & Graham, 2014). From an institutional perspective, BL reduces the need for physical meeting space and classrooms with their associated costs such as maintenance, heating, and air conditioning. Furthermore, some college administrators are burdened with more students to teach, but with less money to do it. On the other hand, some institutions of higher learning are lacking a substantial population base from which to attract potential students (Bates, 2000; Dunn, 2000; Shoemaker, 1998). Online learning could increase the population base by connecting to students at a distance to a higher learning institution.

Also, BL has demonstrated the productivity and quality of higher learning institutions by replacing faculty with lower paid-teaching or graduate assistants and technology for some portion of course contact hours (Bowen et al., 2012). The technology would perform some of the functions related to content delivery, communication, student assessment, and feedback, or through automated administrative tasks such as attendance or other record keeping with the hope that skilled faculty would be freed up to facilitate students with complex tasks.

In one example, between 2011 and 2012, the Missouri Learning Commons, a consortium of the state's 13 public four-year colleges, worked with the National Center for Academic Transformation on a redesign of 14 courses. The results reported that 10 of the 14 redesigns had lower costs, and that 12 of them produced the same or better pass

rates as the prior versions of these courses (National Center for Academic Transformation, 2010-2013).

BL has promoted innovative curriculum design. Elia, Secundo, Assaf, and Fayyoumi (2014) summarized the following new principles:

- the involvement of heterogeneous stakeholders in the course's design phase
- the focus on competence development rather than on knowledge transfer
- the choice of team work as an additional component to evaluate individual students' performances
- presence of remote and F2F interactions among peers and between teachers and students
- the usage of web 2.0 tools as enablers of collaborative learning processes and social networking
- continuous tutoring both for content and technological issues (p. 543)

Lastly, the instructor's role has changed. Xu (2013) noted that instructors have been transformed from a "knowledge initiator, class controller" to facilitator, advisor, and promoter of learning (p. 538).

Other blended learning advantages. Other advantages for BL include social interaction, personal agency, and revision ease. Each of these will be discussed in turn in this section.

BL may increase engagement through social interaction or social presence. Social presence is defined here as the “degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships” (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976, p. 65). Pure online learning environments have been criticized for the lack of human interaction and, for this reason, there has been an increasing movement toward BL approaches where students can experience more of such interaction (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Instructors may be attracted to BL because it can facilitate increased opportunities for social interaction (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). According to Swan and Shih (2005), social presence is the level online participants feel connected to one another. Barbour and Bennett (2013) said instructors felt that building strong online relationships helps develop social presence. Positive social presence/connectedness helps students to feel emotionally comfortable and thus emotionally engaged in learning, which is a requirement for cognitive engagement (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010). Face-to-face courses might have limited opportunities for students to engage with all of their classmates. Also, some students are inhibited from full participation in discussions, group activities, and so forth in such an environment. Online learning, on the other hand, that facilitates collaboration, class discussions, etc. could increase the amount of student-to-student interaction. In turn, this may enhance student engagement with the subject content and provide motivational benefits. Therefore, BL may improve classroom dynamics such as

students being more eager to learn, greater engagement, more participation, increased involvement, and improved preparedness.

Amaral and Shank's (2010) study involved 450 students in a redesigned BL introductory college chemistry course. It used the ANGEL (A New Global Environment for Learning) LMS and included detailed student study guides. Results were better student understanding of subject matter and an increase in student preparedness for class.

In another study (Shroff & Vogel, 2010) conducted among 77 students in a Hong Kong business course, the researchers found no statistically significant difference in individual interest between students doing face-to-face and online discussions. But they did observe that students participated more in online discussions and were more eager to engage in textual dialogue. The conclusion was online discussions helped further individual student assimilation, reflection, and critical thinking.

However, social interaction may depend upon teaching methods and course design. Aly's (2013) conclusion was that teaching methods are more important for student learning than the delivery medium. This study involving students in an university introductory course found that college students can get the same learning taking a completely online course as they can from a course including face-to-face instruction. Course design that implements an interactive community with immediate feedback makes the difference.

Echoing this a critical look at various studies from the National Education Policy Center (Enyedy, 2014). It declares personalized instructions yields modest educational

improvements at best, and none at all in some instances. A combination of person-to-person and tech-based instruction shows the greatest potential academic benefits.

Besides BL increasing engagement through social interaction, it may help personal agency. BL allows students some choices about what, when, where, and how they learn. This could promote student agency. BL's flexibility of access to learning may reinforce the students' autonomy, reflection, and powers of research as revealed in several studies (Chambers, 1999; Lebow, 1993; Radford, 1997; Sharpe et al., 2006; Tam, 2000). BL may also facilitate the review and control of learning (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Since BL has a combination of face-to-face and online components, more learners who live a distance from the higher learning institution could enroll in a course or program. In addition, the online component could benefit students to complete their course work whenever and wherever they want, as they can access the Internet without being in the classroom. Furthermore, BL may help students control their own learning pace (Garnham & Kaleta, 2002; Owston, Wideman, Murphy, & Lupshenyuk, 2008; Smyth, Houghton, Cooney, & Casey, 2012). Therefore, many believe that BL can create opportunities to endow students with increased personal agency over their learning, not to mention, preparing them for an increasingly online world.

A third BL advantage is revision ease. Revising involves more than fixing the prototype and moving on. Revision's goal for BL is to both "improve the existing version and adapt the results to future lessons (Stein & Graham, 2014, p. 76). This means the present lesson's latest iteration can serve as a model for the next lesson, which, is then treated as a prototype to be implemented, evaluated, and iterated. Stein and Graham

(2014) recommended that instructors improve the BL course in small ways, whenever they teach the course. As Christensen, Horn, and Staker (2013) point out, the BL approach is often perceived as less threatening to instructors because the instructors usually remain the course's creator, deciding which portions and resources of class instruction to provide online and determine which is the best way to use the face-to-face time.

Perhaps BL's revision ease may be one of the reasons why so many instructors are interested in this approach. For example, when EDUCAUSE, the nonprofit organization encouraging the use of technology in higher education, requested proposals for utilizing technology to transform student outcomes, a vast majority received called for blended instead of a fully online approach (Means, Shear et al., 2013).

As stated earlier in this study, any type of online approach inspires both strong pro and con views. The next section examines the cons or challenges of BL learning by looking at the BL disadvantages in higher education.

### Blended Learning Challenges in Higher Education

The use of BL can pose challenges for students, instructors, and institutions of higher learning. These will be examined in terms of pedagogy, flexibility/access to knowledge, financial affordability, and other challenges such as social interaction, personal agency, and revision ease.

Pedagogy challenges. BL studies vary greatly in their pedagogical outcomes. Even though many studies claim BL improves pedagogy, some studies, too, have found no impact or only modest gains for students enrolled in BL programs. Some studies have

shown no significant effect on academic success and attitudes (Delialioglu & Yildirim, 2007). For example, a 2010 study involving an online introductory university course, no statistically significant difference could be found between the blended section and the online section. This study concluded that perhaps teaching methods rather than course delivery make the difference when it comes to learning (Aly, 2013). A big complaint about BL is that educators are not sure if it really has the positive impact on student achievement and if so, under what conditions. The BL research is difficult to interpret due to a number of factors. As explained earlier in this dissertation, BL courses are implemented in very different ways, under different conditions. Not even a standard definition of BL exists. Also, technology evolves so quickly that the research may focus on a digital tool or system that is soon outdated. Understandably, online learning effectiveness studies too often fail to specify the key factors of the learning experience design, and that the online aspects of a course or other learning experience as if they were self-contained, ignoring the broader context which learning takes place and the relationship between online and offline learning activities (Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014, p. 189).

Julia Freeland, a research fellow at the Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation, a California think tank that studies BL, commented that the main problem in “what works in education” research is that it focuses on average students (2016). The promising premise of BL is its ability to personalize education to meet individual students’ needs.

When we rely on research for a thumbs-up or a thumbs-down, we don't actually research what educators and administrators really need to know. We don't need more studies that say, 'On average we see modest gains.' That doesn't help me as a teacher see whether those modest gains could occur for my students. (Davis, 2015)

BL may not be the best choice for every student. Bowman (2015) lists the following educational considerations:

- Reading is paramount in online learning. Up to 100% of classroom material may be made up of assigned readings (with possible multimedia presentations). This is not necessarily the case with traditional classroom environments. These rely more on lectures and face-to-face contact. Therefore, students who struggle through reading-based learning, may really struggle with online learning.
- A longer period to receive feedback than in face-to-face situations may be required. As mentioned, online learning relies heavily on written material. The con here is that if a student gets "stuck" on something, their instructors and classmates will not necessarily be on hand to provide immediate feedback, even though effective instructors will make themselves available through various means, including online office hours. Writing skills are crucial for online learning. Often, the loudest and most talkative student gains the advantage during class discussions in a face-to-face classroom. Face-to-face uses different tools of communication than online courses. Writing may complement other communication tools such as presentations and in-person dialogue in traditional



courses. If a student is not a strong writer, he/she could compensate in a traditional classroom with these other communication tools. With online learning, usually the majority of assignments and class communication is written via email or instant messaging. Therefore, the writer will usually have an easier time over the talker since writing skills are necessary for success.

- Digital literacy skills often determine how well a student will thrive in online learning. Online learning requires the ability to navigate, evaluate, and create information using a set of digital literacy skills and knowing how to use an online course management system (i.e. the website where lessons, assignments, and other materials are stored and made accessible to the students in class). In fact, the most successful online students embrace computer technologies and have a desire to expand their digital skills. However, not all students have such desires.

Another concern is digital immersion. Digital immersion means hours spent on the Internet socializing with peers and following pop culture. Bauerlein's book, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (2008), cites several studies that suggests U. S. Digital Natives (people born or brought up during the age of digital technology and therefore familiar with computers and the Internet from an early age) know little about politics, history, literature, science, but much about celebrity gossip. In a multi-year ethnographic study based on interviews with more than 800 American youth and their parents, The Digital Youth Project (Ito et al., 2008), young people's use of social networks, instant messaging, and mobile phones are described as "hypersocial" and "always on communication." However, time spent on

Facebook and MySpace, popular websites among students, means less time spent on more intellectual pursuits, such as reading books and shaping relationships with their elders, people who in earlier times acted as mentors/role models. In short, students who spend more time with their peers than with anyone else may lack the role models who may show them how to set high standards and enforce the discipline needed to achieve them. For instance, study skills such as time management are important when taking a BL course. However, not all students are used to taking responsibility for their own learning. A study by Kenney and Newcombe (2011) discovered some students had issues with time management and using technology. The students needed continuous reminders about due dates and where to find materials and assignments on the website. Many students would wait until the last minute to submit assignments and post discussions. And sometimes they experienced technical difficulties. The researchers remarked how surprised they were at some of the students' lack of proficiency when using technology for instructional rather than social purposes.

Some students have expressed that BL is confusing. They have commented that some students do not fulfill their responsibilities when doing group work, are not always clear on when the professor has provided feedback, and have trouble finding the learning module that is active. In addition, the complexity of content creates difficulty for students in following related online discussions. Some course information may be posted in too many areas and course calendars can be too complex (Welker & Berardino, 2006). A student comment from this study remarked: "I just learn best when someone is telling me information face-to-face."

Furthermore, some students are grade-centered. Owston, York, & Murtha (2013) identified that students' positive perceptions relate to higher grades.

Finally, technology itself can be a problem in promoting better pedagogy. Because BL has a strong dependence on the technology with which the BL experience is delivered, the technology must be reliable, easy to use, and current, for it to have a meaningful impact on the learning experience (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). Not all students have the technology skills to handle a BL course. Shivets (2011) declared that students' prior experience with technology is important for success. Being technological illiterate may serve as a big barrier for students attempting to get access to the course materials, making the availability of high-quality technical support paramount (Alexander, 2010). Another aspect of BL that may prove challenging is group work because of difficulties managing this in an online setting (Wicks et al., 2010). Reportedly, from a study involving four universities, the use of lecture recording technologies can result in students falling behind on the materials. This study found that only half of the students watched the lecture videos on a regular basis, and nearly 40% of students watched several weeks' worth of videos in one sitting (Gosper et al., 2008).

Perhaps, then, results may depend on how well the BL course is designed. Shivets' (2011) research literature review shows student motivation plays an important role in the success of a BL course. Factors such as enthusiasm and engagement of instructor, easy access to required course materials, clarity of expectations and instructions, and technology reliability determine the success of a BL course.

Increased flexibility/access to knowledge challenges. One of the biggest flexibility/access to knowledge challenges BL faces is the digital divide (Ramirez, 2014). Digital divide is defined here as the gap between those students who have and do not have access to computers and Internet (van Dijk, 2006). Possible inequalities in BL implementation could occur because not all students have PCs, Internet access, or the computer skills for such a course (Ates, Turali, & Guneyce, 2008). Even though a Pew Research Internet Survey (2015) stated that currently 84 % of American adults use the Internet, which is an increase from slightly over 50% in 2000, there has been little or no growth since 2012. Gaps still exist among students who are older, lacking a high school diploma, from low family income, who reside in a rural area, African-American, and Latino/Hispanic American (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). Falling into two or more of these categories makes the gap even larger (Perrin & Duggan, 2015). Thus, possible inequalities in BL implementation happen due to not all students having computers, Internet access, and the computer skills to manage a BL course (Ates et al., 2008). Educators need to consider the factors influencing motivational success- lack of money, computer anxiety, and technophobia (Rockwell & Singleton, 2002)- if they truly want to teach students from all backgrounds.

Educators must note, too, that the skills gap is growing (van Dijk, 2006). Most Internet usage, apart from emailing and texting, is passive (Lenhart et al., 2003). For example, a recent study of first-year university students in Australia confirm that apart from YouTube, cell phones, and e-mail, students vary considerably in their technological proficiency and preferences. Most of the 2,000 students surveyed had

never created a Website, kept a blog, participated in a Web conference, used RSS feeds, or contributed to a wiki (Flaherty, 2010). Digital literacy skills often determine how well a student will thrive in online learning. As reported earlier, the most successful online students embrace computer technologies and have a desire to expand their digital skills (Bowman, 2015), but not all students embrace nor desire to expand digital skills.

Financial challenges. While the literature often mentions that BL is cost saving, it has some methodological weaknesses. The results came from self-reported data, and sometimes the data underestimated actual costs. For instance, it may cost more in time and money than expected in developing online learning resources. Others (e.g. Lack, 2013) have said that the pre-post design to measure learning outcomes lacked any experimental or statistical control.

Moreover, some worry cost cutting may be obtained at students' expense (Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014). Will institutions of higher learning in today's tough economic times favor cutting costs to making learning as effective as possible?

Furthermore, from an educator's perspective, it has been noted that providing effective feedback is more time-consuming (and thus more expensive) when electronic media are used, in comparison to traditional (e.g. paper-based) assessments (Grieve, Padgett, & Moffitt, 2016). Also, using e-learning platforms can be more time consuming than traditional methods, not to mention accruing additional new costs, as e-learning platforms and service providers may charge user fees to educators.

Also, in order to sustain BL, support mechanisms need to be provided at an institutional level and can include strategies, policies, support, and service (See Graham,

Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013). For example, pedagogical support and training will be needed for the nearly 67 percent of faculty who have not been teaching online (Straumsheim, 2014). Such a high percentage may also reflect a “fear of the unknown” among faculty in higher level institutions of learning. A Gallup survey of 2,799 faculty members and 288 academic technology administrators reflects this view. Its data shows that the more exposure a faculty member has had to online or blended learning, the more positive their view. But not all faculty have seen the potential of online learning to match and even exceed the effectiveness of face-to-face learning, because they have not had the opportunity to become familiar with best practices and research-driven course design and delivery. As Vignare (2006) states, “Almost no other industry has invested as much into information technology and so little into training”.

In summary, depending upon the particular alternatives being compared, such as the implementation model, the number of students involved, staffing, the size of the investment in software development or subscription fees, etc., BL can be more or less cost effective than traditional face-to-face instruction.

While financial savings is a significant motivation for college administrators to support BL, it is not the focus of this dissertation study and will not be further addressed unless from a student perspective. Notwithstanding financial issues, it is clear administrators play a crucial role in the promotion and success potential of BL in higher education.

Other blended learning challenges. Other challenges for BL include social interaction, personal agency, and revision ease. Each of these will be discussed in turn in this section.

BL may have challenges with social interaction. Online learning deals not only with physical distance, but a psychological distance, too (Garrison, 2000; Gunawardena & Mclsaac, 2004). In online learning, strategies promoting the feeling of connectedness and belonging have appeared crucial for learning (Hara, Bonk, & Angeli, 2000; Harasim, 1993; Kitchen & McDougall, 1998; So & Kim, 2005). As a result, social presence seems to be a social and communication factor that is key to distance learners' perception of psychological distance with their instructor and other learners (Gunawardena & Mclsaac, 2004). In a study involving a 13-month graduate-level certificate program at a large midwestern university (Whiteside, 2007), the instructors emphasized the importance of establishing relationships in their courses to spur social presence. They indicated that "learning stems from relationships" and if students "don't have a relationship with somebody" or a connection to them, then students are not invested in each other and they do not have "the incentive to interact." Each of the instructors and students interviewed found that the initial community building activities were essential to establishing the foundation for social presence, building relationships, and extending overall learning. When that community building and social presence falters, a student suggested, so does the "overall learning."

However, not many BL courses are designed for social presence. Some may experience feelings of isolation and decreased motivation during the online portions

(Dogan, Bilgic, Duman, & Seferoglu, 2012). Others have expressed insufficient communication and social interaction in instructional activities (Haefner, 2000) or having reduced opportunities for social interaction with peers than in a face-to-face classroom environment (Smyth et al., 2012). If instructors do not take the extra time to communicate with students, especially in the online portion, the results could be disastrous. For example, Hartnett (2015) found that when students did not feel supported by instructors, a decrease in student engagement and motivation would occur.

Another BL challenge is personal agency. Not all BL is alike, and the use of BL does not guarantee that student agency is promoted. Among the advantages stated earlier, BL allows the learner the chance to learn new technical skills or develop skills of self-motivation, time management, and focus which are all important in other roles and jobs as these are key transferable skills. In BL settings, the importance of students' self-motivation and self-management increases because there is less in-class time and more emphasis on self-regulated learning. However, not all students are self-motivated or able to self-manage. They may allow outside distractions to interfere. They may not be able to stick to deadlines and avoid other things getting in the way of their online studies, therefore not allowing time for online work. Several researchers back this up. They found that students had difficulty adjusting to blended learning (Aycock, Garnham, & Kaleta, 2002; Bonk, Olson, Wisher, & Orvis, 2002).

An additional disadvantage is the pervasive access the technology affords. Although the flexibility to learn online and from a distance provided by BL is perceived as advantageous, the pervasive access may, too, be invasive to learners' personal lives.



For some, the online component results in more time devoted to study and less to personal concerns. This can cause these students feeling overwhelmed and tired (Smyth et al., 2012). Students may have unrealistic expectations. For example, Vaughan (2007) cited studies that revealed some BL students assumed that fewer classes meant less work, admitted they had inadequate time management skills for BL, and experienced problems with accepting responsibility for personal learning. Aycock, Garnham, and Kaleta (2002) suggested that students' poor time management skills rather than technologies were the major problem. In addition, when several components in a BL environment are not well integrated, an increase the extraneous or ineffective cognitive load in learning processes can occur. This information implies that simply turning classroom courses into blended formats does not necessarily provide students with more interactive and flexible learning experiences. Thereby, more careful analysis of learners, contexts, and technologies are needed.

The last BL challenge discussed here is the "ease in revision." Often, college instructors who have no previous experience or expertise with blended learning are being asked to design and implement such curriculum and instruction. It is not uncommon that this occurs without attention to either needed faculty professional development or appropriate technical support. Additionally, college instructors are frequently being asked to design and implement blended learning courses without consideration of the appropriateness of such technological use in relationship to the theoretical orientations and underpinnings of specific content area, teacher education programs, or individual teacher educators (Keengwe & Kang, 2012). Matters are made worse when instructors

must discern the confusion surrounding the actual design of BL courses (Welker & Berardino, 2006). BL is not easy to design. Garrison and Kanuka (2004) wrote:

There is considerable intuitive appeal to the concept of integrating the strength of synchronous and asynchronous (text-based Internet) learning activities. At the same time, there is considerable complexity in its implementation with the challenge of virtually limitless design possibilities and applicability to so many contexts (p. 95).

One of the most common mistakes when designing a BL course from an established course is that many try to simply replicate onsite activities online. This will not yield the best results. Chances are the resulting BL course will not measure up to the outcomes, rigor, and/or engagement of the onsite course (Stein & Graham, 2014). Other common pitfalls according to Stein and Graham (2014) include using technology simply for technology's sake and creating too much work for students by simply adding onsite or online activities to an existing course design and not realizing that some onsite activities may be misfits in online environments, and forcing a fit will ignore opportunities for transformative redesign.

Reliable and robust technology for the whole institution and diversified learning management systems have been recognized as prerequisites for successful BL (see Alsabawy, Cater-Steel, & Soar, 2013; Chen, Wang, Kinshuk, & Chen, 2014). Another theme in the BL literature is the necessity for the constant replacement of outdated technology. However, doing these things may prove too expensive for higher learning institutions.

Furthermore, many instructors are not tech savvy. Academics' digital fluency or confidence and skills in using online technologies remain low despite the availability and

affordances of digital technologies (Johnson, Moe, Fader, Bellman, & Lohse, 2004). The low digital skills of academics, in turn, compromises appropriate technology integration, limiting the facilitation of more effective student learning (Torrissi-Steele & Drew, 2013). Presently, the use of technology for instruction is mainly for management and administrative purposes instead of facilitating learning (Palak & Walls, 2009). Implementing BL in universities is difficult since many instructors may need to acquire new learning technology skills such as how to foster online learning communities, facilitate online discussion forums, and manage students (Dziuban & Moskal, 2013; Voos, 2003).

Time is a factor, too. It usually takes two to three times the amount of time to plan and develop a BL course compared to the amount of time required to develop a similar course in the traditional format (Johnson, 2002).

All of these challenges are further complicated for institutions of higher learning by the lack of support for course design. Successful BL experiences for students require university support for course redesign, which may involve deciding what course objectives can best be achieved through online learning activities, what can best be accomplished in the classroom, and how to integrate these two learning environments (Dziuban et al., 2006). Instructors have reported more work on their part and some loss of traditional classroom dynamics (Welker & Berardino, 2006).

This portion has just examined the advantages and disadvantages of BL. So how can educators increase BL efficiency in higher education? The next section addresses this issue.

### Increasing Blended Learning Efficiency in Higher Education

With all this activity around BL in higher education, a natural question is how well do students learn from these courses? Unfortunately, a straightforward answer has not yet emerged. A big gap exists between the kinds of learning environments we have, the scientific and technological capabilities to design courses, and what is actually commonly provided online (Bakia et al., 2013). As witnessed earlier from this literature review, BL is a somewhat confusing field of research in which different researchers focus on a multitude of variables, factors, and variants of instructional approaches in an attempt to gain knowledge about the usefulness of BL. BL environments vary widely according to the following goals: pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost effectiveness, and ease of revision. Several studies have fallen into the trap of treating the online aspects of a BL course as if they were self-contained, ignoring the broader context in which learning takes place and the relationship between online and offline activities (Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014). As a result of such muddied BL research, many researchers (Bliuc, Goodyear, & Ellis, 2007; Shea, 2007; Vignare, 2007) call for more and better research that goes beyond the case study and seeks to establish useful frameworks for the integration and application of BL in academia. They believe the research should also focus on key aspects such as access to, and quality of, BL environments.

BL is more than simply mixing new information and communication technologies with face-to-face activities (De George-Walker & Keeffe, 2010). Successful BL is defined as "practice which promotes achievement of high-quality learning outcomes and

positive student learning experiences, with high teacher satisfaction and a reasonable workload that allows staff time for research and scholarship" (Stacey & Gerbic, 2008, p. 965). Effective BL combines the strengths of online and face-to-face learning to promote the best learning outcomes for students (Vaughan & Garrison, 2005). It can be summed up as an "organic integration of thoughtfully selected and complimentary face-to-face and online approaches and technologies" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p.148).

Beyond the simple combination of face-to-face and online instruction, Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) identified the three types of mixing in a blended course: (a) learning activities, (b) students, and (c) instructors. Factors influencing this blending are the instructor, student, and institution. BL presents challenges for instructors, students, and institutions, and once these challenges are met, BL can give rise to success. The instructor, student, and institutional factors affecting the success of BL, as identified in the literature, are described below.

*Instructor Factors.* Robust teaching methods are more important for student learning than the medium of delivery. It is up to the instructor to design a good online course, one that promotes an interactive virtual community with immediate feedback (Aly, 2013). First, BL instructors need to be enthusiastic, engaged, caring towards their students, and good communicators (Shivets, 2011). Second, instructors must be taught to use the technology from the user end in order to effectively facilitate student learning. The attitude, readiness, and technological skills of the instructors are just as important, as how successfully they are used, developed, and updated the technology-based tools and resources in operation (Beadle & Santy, 2008; Harris et al., 2009). Third, instructors need

to keep in mind that successful cases of BL have shown the importance of creative and systemic thinking to overcome the limitations of standardized face-to-face and online education (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Fourth, the term “instructor” is misleading in a BL context, as the role moves to facilitator and other identities with less control over *where* and *how* learning takes place, and often requires entering into negotiation over exactly *what* content is (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Last is a quality that is not brought up much in the literature: the identity and integrity of the instructor. In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer dissects a fundamental problem with much of the discussion around educational reform:

The question we most commonly ask is the “what” question – what subjects shall we teach? When the conversation goes a bit deeper, we ask the “how” question – what methods and techniques are required to teach well? Occasionally, when it goes deeper still, we ask the “why” question – for what purposes and to what ends do we teach? But seldom, if ever, do we ask the “who” question – who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form – or deform – the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world? How can educational institutions sustain and deepen the selfhood from which good teaching comes? (1998, p. 4)

Palmer argues that education cannot be reformed if society fails to cherish and challenge “the human heart that is the source of good teaching” (Palmer, 1998, p. 3). For Palmer, good teaching is more than technique: “good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 2000, p. 11). This means instructors must know themselves, and seeking to live life as well as possible. Good teachers are connected, able to be in touch with themselves, their students, and their subjects. In a passage providing his rationale for a concern with attending to and knowing ourselves, Palmer draws out the implications of his argument:

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together.... When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject – not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. (Palmer, 1998, p. 2)

According to Palmer, if we do not know who we are, then we cannot know those we work with, nor the subjects we teach and explore. As educators, instructors can work on this by keeping personal journals, exploring their feelings and experiences in supervision, talking with colleagues and friends, engaging in contemplation, etc.

*Student Factors.* Consideration of learners' needs and management of their expectations and level of understanding is important for the development and implementation of successful BL modules (Bliuc et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2009; Mitchell & Honore, 2007). Additionally, the literature suggests that it is critical to take into account the learners' motivation (Stewart, 2002), and to ensure learner readiness (Baldwin-Evans, 2006) and learners' ability to cope with independent learning (Tabor, 2007). Mitchell and Honore (2007) see the attitude and motivation of learners as particularly significant when e-learning is involved, because those factors affect acceptance and participation. It is important to manage students' expectations, especially the false belief that fewer face-to-face class meetings mean less work. In fact, students need encouragement to take more responsibility and autonomy over their learning (Tabor, 2007; Vaughan, 2007). Moreover, BL can only be successfully implemented if the learners have sufficient knowledge of and are ready to use the technology. They must be

trained and equipped to navigate the information and communication technology required in the course (Beadle & Santy, 2008; Harris et al., 2009).

*Institutional Factors.* The main institutional factor required for successful BL is the allocation of dedicated services to support and assist learners and facilitators throughout the development and use of modules. This includes spending resources on training to encourage instructors to become actively involved and fully aware of blended learning initiatives (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Harris et al., 2009). The emphasis in this training is on the learning and the associated outcomes rather than on simply the technology. The aim is to encourage communication between users and developers, and help those involved to take full advantage of the resources available. Also, institutions of higher learning need to meet technological requirements for successful BL. Stewart (2002) suggests that course content and learning approaches be evaluated for accessibility, with consideration of bandwidth, firewalls, and connection speed. Another institutional consideration is easy and regular access to e-learning technology for both facilitators and learners (Childs, Blenkinsopp, Hall, & Walton, 2005). Although technology is obviously important for BL implementation, educators should focus on Sloman's (2007) recommendation that technology should be considered merely as a means to facilitate student learning. This shifts the emphasis from a purely technological focus to teaching learning methods instead. So far, this literature review has explored the pedagogy of teaching literature, instructional design, and blended learning in general. The CABLS framework proposed by (Wang et al., 2015) is a particularly useful example in



demonstrating the application of a systemic approach in deciding what is BL and what are the goals of blending.

### A Blended Learning Framework

While aiming for good course design to be studied, it is important to consider various models to help with course design for a blended Introduction to Literature. Even though such models often take a simple or mechanistic approach to the process of developing a curriculum, they should be explored since they can generally supply insights why various approaches to curriculum planning and development, in this case, for a blended Introduction to Literature course, fails or succeeds. BL's popularity, especially in higher education contexts, does not necessarily translate into advancement of academic practice. This is due to many factors: (a) higher education is filled with various BL designs, (b) BL courses are implemented in very different ways and under different conditions, (c) no standard definition of BL exists, and (d) instructors' digital fluency may vary.

The literature review here indicates BL's effectiveness and validity as a new form of learning have been established in practice. At the same time, the review found that the vast majority of the empirical studies into BL are research interventions of short duration conducted at either the course or task level, focusing on just one or a few aspects of BL. As a result, investigations into BL continue to be fragmented and several important issues remain unexplored. Owston (2013) notes "There is a need for research investigating why BL, despite its many inherent advantages, has not been scaled up successfully in very many institutions" (p.1).

The tools available to guide and evaluate BL course designs are limited (Smythe, 2012). Although, there are available frameworks to design and evaluate BL practices from both the perspectives of learning and teaching and IT infrastructure, these frameworks are problematic either in their design or in the criteria and standards, or lack thereof. However, one framework that aims to promote a deeper understanding of BL research and practice by using a different perspective is the complex adaptive systems model. To achieve this aim, the next portion of this section will review existing BL models, then discuss the theories of complex adaptive systems in an effort to develop a framework that effectively captures the nature and dynamics of BL, and conclude with the proposal of a framework for complex adaptive blended learning systems, known as the CABLS framework.

Review of blended learning models. Since the beginning of this century, many BL frameworks and models have emerged, and these have advanced our understanding in many important ways. The following review section discusses some of the most influential models, and documents the differences between them and the one proposed in this research.

Parsell and Collaborators' (2013) framework contains generic criteria, with an emphasis on the elements of learning and teaching. Technology appears as an additional component instead of being interwoven. Explicit BL criteria and standards would facilitate more effective learning and teaching activities as the criteria can be used to benchmark academic practice (Reed, 2014).

Smythe's (2012) framework contains five performance levels and claims to be standards-based, but it lacks the descriptions of standards for each level. This is problematic as it may cause academics to have their own judgments on what is appropriate for each level.

Shea's grounded model (2007) promotes a pyramid framework starting with "assumptions and beliefs about the nature of knowledge" (p. 31). This is followed by the identification of the theories of learning that reflect these philosophical underpinnings, the articulation of complementary pedagogical approaches, instructional strategies and, specific learning activities. The model is problematic since it focuses on only one BL aspect, the instructional design of a blended curriculum.

McSporrán and King's generic framework for BL (2005) advocates the selection of delivery methods in line with learning needs and available resources. Again, the fault of this model is that it only caters to one BL element, content delivery, which is useful in guiding the delivery of blended learning at a course level but not at guiding implementation at an institutional level.

Oliver (2003) provides benchmarks with criteria and standards, but it is basically an adaptation of face-to-face teaching principles.

The Octagonal Model proposed by Khan (2001) is a more comprehensive framework. It consists of the following eight elements: pedagogical, technological, interfacial, valuational, managerial, resource supportive, ethical, and institutional. According to Singh (2003), this model has provided guidelines for several BL programs. Even though the identification of these BL elements contributes to our understanding, it

does not underline the intricate and dynamic relationship between the elements and how they evolve together to sustain implementation beyond the course level.

The Community of Inquiry Framework developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer, (2000) recognizes the dynamic relationship between elements in online learning, but this framework is not for BL, per se, although the three elements- cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence- are relevant to BL.

As shown in this review, each of these models has its own concerns, focuses, and examines BL from varying perspectives. Although each contributes to BL understanding, none has been able to provide a complete picture of BL, because none of them has explored BL using a complex adaptive systems approach. Consequently, BL remains a large puzzle, made of intertwined disjointed parts, all trying to connect. This makes it tough to view the whole picture of BL since each element, in isolation, only offers its puzzle piece without connection to the others. Because this review recognizes this gap, and because it wants to explore how BL's constituting elements work individually and together, it is clear that a more comprehensive and dynamic type of models is needed. The solution is the complex adaptive systems theory.

Theories of complex adaptive models. Originating in physics, chemistry, and mathematics, complex adaptive systems theory has helped the world to gain an understanding into the complexity of dynamic and non-linear systems such as neural systems, ecologies, galaxies, and social systems (see Bertalanffy, 1968; Waddington, 1977; Waldrop, 1992). These systems are dynamic and open, and have the innate ability

to self-organize, adapt to, and evolve with their environment. Such a systems view provides a different lens to see the nature of BL.

BL has been seen as a complex and dynamic system (Branch, 1999; You, 1993). Therefore, the proposal of a complex adaptive systems framework for BL makes sense since the integration of technology-mediated learning with campus-based learning has made learning complex. This complexity lies not only in the emergence of new elements in teaching and learning, but also in the changes brought about by the interaction between these new elements. The technology as a new element and its impact on learning is a prime example. Lim (2002) points out that technology “may trigger changes in the activities, curriculum, and interpersonal relationships in the learning environment, and is reciprocally affected by the very changes it causes” (p. 412). Thus, a complex systems approach is needed to effectively address such complexity and the reciprocal changes in BL.

CABLS framework. To respond to this need, Wang et al. (2015) proposed a six-dimensional framework named the Complex Adaptive Blended Learning System (CABLS). It developed out of two aims: to bridge a gap in BL research- the lack of a systems approach to the understanding of BL research and practice- and to promote a more comprehensive understanding of what has been achieved and what needs to be achieved in BL research and practice.

As shown in Figure 1, CABLS is made up of six subsystems and their relationships: the learner, the teacher, the technology, the content, the learning support, and the institution. Like “any complex system, the six subsystems act within themselves

and upon one another in a dynamic and non-linear fashion. At the same time, each of these subsystems has its own characteristics and internal driving forces, depending on surrounding subsystems, to maintain its vitality. Furthermore, each subsystem also has its own subsystems, and all interact with one another to form a system of BL” (Wang et al., 2015, p.4).

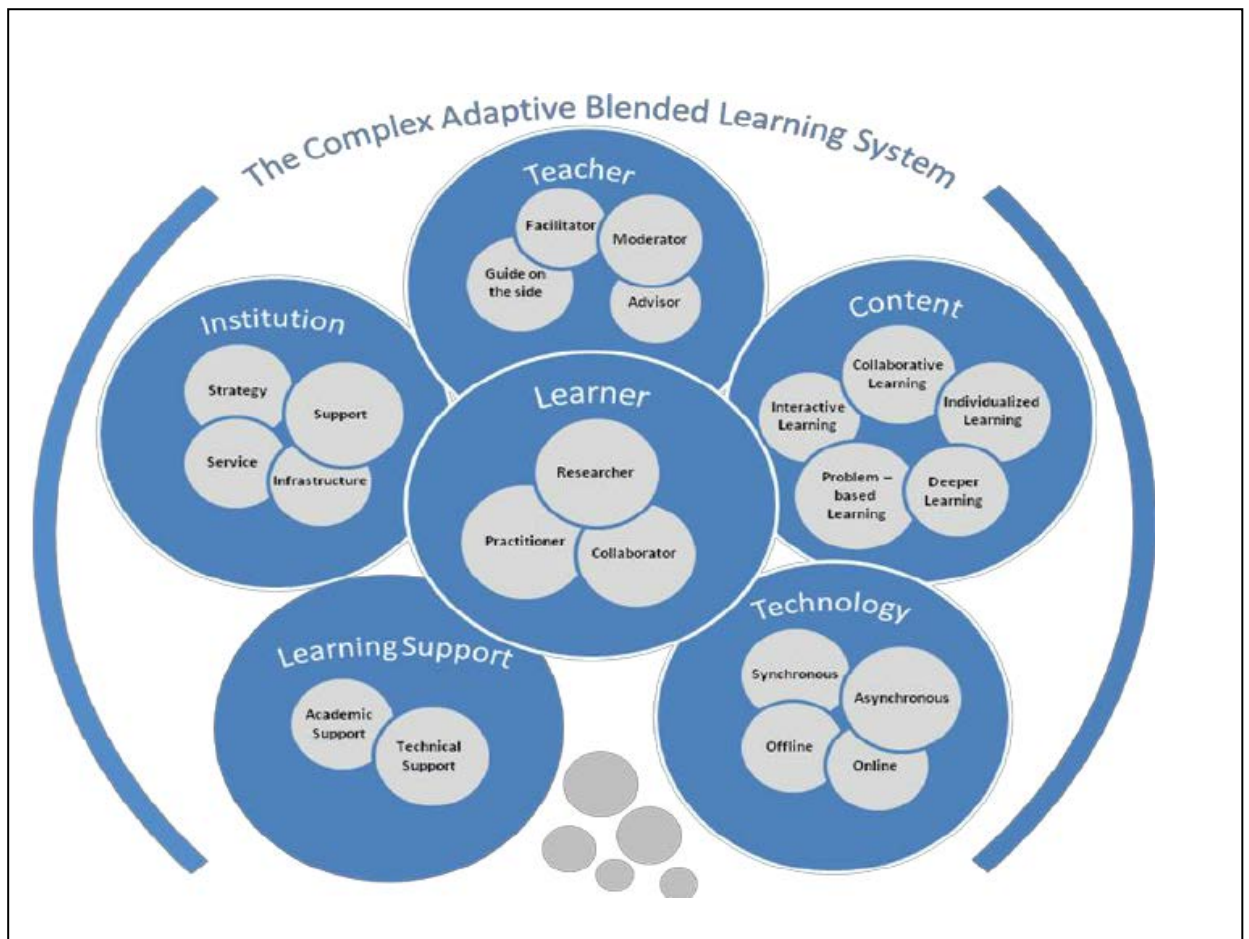


Figure 1. The Framework of Complex Adaptive Blended Learning Systems (CABLS)

Wang et al. (2015) describes each of the subsystems as follows:

- *The learner in CABLS:* As a complex subsystem, the learner co-evolves with other subsystems, continuously acquiring new identities. BL studies have reported passive learners being transformed to active participants in learning. This is from undergoing a dynamic, adaptive process of change as they interact with other subsystems in the multimodal learning environment.
- *The teacher/instructor in CABLS:* In BL settings instructors co-evolve with other subsystems, especially with learners, emerging with new identities (such as facilitators, e-moderators, advisors, guides on the side, etc.) and multi-disciplined professional skills.
- *The content in CABLS:* The content that BL learners are engaged with is a result of continuously interacting with, and often determined by, the learner, the instructor, the technology, the learning support, and the institution. This is demonstrated in Singh's (2003) categorization of BL, which captures the types of learning content taking place: blending offline and online learning; collaborative and self-paced learning; blending structured and unstructured learning; blending custom content with off-the-shelf content; and blending learning, practice, and performance support. Empirical studies have shown the emergence of deeper learning (see Moore & Gilmartin, 2010) as one of the changes caused by the new content in BL.
- *The technology in CABLS:* Ni and Branch (2008) have recognized the complex nature of technology. They identified multiple interactions within technology and

between technology and the environment. Such complexity has been insufficiently addressed in research, “thereby rendering the results of many research studies about educational technology lacking in generalizability or application” (p. 30). Additionally, the perpetual development in technology usually rejuvenate BL, while at the same time, balancing it on “the edge of chaos,” stable enough to maintain its internal structure but sensitive enough to the changing needs of the learner and the new challenges and potential brought about by new technologies. Empirical studies have revealed that new technologies generally undergo a dynamic, adaptive process of emergence, adoption, and establishment or obsolescence, retaining those technologies that best serve BL.

- *The learning support in CABLS:* Unlike other BL models, the CABLS framework pushes learning support from the background to the foreground, because of the learner’s control over his/her own learning. Here, learning support contains two kinds of support: academic support focusing on helping learners to develop effective learning strategies, such as time management and collaborative skills, and technical support focusing on helping students improve their fluency of the use and knowledge of the technological tools to complete learning tasks. These learning support mechanisms should be informed by the needs of the learner, effectuated by the instructor’s expertise, necessitated by the continuous advances in technology, and ensured by institutional support.
- *The institution in CABLS:* Including the institution as a subsystem elevates BL from the course level to the institutional level. Including support mechanisms



such as policies, strategies, support, and service (See Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013) can help sustain BL. These mechanisms are interrelated and informed by the learner, the instructor, the technology, the content, and the learning support. In turn, the institution becomes the driving force behind the development of the surrounding subsystems. This emphasis on the interdependency and dynamic interaction between the subsystems marks the difference between the CABLS framework and existing BL models.

The subsystems in the CABLS framework are not exclusive and exhaustive, but due to the constraints and focus of this study, only the essential components of BL are discussed.

When Wang et al. (2015) applied the CABLS framework to review 87 empirical studies from current BL literature, they found many gaps in BL research and practice. First, no study covers all six components or the interaction between the subsystems in BL with a systems perspective. Second, through the CABLS lens, it was discovered that relationships such as between learning support and other subsystems have not been researched. Third, the CABLS framework directs future research to relationships that have not been investigated yet in BL studies such as one-to-many and many-to-many relationships between the subsystems.

### Summary

This chapter presented and discussed the literature that forms the base for this dissertation study. First, an introduction based upon the literature made a case for what I wanted to do in my study. Next, the literature on the pedagogy of teaching literature was

reviewed and then focused upon the framework of Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of the Literary Work (1994) which was the basis for teaching the Introduction to Literature course content used in this study. This section also outlined the importance of instructional design. Since understanding the elements of literature was a key component in the content of the Introduction to Literature classes, the Perkins and Unger TfU (1999) framework was examined. The last part of Chapter 2 reviewed the BL literature. This included a definition of BL, its history, and a discussion of several findings relating to the advantages, challenges, and increasing BL efficiency in higher education. It was found that BL studies are somewhat muddled due to BL's multiple variables, factors, and variants of instructional approaches. BL environments vary widely according to the following goals: pedagogical richness, access to knowledge, social interaction, personal agency, cost effectiveness, and ease of revision. Several studies have fallen into the trap of treating the online aspects of a BL course as if they were self-contained, ignoring the broader context in which learning takes place and the relationship between online and offline activities. This section ended with describing the CABLS framework for BL proposed by Wang et al. (2015). This is a six-dimensional framework consisting of: the learner, the teacher, the technology, the content, the learning support, and the institution. Like other complex systems, the six subsystems act within themselves and upon one another in a dynamic and non-linear fashion. At the same time, each of these subsystems has its own characteristics and internal driving forces, depending on surrounding subsystems, to maintain its vitality. The next chapter explains the study's research design. Since the CABLS is the best framework to explain the data I was seeing, it made sense to

go with a mixed methods study using a qualitatively driven approach in which quantitative data is added to supplement the qualitative study in order to answer the complex research questions (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). The complexity of CABLS requires both qualitative and quantitative to capture the richness of BL. Chapter 3 also includes the research context, the materials and activities, the participants, the data collection techniques and materials, and the analytical procedures.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

In this chapter, is a description of the research context, participants, the Introduction to Literature course, and research design. Within the research design is a detailed rationale for the choice of a mixed methods approach to data collection including the individual qualitative and quantitative aspects of the study, and descriptions of the data collection techniques and materials. The chapter concludes with a summary.

#### Research Context

Existing data were collected from two Spring 2015 and two Fall 2015 sections of the Introduction to Literature course in a midsize Research II Midwestern university in the United States. This study explores the blended format in an effort to improve the University's Introduction to Literature courses. BL is a possibility for today's students who want relevant and engaging learning experiences. A 2009 survey of students conducted by the non-profit organization, Project Tomorrow ("Speak Up 2009") discovered that students enjoy online learning and are more connected to school through such experiences. This survey reported these free-agent learners are not waiting for their schools to catch up with them. They are, in fact, adopting and adapting these emerging technologies such as online learning to increase their own productivity as a learner and to personalize their learning process. Learning is not tethered to the traditional school or classroom in students' vision for 21st century education.

BL seemed to be the best format for the Introduction to Literature classes for four primary reasons. One is that BL is an approach that allows higher education institutions and their faculty to harness some of the advantages of online education without completely disrupting the normal course structure and instructor role (Christensen, Horn, & Staker, 2013). Two, the research is promising that BL can have a positive impact on efficiency, convenience, and learning outcomes. Three, by moving more of the learning online, BL courses can add flexibility to participants' schedules, provide learning benefit through online tools, and could tap into the modern, social Web to help learners venture beyond the traditional confines of traditional face-to-face learning. This seemed specially promising for the study's locale, because the university's English department has experienced problems working with students with busy schedules due to demands from their jobs and extra-curricular duties. Fourth, the university where this study was conducted is open to BL and is encouraging staff to try it since this appears to be "the wave of the future." However, as in any type of learning, a primary ingredient to serving all students well is finding ways to personalize learning and providing instructors with the data they need in order to best meet the needs of their students. More about this will be discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The following sections describe the participants and the Introduction to Literature course. Within the course section is the description about the paper-based materials, online materials, and course lessons used in the study.

### Participants

The following section contains descriptions of the teacher and student participants in the blended Introduction to Literature course.

In the Spring 2015 and the Fall 2015 semesters, data collection took place. The courses had 40 and 62 students enrolled, respectively each semester. Two co-instructors taught these students. The 102 participants were primarily first- and second-year undergraduate college students of various majors who enrolled in the course to fulfill a general education liberal arts requirement. Ages ranged primarily between 18 and 20 years old. Three students were over the age of 30. Females composed 60% and males 40% of the participant population. Ninety-eight percent were Caucasian. Two students were Bosnian, one Hispanic, and one African American. Other students were from the Midwest. All but two students finished the course, and these did not finish due to medical reasons.

#### The Introduction to Literature Course

Introduction to Literature is described in the University's course catalog as "the understanding and appreciation of the basic forms of literature through close reading of literary texts, including works originally written in English" (UNI, 2015-16). Several Introduction to Literature sections are offered at the University. A few sections are online, but the vast majority are face-to-face. The two blended sections in both the Fall and Spring 2015 semesters were used in this study. No matter the form of delivery, each Introduction to Literature instructor has the freedom to design his/her syllabus as long as the broad outcomes of being exposed to classic examples of literature and practicing the skills of close literary analysis are met.

The University's Introduction to Literature courses are part of the Liberal Arts Core (LAC). Students who plan to earn an undergraduate degree from the University

must complete the LAC. The LAC courses serve the purpose of providing a liberal arts foundation to help students develop a sense of social responsibility in addition to intellectual and practical skills. The University believes that high quality education places a strong emphasis on critical thinking, complex problem solving, oral and written communication, and applied knowledge so that students will be able to contribute to innovation in the work place. The LAC purpose is to:

actively engage students to become self-aware participants in their own personal development through thoughtful and informed decision making, promotion of life-long learning, enlarging the scope of their world to global issues and diverse cultures, and increasing their strategies for solving complex problems they will encounter in the future. LAC seeks to attain its purpose through fostering growth in three interrelated areas—skills, knowledge, and perspectives and values. (University of Northern Iowa, 2016)

Undergraduate students are required to enroll in courses from each of the following categories: Core Competency; Civilizations and Cultures; Fine Arts, Literature, Philosophy and Religion; Natural Science and Technology; Social Science; and Capstone Experience. Introduction to Literature falls into the third category, Fine Arts, Literature, Philosophy and Religion. According to the University's LAC website:

Courses in this category explore the diverse forms of human expression and enhance understanding how religious, philosophical, literary, and aesthetic ideas and experiences shape and reflect cultures and common patterns of human life. Students will develop knowledge of the complex interplay of culture, history, and human experience through critical examination of ideas and beliefs, ritual and symbol, moral codes and social values, story and poetry, visual art, music, theater, and dance. (UNI, 2016)

As stated previously, two sections for both the Spring and Fall 2015 semesters were blended. These sections provided the course data for my study. The blended sections were co-taught by myself and another professor. Co-teaching is defined as “two

teachers working together with groups of students and sharing the planning, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction, as well as the physical space” (Bacharach, Heck, & Dank, 2003). Both instructors each had many years of experience teaching 7-12 grade English and on the college level. Both instructors were eager and volunteered to do the blended Introduction to Literature course.

We designed the blended sections focusing on the American short story. This was done for several reasons. First, a short story is often defined as a piece of prose fiction which can be read in a single sitting (Poe, 1845). Thus, short stories are brief and usually interesting enough to capture students’ attention, and can be wonderful examples of types of literature, as well as themes, plot structures, writing styles, etc. Second, teaching new concepts are often lost on students when they cannot experience these concepts being used in an authentic fashion. Without several examples to assist the teaching of literature, abstract ideas such as symbolism and complex ideas such as characterization can be mind boggling. And, of course, the instructors were simply looking for classic literature to share with their students.

It was decided not only to focus on the major literary form of the short story, but also on American Literature, because American Literature and its history are directly linked to how Americans think of themselves and as a nation, even when these two may be at odds with each other. American Literature provokes a never-ending discussion which evolves as time goes on, but yet, asks and examines the same questions in each generation. This course was designed to probe the links and corollaries in the literature



due to historical periods/events and across gender, race, ethnic, culture, and socio-economic class lines.

So, the American short story, due to its conciseness, allowed the co-instructors to model literary elements and concepts immediately. Furthermore, short stories helped the instructors to supply multiple examples in a brief period of time. Lastly, American Literature, which usually exhibits an aesthetic dimension, opened a window of understanding that uniquely illuminated the human experience of the cultural past as well as the present of us as Americans. Since America is a “vegetable soup” of nationalities and cultures, American Literature, in particular, invited students to explore the varieties of human experience that lead to insights about the multicultural experience beyond the range of their own cultural limitations.

To help students interpret the American short stories, the students were taught the fundamentals of literary analysis. The definition of literary analysis used here is from Wolfe and Wilder (2016): writing that makes interpretive claims, is debatable, supports with textual evidence, that when used together argues for a thesis about the text, and explores its complexity. Literary analysis is a vital stage in the development of a learner’s critical thinking skills. In Bloom’s Taxonomy (Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956), analysis comes at the fourth level, after comprehension and application meaning. This level is where learners use their own judgment to begin analyzing the knowledge they have learned.

Literary analysis is not an easy task for instructors to teach, because it is essentially guiding students slowly through the process of understanding and critically

thinking about literature. And with so many approaches to do this, where does an instructor begin? One way is by examining a text's literary elements.

Content for our blended Introduction to Literature courses focused on the elements of literature supplemented with the author's biography and the historical context of the story. The literary elements stressed here were setting, characterization, point of view, theme, plot structure, and author style. Students were also asked what they would take away from each story. It was decided to use this approach since all stories contain some of the elements of literature. Even though a story may not contain all of the elements, some or most are still essential. When a student can read and identify the elements of literature, the short story is usually then appreciated at a higher level, as demonstrated in Bloom's Taxonomy, leading to a deeper understanding of the text. Therefore, by learning the fundamentals of any story, known as the elements of literature, the students will have a better chance to grasp a story's content for comprehension and use prior knowledge of each element to apply to the reading of any new literary text. To guide the undergraduate students toward discovering deeper literary interpretations, the steps of this process were introduced in a simplified form. No assumptions were made at the beginning of the course as to what students knew or have learned about analyzing literature prior to starting the Introduction to Literature course. In fact, the idea behind this course design was to assume that no student was prepared for the college-level reading. More about this will be discussed later under the materials sections in this chapter.

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, Rosenblatt's transitional theory of reading (1994) was used as a framework to teach the Introduction to Literature course content. The rationale behind using Rosenblatt's transitional theory for reading was based upon five main principles. First, this theory of reading shifts the teacher - and text-centered approach to a student-and response-centered approach (Beach, 1993; Langer, 1994). Second, it reinforces the belief that learning to read is a life-long process (NCTE, 1998-2015). Introduction to Literature picks up with the knowledge students have from their interactions with families and communities, and hopefully, adds to that knowledge. Third, the theory emphasizes that reading is an active process. While reading, students actively create meaning, rather than discovering it. And because meaning is created by individual readers, no single correct meaning or interpretation of any text exists. Fourth, since literary analysis is a process with no right or wrong answer, we felt this would empower students to be passionate about reading the short stories and, most importantly, encourage them to look beyond the words of the text. Fifth, Rosenblatt's theory provides a way of knowing about the world. Literature extends students' interests and encourages listening, thinking, talking, responding, and sharing. Also, literature extends language learning across the curriculum, integrating the language arts with other disciplines (Cox, 1996).

As stated before, the literary elements were supplemented by teaching about the author's biography and the historical context of the story. Often, more meaning can be attached to a literary work's text by making connections drawn from biography and history (Wolfe & Wilder, 2016). This is not in contradiction to Rosenblatt's transactional

theory. Historical, biographical, and cultural perspectives may all yield insight into literature. But the theory does assert that the fundamental literary experience is the encounter of a reader, a unique individual, with a text, which was strongly stressed over and over in the course. Jauss (1982) points out that:

...even the critic who judges a new work, the writer who conceives of his work in light of positive or negative norms of an earlier work, and the literary historian who classifies a work in its tradition and explains it historically are first simply readers. (p.164)

Since the co-teachers were teaching for understanding as their chief aim, they believed understanding the literary elements would, in turn, help lead to an understanding or interpretation of the American short stories studied. To help achieve this, they embraced the Perkins and Unger Teaching for Understanding (TfU) 1999 theory for instructional design for the blended Introduction to Literature course. TfU theory incorporates a teaching methodology that makes practical sense to instructors, using a broadly constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

Due to the fact that practically all of the students enrolled in the Introduction to Literature courses were first-year students, and were adjusting to being away from home and the college way of life, a nurturing approach was needed. Therefore, it was decided the first seven weeks of the semester be face-to-face learning. The last nine weeks would be online with two more face-to-face meetings. The first of these additional face-to-face meetings would happen one, to one and a half weeks, after first going online. This was used as a check-in so if the students were having any problems with the online portion they could be addressed. The second additional face-to-face meeting was just ahead of

finals week. This face-to-face meeting was for explaining finals, having an open discussion about the course, and bringing closure.

This BL schedule was used for several reasons. First, since the students were primarily freshmen, the co-teachers needed to develop a close relationship with them. Research indicates that effective teaching involves establishing relationships with students. For example, Duncan (2005) and Young (2006) studied student comments about online courses. They found that effective instructors, according to the students, were those who were concerned about their students, established trusting relationships, and provided structure and flexibility. They also communicated well and were active and visible as they facilitated learning. From another example, Young and Bruce (2011) examined student perceptions of online courses and found the following three factors related to their overall evaluations: community building between students and instructors, community building among students, and student engagement with learning. The initial face-to-face not only allowed the co-teachers to better know the students, but to also show concern for the students, establish trusting relationships, and provide structure.

Furthermore, the face-to-face sessions helped the co-teachers establish community not only between students and instructors, but among students as well. In addition, the co-teachers could promote student engagement. Consider the fact that most of these students are new to the college experience. Many have left the familiarity of their families, friends, and hometowns. They are in a new unfamiliar situation with strangers. The last thing needed is to make students feel more detached. Thus, we felt it was crucial to use the first half of the semester in the face-to-face format, because such an

environment can establish a nurturing community when students physically meet their instructors and peers. For purely online students, the interactions and resources available through professors, peers, and other campus sources may not be utilized or even considered. Such distance often affects students' experiences and success in a negative way. They have fewer opportunities to experience and develop the academic and social integration common in traditional face-to-face courses. These are the known predictors for student success. Without such communities, students might be less likely to persist in college and finish their degrees. Furthermore, the students may feel isolated and alienated. Face-to-face courses, on the other hand, often give students a sense of community where they may engage, interact, and support each other. Wiseman, Gonzalez, and Salyer (2004) support these claims by finding instructors play an important part in students' sense of community and their academic success. They stated that interaction with instructors may provide students with a connection to the college. They also found that the student-instructor interaction directly affects students' success. Conrad (2002) states that: "Online educators who understand that safe, nurturing environments are foremost in contributing to learners' happiness, sense of comfort, and ultimately rates of completion place the creation of community high on their list of priorities." By meeting face-to-face the first half of the semester, we believed could help students feel close to one another interpersonally. We tried to create an informal setting where we became familiar with each other's communication style, personalities, level of commitment, nonverbal cues, etc. We had witnessed on-campus students experiencing this by interacting with their peers before, during, and after classes.

A second reason the co-teachers established the BL face-to-face and online schedule at a 50-50 ratio was due to the necessity of modeling study skills. Study skills are defined as “learning strategies that help students organize, process, and use information effectively” (Kerka, 2007). Study skills, study habits, study attitudes, and study motivation play a critical and crucial role in determining students’ academic performance. What separates successful college students from unsuccessful ones directly relates to their ability to take notes, identify main themes, retain information, manage time, etc. (National College Transition Network. Study Skills, 2006). Not only are study skills important for academic learning, but also for everyday life. They can help students to be organized and successful lifelong learners and manage their jobs, households, and finances (Elementary and Middle School Technical Assistance, 2001). The co-teachers have experienced that many beginning college students need help not just with what they learn but also with how they learn it. In other words, they need to learn how to learn. When students attribute failure to internal factors such as lack of ability, or external factors, such as bad luck, their self-confidence suffers and they see effort as futile (Peirce, 2004). Mastering the skills for studying and learning thereby increases their self-efficacy and empowers them to change their approach and try different strategies if they fail. Study skills involve metacognition, “a self-awareness of one’s thinking and learning. Learners who are able to step back and monitor their thinking and learning are able to use strategies for finding out or figuring out what they need to do” (Anderson, 2002, p. 1). Research reveals that students who are strategic learners:

- Know there are multiple ways to do things

- Have increased self-esteem
- Become more responsible
- Improve completion and accuracy of their work
- Are more engaged in learning
- Improve performance (Beckman, 2002).

Lastly, students who are proficient in study skills are able to find appropriate strategies to apply to specific subjects (Kerka, 2007).

By meeting face-to-face for most of the first half of the semester, students witnessed the instructors modeling how to interpret short stories. Furthermore, the co-teachers discovered in their experiences, students “listen with their eyes” as well as their ears. They have an awareness of the instructors’ mannerisms. Being face-to-face allows students to better know the instructors and how they communicate. To better explain this, consider the following analogy. What the writer does with punctuation, bold print, headlines, and italics, the instructor does with vocal inflection and bodily gesture. All instructors communicate physically as well as orally. For example, many instructors enjoy expressing their joy and passion of teaching and their subject matter by their gestures, tone, and facial expressions. Online, to what extent can these nonverbals be conveyed?

Moreover, not only did the students learn from the instructors, the instructors learned from the students. Instructors learn much about their students from informal interactions such as before, during, and after class. In fact, most instructors enjoy interacting with their students. While on-line discussion may offer such opportunities for



informal interaction, they cannot match the experience of interacting face-to-face. Likewise, students in face-to-face courses usually find it easier to meet with their instructors and get to know them since they can meet or consult with them before or after class. Also, meeting face-to-face, since students are already on campus, allows them the physical proximity that encourages easier access to talk with their teachers. Even though online instructors have office hours, students must go out of their way to visit them on campus. Therefore, this distance factor reduces the chance that students will meet with their instructors. Although online students can talk with teachers via email or chat in real time, the medium is limited in its ability to recreate several of the nuances associated with face-to-face interactions. Thus, both students and instructors may experience a loss of the relational rewards associated with a face-to-face classroom, building relationships and mentoring with each other because they are distanced by both time and space.

Also, meeting face-to-face makes establishing a dialogue easier. This is due to face-to-face dialogue being fully verbal, non-verbal, and collaborative. As I have often witnessed in face-to-face dialogue, students speak more freely compared to online. Usually, online communication was more formal with less slang and informal grammatical forms. It seemed as if most students could speak informally face-to-face about their ideas much more freely than they could write about them. Moreover, as echoed two paragraphs earlier, face-to-face dialogue includes facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, paralinguistic features of the spoken voice, and any act other than words. Such non-verbal acts provide not only useful redundancy but also supplementation and nuance. They often permit the depiction of meanings that are difficult or impossible to

convey in words. For example, I get less meaning from a lecture when the speaker just reads from a text as opposed to a speaker who effectively uses nonverbals. Furthermore, Clark and his colleagues (e.g., Clark, 1992, 1996; Clark & Schaefer, 1987; Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986) have identified processes of *collaboration* in conversation, meaning participants can work together to confirm that *what is being said is also being understood*. This can be shown by speakers overlapping, building sentences together, and speaking and gesturing simultaneously. In addition, listeners frequently insert brief responses such as "yeah," or "hmm," and nodding which Yngve (1970) refers to as "back-channel" responses. Even when they are not inserting these discrete responses, listeners may provide constant facial feedback by their attentive, confused, or bored expressions. For example, when I instruct a student, "Now look for ways the author's style influences the theme." He/she can respond, "Would that include figures of speech?" This possibility of achieving immediate clarification is a unique characteristic of face-to-face dialogue. No other form of communication allows mutual understanding to occur as rapidly and freely. Even with synchronous online learning, students can type in a question, but little chance exists to type in a follow-up question or establish any type of dialogue with the instructor or peers. Many times such communication in face-to-face learning is valuable since it helps students to dig deeper within the lesson.

Another reason for meeting face-to-face practically all of the first half of the semester is that students are better able to focus on the lessons. This is due to fewer distractions. Their phones are not ringing, people are not stopping by for visits, no signals are coming from their technological devices such as texting or email messages, etc. I

have observed they are more likely to focus on the learning physically in the classroom with me than online in another place. Being elsewhere makes it easier for students to click through e-learning screens while “multi-tasking”, thereby accomplishing very little, if any, learning.

Furthermore, meeting face-to-face for most of the first half of the semester promotes individual attention to student needs. During a face-to-face session, the instructor may become aware that one or more students are having difficulties, either in understanding some topic or applying the learning. Good instructors watch for signs of these problems and will offer help. Online instructors, even when using synchronous e-learning, have a tougher time reading these body language cues.

#### Paper-Based Materials

The instructors used various kinds of materials to teach each section of the course. After pre-testing the students, a paper syllabus (see Appendix A: Paper-Based Materials-Syllabus for Face-to-Face Portion) was distributed to the learners about the face-to-face portion of class, which met the first half of the semester. The syllabus for the online portion for the second half of the semester (see Appendix B: Paper-Based Materials-Syllabus for Online Portion) was distributed right before midterms and also posted on Google Docs.

The primary material used for each course was the assigned textbook, which the students were required to purchase. It was the fourth edition of *40 Short Stories: A Portable Anthology* edited by Beverly Lawn. The other paper-based story was a handout titled “I Never Sang for My Teacher” by D.C. Elder (see Appendix C: Paper-Based

Materials-Drums) which was in the public domain. This piece served as the introductory short story and was utilized as a model on how to do a literary analysis. This very short story was read in class and critiqued using the literary elements which were defined and explained in class and through another handout (see Appendix D: Paper-Based Materials: Elements of Literature). The purpose was for recognizing the elements of literature and establishing a model for critique. Both students and instructors shared and compared their answers. This was the point where it was established that there is no one correct single interpretation for a literary work. What matters instead was how well one was able to make an argument for particular interpretations. In addition, the instructors used a critique sheet template (see Appendix E: Paper-Based Materials-Critique Sheet) and shared handouts from previous courses they had taught such as “Identifying Point of View” when students needed extra help.

#### Online Course Materials

The online materials were presented to students within the learning management system Google Docs. Google Docs is a “web-based document management application for creating and editing private and public, word processing and spreadsheet documents” (Technopedia, 2016). These documents can be stored online on the Google cloud and/or on the user’s computer. Access to these files is available from any computer with an Internet connection and a fully-featured Web browser. Google Docs may be viewed by other google groups and members with the document owner’s permission. Several schools have adopted Google Docs for educational needs. Most of its features are intuitive. It is similar to Microsoft Word and other word processing tools. However, in

addition to its functions as a word processor, Google Docs provides other capabilities that may be invaluable to educators such as sharing and collaborating on documents with others. For this study instructors had folders containing course handouts (including those distributed to students in the face-to-face portion of the course), PowerPoints for individual short stories read during the online portion of the course, lecture notes to all short stories read (online and face-to-face), and the syllabus. The instructors and students communicated with each other through the university's email system. The materials developed by the participating instructors were not used in any other courses.

### Course Lessons

Because almost half of the Introduction to Literature course was online, a strict attendance policy was in place. Logically, it stood to reason students must attend as many of the face-to-face classes as possible during the first half of the course. Students were limited to no more than three absences. For three absences, students could still turn in work late. However, starting with the fourth absence, the maximum points students could receive for late work was 50% of the points for the assignments. For the online portion, students could use one "get-out-of-jail-free" card to turn in work late without a penalty.

Grading for the course was competency-based. If students did not achieve "B" grade or better level on a particular assignment, it was returned with the stipulation that credit would be given once the competency level was met. Grading for the first two assignments was lenient since the co-instructors were trying to build confidence in interpretation skills and promote Rosenblatt's reader response theory that stories had no

single correct interpretation. A little more in-depth thinking was expected with each time students progressed to the next assignment.

Assessment which aligns with the constructivist theory of learning, stresses meaningful language and literary experiences. Such assessment was employed for the course. The following guidelines (adapted from Herman, Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992) were used:

- *Learning is a process of personal construction of meaning.* In the Introduction to Literature course new ideas were discussed and related to the students' personal experiences and prior knowledge. Divergent thinking was encouraged. No one right answer existed for literary interpretations.
- *Learning is not a linear progression of acquiring separate skills.* The focus was on problem solving and higher level thinking skills.
- *Learning varies according to student diversity.* Students were provided choices in their final project. If students managed their time well, they had time to think, revise, and rethink. Concrete experiences from the literature were selected and linked to personal experiences of both the co-instructors and the students.
- *Learning is affected by motivation, effort, and self-esteem.* The co-instructors tried to motivate their students with meaningful literature that could be related to personal experiences. Furthermore, students were encouraged to see the connection between effort and results. It should be noted students were able to earn extra credit if their work was exceptional.

- *Learning is social; group work is valuable.* Sometimes in class students worked with partners while performing certain aspects of literary analysis. The final project, discussed in Chapter 4, encouraged students to take on different roles. Standardized tests were avoided. The co-instructors believe learning is a holistic process. The course was designed with the intention to actively engage students in authentic listening, speaking, reading, and writing experiences across the curriculum.

A goal of the face-to-face lessons during the first half of the semester was preparing students to be independent for the course's online portion. Therefore, course activities were fairly uniform. The short stories were presented chronologically by time written and/or by how the elements of literature built off each other. In the face-to-face and online sessions for the first seven weeks of the semester, the co-teachers typically worked with the course book (with two exceptions of an added short story from the public domain included in one of the Google Docs folders).

The first class session served as an orientation to the class. Students were welcomed, introductions made, BL explained, assignments given, and the course features/policies gone over. The second session involved teaching the elements of literature and applying them to a very short story. The co-instructors modeled this process (coming up with two different literary interpretations) with student input.

Each succeeding face-to-face session included a PowerPoint presentation about the American short story assigned. Currently, the undergraduates were coming to class with limited reading and writing ability and experience, but with extensive visual experiences from their high schools. They were used to multi-media and multi-sensory

presentations. Thus, the co-instructors decided PowerPoints could be highly effective tools to aid learning if used properly. Benefits using PowerPoint are: increasing visual impact; improving student focus; engaging multiple learning styles; supplying annotations, background, and highlights; increasing spontaneity and interactivity; analyzing and synthesizing complexities; enriching curriculum with interdisciplinary material; and increasing wonder. The PowerPoints included thought/discussion questions and embedded videos to help students delve deeper into their reading. (For an example, see Appendix F: Course Lessons-Details for PowerPoint Project.) Typically, PowerPoints generally do not contain complete sentences and much text. However, the co-teachers made an exception to this rule, since each student would be making a PowerPoint presentation as part of the final project to teach a peer about a short story he/she had selected. Also, to help students better understand the use of literary elements for a particular story written long before the students were born, modern illustration would often be used to help students understand. For example, when discussing the use of grotesques in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find," the co-teachers might talk about Gollum from *Lord of the Rings* or Beast from *Beauty and the Beast*. The co-instructors tried to get each student to participate in the class discussion each session.

In summary, the face-to-face portion consisted of a very intense examination of classics of the American short story. In this part of the course, the many approaches to literature study were viewed, the lives of the authors examined, the different ways writers used the range of the elements of literature to craft their stories were discussed, and the added feature of "historical context" to help better understand what each writer was doing



was included. With this background and experience under the students' belts, they were ready to tackle the independent learning pods or online phase of the course. In terms of overall structure for each online learning pod, by midnight Friday of each week students needed to have viewed the PowerPoint presentation for the reading, read the short story assigned, answer (in writing) the questions at the end of the lecture/PowerPoint, and complete the critique sheet (close examination of the literary style elements). Students were now assigned one story instead of two each week, because it was expected that at this point students were doing multiple readings of each story and becoming more sophisticated with their literary analyses.

At the end of the online portion, students would do a final project. This is when students acted not only as literary critics, but also as literature teachers. For this project, students needed to select a short story of their choice not already read from the textbook. (It was decided to use the textbook so students would not have to incur an added expense and all class members would have access to the stories.) Each student would have to create a PowerPoint lesson over a short story for another student in the class to read and analyze (see Appendix F: Course Lessons-Details for PowerPoint Project).

The midterms and finals were surveys where students assessed their learning and provided feedback and information about the blended Introduction to Literature course (see Course Lessons: Appendices H and I).

### Research Design

This dissertation study uses mixed methods to look at students' attitudes and achievements in using web-based instruction to improve undergraduate Introduction to

Literature courses in a blended format. As a methodology, the mixed methods design involves:

it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. (Creswell & Clark, 2009, p. 5)

Broken down, the quantitative perspectives are expressed numerically and are experimental in nature as well as measurable (Glatthorn, 2005). Qualitative perspectives, on the other hand, involve "... an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Other characteristics of qualitative research are: it uses multiple methods that are humanistic and interactive, focuses on content, is emergent instead of being tightly prefigured, and is fundamentally interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The qualitative researcher tends to holistically view social phenomena, systematically reflect on who she/he is in the inquiry, is sensitive to her/his personal biography and how it shapes the study, and uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

In other words, mixed methods allow this study's research questions to be viewed through statistics and personal experiences. The research questions are:

1. What impact did the BL instructional design developed for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes?

2. What impact did the BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student achievement?
3. How do students perceive their teacher's practice and behavior in a BL environment in the Introduction to Literature course?
4. To what degree does teacher practice and behavior affect students' perceptions of the course?
5. What insights did I gain while co-teaching this blended Introduction to Literature course?

The qualitative and quantitative data from the student surveys presented in Chapter 4 and the university's student assessment of teaching in Chapter 5; as well as the qualitative data from the interviews, observations, video, and student work also in Chapter 5; and the quantitative data from the student pre- and post-tests in Chapter 5, too, all cover the first four research questions listed above. The qualitative data from my action research in Chapter 6 helps answer Research Question 5.

Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has six advantages according to Creswell (2013). One is offsetting the quantitative weaknesses and qualitative weaknesses of each method. Quantitative research is weak in understanding the context or setting in which data is collected. Qualitative research weaknesses may include biases and not lending itself to statistical analysis and generalization. Mixed method strategies can offset these weaknesses by allowing for both exploration and analysis in my study. Two, I am able to use all the tools available to me and collect more comprehensive data. This provides results that have a broader perspective of the research

problem. Three, inductive and deductive thinking are combined in mixed methods. Four, combining methodologies helps to reduce my personal biases. Five, the final results include both observations and statistical analyses for triangulation. Triangulation allows me to identify aspects of a phenomenon more accurately by approaching it from different vantage points using different methods and techniques. Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches provide additional evidence and support to validate my study's findings. Six, I can use both words and numbers to communicate the results and findings and thus, appeal to a wider audience.

Due to the large amount of various types of data collected, the results needed to be divided into three chapters. Chapter 4 contains a content analysis method design for the student surveys given at midterm and at the end of the semester. Chapter 5 contains the quantitative results of the pre- and post-tests about students' knowledge of the literary elements and additional content analysis from interviews, observations, video, student work, and the university's student assessment of teaching. Chapter 6 contains an action research summary about some of my reflections teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course. The next section describes the analytical procedure. This is followed by a brief description of each data source and a rationale for using it.

#### Analytical Procedures

This mixed methods study uses a qualitatively driven approach in which quantitative data is added to supplement the qualitative study in order to answer the complex research questions (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). As stated earlier, the research incorporates qualitative content analysis. This is "a research technique used

to make replicable and valid inferences by interpreting and coding textual material. By systematically evaluating texts (e.g. documents, oral communication, and graphics), qualitative data can be converted into quantitative data” (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007, p.5). Duriau et al. noted content analysis “is promising for rigorous exploration of many important but difficult-to-study issues of interest to organizational researchers” (p.5).

In light of the exploratory nature of the study, the grounded theory approach guided my data analysis. I did not have any specific expectations for the data before the analysis started. Rather, I expected that concepts and themes related to students’ attitudes and achievements of the blended Introduction to Literature course would emerge from the collected data through inductive content analysis and the constant comparative method. Only after I started the analysis, did I realize that the emerging concepts and themes fit into the CABLS framework. Analytic procedures fell into seven phases: organizing the data, immersion in the data, generating categories and themes, coding the data, offering interpretations through analytic memos, searching for alternative understandings, and writing the dissertation for presenting the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Each phase will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Furthermore, each of these phases of data analysis entails both data reduction, which is the process of breaking data down into manageable chunks, and interpretation, which brings meaning and insight to the words and actions of the study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

### Organizing the Data

When starting the analysis process, it is important that the researcher devotes time to organizing the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). For this study, I listed in notebooks

the data that was collected, performed the minor editing needed to make field notes retrievable, and cleaned up data that appeared overwhelming and unmanageable. Also, I logged the types of data according to the dates, times, place, and persons it was gathered from.

### Immersion in the Data

Marshall and Rossman (2011) state there is no substitute for the researcher's intimate engagement with the data by reading, rereading, and reading. Constantly, I sifted through the events, people, and quotations from the data.

### Generating Categories and Themes

Becker wrote that his "favorite way of developing concepts is in a continuous dialogue with empirical data. Since concepts are ways of communicating data, it's important that they be adapted to the data you are going to summarize" (p.109). Patton (2002) underscores the fact that much of qualitative research consists of descriptive data, the purpose of which is to show how the daily events of the phenomenon are being studied. Careful attention as to how the data is being reduced is required throughout the researcher's undertakings for the study.

Before further discussion of this phase, some terms need to be defined. Corbin and Strauss (2008) define *categories* as "higher-level concepts under which analysts group lower-level concepts according to shared properties. Categories are sometimes referred to as themes. They represent relevant phenomena and enable the analyst to reduce and combine data" (p. 159). Concepts are defined as "words that stand for ideas contained in data. Concepts are interpretations, the products of analysis" (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008). According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), the literature review suggests likely themes. Mine eventually came from the literature review, too. After starting my data analysis, I discovered the CABLS framework by Wang et al. (2015). Its subsystems became possible themes. The likely themes were theory-generated codes. In addition, vivo codes, or codes from real life data emerged in this phase, too. Themes based off the CABLS conceptual framework helped me to become sensitized to the possible relationship among themes and to recognize them in the data.

### Coding the Data

“Coding data is the formal representation of analytic thinking” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Coding took place in multiple stages, over time. The initial coding process was an open coding process. Open coding, as Corbin & Strauss (2008) note:

requires a brainstorming approach to analysis because, in the beginning, analysts want to open up the data to all potentials and possibilities contained within them. Only after considering all possible meanings and examining the context carefully is the researcher ready to put interpretive conceptual labels on the data. Conceptualizing data not only reduces the amount of data the researcher has to work with, but at the same time provides a language for talking about the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Initially, I split the data into three groups. One group was for data revealing positive results based on students' attitudes and achievement towards the blended Introduction to Literature course. A second group contained data revealing students who were indifferent to the blended Introduction to Literature course. The third group revealed data about students being negative in terms of attitude and/or achievement about the blended Introduction to Literature course.

I then continued to work with this coding phase by concentrating on concepts. Concepts exist on many levels. As mentioned in the generating categories and themes section, higher-level concepts are known as categories/themes and categories inform what a set of lower-level concepts are indicating. No matter the level, all of the concepts arose from the data. However, some were more abstract than others. Corbin and Strauss (2008) explain the conceptualization of the data process as follows:

The researcher scrutinizes the data in an attempt to understand the essence of what is being expressed in the raw data. Then, the researcher delineates a conceptual name to describe that understanding—a researcher-denoted concept. Other times, participants provide the conceptualization. A term that they use to speak about something is so vivid and descriptive that the researcher borrows it—an in-vivo code. (p. 160)

For the study, I immersed myself extensively with the data. I closely read and annotated each qualitative piece of data. I soon started “to generate theoretical properties of the category” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.106). What I was finding was reflecting Wang et al.’s work about looking at BL as a complex adaptive system (2015). During this process, the data were unitized and concepts were highlighted and labeled. Based on this initial analysis, I sorted the data into groups that reflected the CABLS subsystems: the learner, the teacher, the content, the technology, the learning support, and the institution. I was grouping the codes according to conceptual categories that show commonalities among codes, which is known as axial coding (Fielding & Lee, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These categories then became buckets into which segments of text were placed. Analysis progressed as I generated ideas about the interconnections among concepts and categories from the continuous reading and rereading of data.



This process of category generation involved observing patterns evident in the setting and expressed by participants. When categories of meaning emerged, I looked for those having internal convergence and external convergence (Guba, 1978). Thus, the categories were internally consistent but yet, distinct from each other. Here, I did “not search for the exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories of the statistician but, instead, identified the salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

In other words, my analytic focus was creating concepts out of data. First, I broke the data into manageable pieces. Second, those pieces of data were interpreted for the ideas contained within. Third, conceptual names were given to represent the ideas contained in the data. According to Wicker (1985), coding means “thinking outside the box.” Therefore, it required me to set aside preconceived notions about what I was expected to find in the research, and allowing the data and interpretation to guide the analysis. Furthermore, coding meant I had to learn to think abstractly. “The idea is not just to take a phrase from raw data and use it as a label” (p. 160). Rather, coding requires searching for the right word/s that best describe conceptually what the researcher believes the data is showing.

#### Offering Interpretations Through Analytic Memos

As categories and themes were developed and coding was well under way, I began offering integrative interpretations of what has been learned: “often referred to as ‘telling the story,’ interpretation brings meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, and categories, developing linkages and a story line that makes sense and is engaging to

read” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). According to Patton (2002), “interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order” (p. 480). This phase was concerned with evaluating data for usefulness and centrality to help illuminate the research questions being explored and to decide how they are central to the story that is unfolding about the social phenomenon.

I also wrote down thoughts about how the data was coming together in clusters, patterns, or themes developing from the accumulating data in order to gain insights “that move the analysis from the mundane and obvious to the creative” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The process was as follows. First, a piece of raw data was selected. This was used as a springboard for analysis. What I was thinking as the data was analyzed was described in a memo. Each memo was labeled as a concept. Sometimes the code label changed many times during reflection upon the information. Each memo was then assigned a color and titled with a concept that revealed what I thought the raw data was about. Memos became more accurate, complex, and longer as the analysis accumulated.

#### Searching for Alternative Understandings

Qualitative researchers need to be on guard from the beginning, being explicit about their voices, their biases, and how their identities have shaped their research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As categories and themes developed and coding progressed, I constantly evaluated my understanding of the data. Continuously, I compared the viability of themes and explanations. I checked them against the data

collected, and asked whether more or different data needed to be collected. Emerging themes and explanations were compared with those from the literature review, especially from the CABLS perspective, and I sought for any new variations or surprises. I played with creating matrices, clusters, and hierarchies with the goal of constructing a credible explanation that provided significant knowledge from the study. I used constant comparative analysis, analytic induction, and grounded theory. I noticed when the same patterns appeared repetitively, and sensed when little more could be gained from data collection, since this was saturation of data (Saumure & Given, 2008). However, Dey (1999) claims theoretical sufficiency is better terminology than saturation, because it acknowledges the fact that researchers can never know everything and no one complete Truth exists. Second, it reinforces the idea that the study has categories well described by and fitting with the data. The themes, typologies, and patterns were tested as I searched throughout the data for negative instances of the patterns.

While discovering categories and patterns in the data, I needed to critically challenge the very patterns that seem so obvious. Other plausible explanations for the data and the linkages needed to be explored. Alternative explanations *always* exist (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), and I needed to identify, describe, and demonstrate how the explanations I offer are the most plausible.

Before moving on to the quantitative aspects, I should add that the student work presented in Chapter 5 I evaluated by how deeply students analyzed the literature. I looked at their critique sheets to see how much insight they practiced and how much complexity they acknowledged in the stories they read. Also, the final project was judged

on these same criteria as well as where students were according to Bloom's Revised taxonomy. Furthermore, the action research information presented in Chapter 6 came from my journal excerpts about designing and implementing the blended Introduction to Literature course. Themes presented in Chapter 6 were the ones not highlighted in Chapters 4 and 5. LaBoskey (1994) provides a list of five characteristics which should be considered when using personal experience in research: self-initiated, improvement-aimed, interactive, using multiple qualitative methods, and using trustworthiness to establish validity. I tried to employ these characteristics in the study. Those who reject personal research will probably always see action research as a limited form of research, if they consider it research at all. However, research that is reported by others may not speak to my own practice with the blended Introduction to Literature course, whereas action research allows for just that. As Russell (2002) notes, "experience matters, and the learning is in the experience" (p. 84).

Final analysis involved the application of quantitative techniques. Quantitative data is in the form of percentages for the number of students who were able to answer correctly the pre- and post-test questions, answered the survey questions as positively or negatively, and for the number of students who answered the university's student assessment of teaching according to one of the points of the five-point Likert scale. Frequency counts were also used on the student surveys. This involved counting the number of times a qualitative theme/concept occurred (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003). The frequency was then converted as a percentage of the total count. Frequency count is

the most straight-forward approach to working with quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2009).

### Writing the Dissertation for Presenting the Study

Writing about qualitative data cannot be separated from the analytic process, because when I selected the wording to summarize and reflect the data's complexity, I was engaging in the interpretive act by giving meaning to the vast amount of raw data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Many of the aspects of the data analysis phases just discussed were interwoven with managing the research process for this study's final product. Considerations of the soundness, usefulness, and ethical conduct of this study were intertwined throughout the various phases of data analysis and writing. Much consideration was given to the value, truthfulness, and soundness of the study from beginning to end. For example, considerations addressed my roles as both researcher and teacher for the Introduction to Literature course and how these roles might shape events and meanings when interpreting the data. Lastly, the selection of the setting and sampling of participants and behaviors within that setting were based on sound reasoning. For credibility's sake, this research employed useful strategies: triangulation, peer debriefing, and audit trials.

Triangulation. Triangulation is defined here as "the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 252). This technique helps ensure my account is rich, robust, well-developed, and comprehensive (Cohen & Manion, 1986). Since a single method cannot adequately shed light on a

phenomenon, multiple methods helped to corroborate, elaborate, or facilitate deeper understandings of the research in question (Rossman & Wilson, 1994).

There are various types of triangulation. The types used in this study, as described by Denzin (1978) and Patton (2002), are methods triangulation, which check out the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods; triangulation of sources, which examines the consistency of different data sources; and theory perspective triangulation, which uses multiple theoretical perspectives to examine and interpret the data. These strengthen the study's usefulness in other settings. Following is how I employed these different types of triangulation in the study.

Methods triangulation was obtained by using various collection methods: pre- and post- tests, student surveys, student assignments, class observations, videos, student interviews, the university's student assessment of teaching, and my action research of the experience. Using different data collection methods helped me to check out the consistency of my findings and elucidate complimentary aspects of the same phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, the student surveys and the university's student assessment of teaching supplied both qualitative and quantitative data. Points where the data diverged were of great interest and provided me the most insights. For example, no matter which data collection I used, the students who experienced the blended Introduction to Literature course were generally positive in their attitudes and felt that they achieved much academically. However, each of these data collection methods also revealed a small percentage of students who had indifferent or

negative perceptions of the blended format. The various forms of data helped me pinpoint why (e.g. digital divide, poor study skills, learning preferences, etc.).

Triangulation of sources, as mentioned earlier, allowed me to examine the consistency of different data sources from within the same method at different points in time, in public vs. private settings, and comparing people with different viewpoints. For example, I conducted all the data collection methods during two different semesters (fall and spring). Data results were basically the same both semesters with the exception that the student work seemed a little stronger academically in the spring. Other examples of triangulating sources at different points in time within each semester of the study included conducting the student surveys at both midterm and during finals, and looking at student work at three different points during the course (first week, midpoint, and the final week). I triangulated sources through public vs. private settings by observing, collecting other pertinent data, and evaluating student work during both the public face-to-face setting and the private online setting of the blended Introduction to Literature course. Lastly, I triangulated sources comparing people with different viewpoints about the blended Introduction to Literature course. This included the vast majority of students who liked the course as well as those who were indifferent or disliked it. And not only did I gather student view points, but mine, as the teacher, too, in my action research which is presented in Chapter 6. This worked well with the CABLS framework, because this view contains both the learner and teacher subsystems.

Theory/perspective triangulation involves the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data. Theoretically, it is believed that viewing the data from

different disciplines or positions brings different perspectives. Therefore, if each of the different disciplines interpret the information in the same way, then validity is established (Patton, 2002). For the study, I examined the data not only through the CABLS lens, but also through the lenses of the transactional theory of reading and the TfU model.

Peer debriefing and audit trials. Another strategy for credibility is peer debriefing. This is when “the researcher makes arrangements with knowledgeable available colleagues to get reactions to the coding, ...the analytic memos written during analysis, and the next-to-final drafts” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Debriefing was done in this study with my co-teacher and members of the committee.

Lastly, audit trails helped to achieve credibility. Audit trails are a transparent method to illustrate how data were collected and managed (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This provides an account for all data and design decisions made in this study so that anyone will be able to trace the logic.

In summary, the mixed methods research methodology just outlined provided the best way of collecting rich, detailed data on the student participants’ perceptions, behaviors, and achievements as well as the insights I, the researcher, gained while co-teaching in looking at one approach in using web-based instruction in a blended format to improve the undergraduate Introduction to Literature course. The next section describes the data collection techniques and materials used in the study.

#### Data Collection Techniques and Materials

This section describes the data collection techniques employed in this mixed quantitative and qualitative study and the individual instruments used to gather the data.



As shown in Figure 2, the Methods of Data Collection Chart, the data came from various sources: student pre- and post-tests, student surveys, interviews, observations, video, student work, the university's student assessment of teaching, and the researcher's action research.

QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
	student pre- and post-tests
student surveys	student surveys
student assignments	student assignments
classroom observations	
Videos	
student interviews	
University of Northern Iowa Assessment & Course Evaluation form	University of Northern Iowa Assessment & Course Evaluation form
action research	

*Figure 2. Methods of Data Collection*

Following is a brief description of each data source and a rationale for using it.

#### Pre- and Post-Tests

Pre- and post-test procedures are commonly accepted as a viable method to assess learner outcomes of educational programs (Dugard & Todman, 1995). This procedure involves measuring the variable(s) of interest, implementing the course, and then administering a post-test to measure the same variable(s) of interest again at the end of

the program or course (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Pre- and post-testing supplies feedback to instructors by providing a baseline of the initial knowledge level of the learner from pre-testing and then revealing what knowledge the participants gained from the course from post-testing. With measurements being collected at the beginning and end of the course, course effects are often revealed by calculating the differences between the two measures (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000). These performance measurements help to address whether the program accomplished what it set out to accomplish (Hatry, 1999; Newcomer, 1997; Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000).

One advantage of pre- and post-testing is providing multiple data points, because it provides more information than a post-test-only design. Since this method provides a measure of participant knowledge prior to the start of programming efforts, it can be helpful in refocusing the information to be presented while providing a point of comparison from beginning to end (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Another advantage of pre- and post-testing is it captures factual information change. Evaluating factual knowledge or current skills can provide a more accurate measurement of change than simply perceptions of change.

On the first day of the semester for each Introduction to Literature class, the co-teachers administered to all the students a pre-test asking students to list and define the elements of literature as well as their feelings about reading (see Appendix I: Data Collection-Pre-Post Tests). This was used as a baseline to show how well students knew the elements of literature and what they felt about reading before the course began. Students were asked this information again at the end of the semester to determine how

much growth, if any, they had about the elements of literature and if they changed their perceptions about reading after taking the blended Introduction to Literature course.

### Student Surveys

An important goal of this study was to learn about the knowledge, ideas, feelings, opinions/attitudes and self-reported behaviors of how undergraduate students perceive a blended Introduction to Literature class. Using surveys is now common practice to collect such data (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). A definition of survey is the measure of experiences or opinions of a group of people through question asking (Fluid, 2014).

When conducting a survey, the questions need to be designed to minimize mistakes in the understanding of the questions and recording of the answers, as well as maintain the cooperation and interest of the participants (Dillman et al., 2009). Therefore, a tailored design method was used. According to Dillman et al., the tailored design method is “procedures that work together to form the survey request and motivate various types of people to respond to the survey by establishing trust and increasing the perceived benefits of completing the survey while decreasing the expected costs of participation” (p. 38).

While designing the surveys, it was decided the mode should be self-completion questionnaires. These are descriptive open-ended questions, in which respondents are asked to supply in-depth information upon the topic of the question (Dillman et al., 2009). Self-completion questionnaires are completed by the respondent (Bouraque & Fielder, 1995). Dillman et al. list some of the benefits self-completion questionnaires have over closed questionnaires. They do not limit the participants to set answers, so they

can express what they really mean and explain why they think in their own words. This is especially helpful when trying to determine more in depth the learners' feelings, thoughts, and experiences about the blended Introduction to Literature course. Thus, I obtained richer data. Lastly, self-completion questionnaires avoid the possibility of interviewer bias, although weaknesses in design and wording can still lead to biased reporting. One disadvantage is that they require more time and effort from the respondent to answer (Bouraque & Fielder, 1995). However, since the surveys were considered assignments for the class, and students would receive points for answering all the questions, the extra time and effort really was not an issue.

Two written questionnaires were used to obtain the data (see Course Content: Appendices H and I.) The first one served as a midterm. The second served as a final. These were sent through Google Docs. Students had one week to answer each of these questionnaires. Students were told there are no right or wrong answers, just needed honest responses. If students filled out the surveys entirely, they earned the total points. All the students filled out and returned the surveys. They probably wanted to earn the points and not have an incomplete grade for the semester. Responses were sent back to me, the researcher, who was also their instructor, through the university's email. Refer to Chapter 4 for the results.

As in any methodology, reliability and validity are issues. Reliability refers to how well data from the questionnaire can be reproduced (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A goal of the researcher is to ensure that each question means the same to the surveyor and respondent, who should be able to respond with as accurate a response as possible (Frey,

1989). I therefore followed the advice of Sudman and Bradburn (1982) in designing survey questions. First, avoid over-taxing the respondent's memory. This was not a problem because the surveys were given during the same semester as the students were taking the class. Two, ask questions that are relevant to the respondent. I accomplished this by breaking the blended Introduction to Literature course down into its design components such as face-to-face instruction, online instruction, course content, course materials, teacher practice, etc. Three, ensure what is being asked of the respondent is clearly communicated. This was tested by conducting a pilot study using the questionnaires with two sections of Introduction to Literature students the semester before the study was conducted. Also, the survey questions were shared with my co-teacher. And four, only ask for information the respondent is likely to have, in which the questions were all based upon their experience and attitudes they had in the blended Introduction to Literature course.

Validity is how well the questionnaires measure what they intended to measure (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This involves three types of validity: content, criterion, and construct (Meadows, 2003). Assessment of content validity is based on the extent to which the questionnaires' content includes everything it should, and not anything else. Evaluating content validity of the study's questionnaires were based on expert review. The questions were evaluated by my co-teacher and a professor teaching survey methods at the graduate level. Criterion validity refers to how well the questionnaires are able to predict some future event, behavior or outcome, or how it compares with a similar measure of the same thing. After reading about the CABLS framework, I predicted the

success or lack of success of a BL course depends upon how well the various CABLS subsystems of the learner, the teacher, the content, the technology, the learning support, and the institution interrelate and work with each other. Construct validity was based on the extensive use of the survey questionnaires and the amalgamation of all the evidence of their performances, including content and criterion validity. This means I had to provide evidence that my data supported my theoretical view that BL is better captured through the CABLS holistic circular perspective than the previous BL linear models that captured only an aspect or two of BL's factors. Thus, the data presented in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 support my prediction. Lastly, it should be noted that typically it is best to use existing questionnaires that have been widely used and have been shown reliable and valid. However, this was not possible. In this case, the information requirements of the survey questionnaires needed to be specific to a one-of-a-kind study. Therefore, I constructed the survey questions.

### Interviews

For clarification or obtaining additional information from the other methods of data collection, informal interviews were used. Kvale (1996) describes qualitative interviews as “a construction site of knowledge” (p.2), where two (or more) individuals discuss a “theme of mutual interest” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p.2). The type of interviewing used in this study was the informal, conversational interview which “takes place on-the-spot, as casual conversations are entered into with individuals and/or small groups. It is spontaneous and serendipitous” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Interviews have benefits. An interview quickly yields a quantity of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Combined with observations, interviews allow the researcher to understand the meaning that the everyday activities in the blended Introduction to Literature course had on participants.

As with other data collection methods, interviewing has limitations. Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest some of these. They point out that interviews are usually intimate encounters that depend on trust. Furthermore, in some instances, interviewees might be unwilling or uncomfortable sharing all that the interviewer wishes to explore, or they might be unaware of recurring patterns in their lives. Also, interviewees may not always be truthful (Douglas, 1976).

However, I tried to counter the aforementioned limitations of interviewing by explaining to participants how they are protected through the IRB; establishing a rapport with participants; and having these interviews in informal, conversational settings to help the student participants feel more relaxed. Also, I tried to be a good listener, frame my questions carefully, and gently probe for elaboration. I aimed for empathetic understanding. Since the main purpose of the study was to uncover and describe learners' perceptions of the blended Introduction to Literature course, I tried to nurture a sensitive awareness of the students' perceptions of the course as they viewed it, seeking to understand the world of each of my students as if I was "wearing his/her shoes." For the interviews and the surveys, it was the subjective that mattered. To make more objectivist assumptions, I would triangulate the data from both of these sources with other methods such as the student pre- and post-tests, student questionnaires, observations, video,

student work, and the university's student assessment and evaluation of teaching which are presented in Chapter 5 as well as my action research which is presented in Chapter 6.

Interviews took place spontaneously before and after face-to-face sessions, through emails, and office visits. Responses were written down in a notebook. Analysis of these informal interviews followed the same procedure as the observations.

### Classroom Observations

Observations have much to offer the qualitative researcher. Marshall and Rossman (2011) define observation as “the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (p.79). “Observations enable the researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses, providing a ‘written photograph’ of the situation under study” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993).

Observations are important because it is not unusual for persons to say they are doing one thing, but in reality, are doing something else. Observations are the only way to discover this (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Also, because people are not always consciously aware or able to articulate the subtleties of what exactly happens in interventions among themselves and others, observations give researchers the perspective to notice what is happening (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In other words, observations provide the means to help researchers check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, reveal how participants communicate with each other, as well as checking for how much time was spent on different activities (Schmuck, 1997).



Due to the fact that one of the analytical methods used in this research was action research, the researcher was a participant observer. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) define participant observation as “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting” (p.91). In this stance, the researcher can generate a more complete understanding of the group of participants (Gold, 1958). As Patton (2002) stated, “Creative fieldwork means using part of oneself to experience and understand what is happening. Creative insights come from being directly involved in the setting being studied” (p. 302). DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) and Adler and Adler (1994) echoed the power of participant observation. They stated that the peripheral membership role helps the researcher to achieve the goal of participant observation: to create a holistic understanding of the phenomena being studied to help answer research questions, build theory, and generate or test hypotheses.

However, the degree to which the researcher participates in the study influences the quality and amount of data collected. Various stances exist. These are: the complete participant (a member of the group being studied and who conceals his/her researcher role from the group to avoid disrupting normal activity), the participant as observer (a member of the group being studied, and the group is aware of the research activity), the observer as participant (the researcher participates in the group activities as desired, but performs the main role of collecting data while the group being studied is aware of the researcher's observation activities), and the complete observer (the researcher is completely hidden from view while observing or is in plain sight in a public setting so that subjects are unaware of being observed). The most ethical is the observant as

participant (Kawulich, 2005). Kawulich reasons this is because not only are the participants aware of the researcher's observation activities, but also that the emphasis is for the researcher to obtain data, instead of participating in the phenomena being observed. Observant as participant is the stance I followed. Even though no best approach for conducting participant observation research exists, the most effective work is done by researchers who view their participants as collaborators (Whyte, 1979). I tried to view my students from the blended Introduction to Literature as collaborators by building stable teacher-student relationships with them. Doing otherwise would have ignored the collaborative relationship between myself as the researcher and them as the participants, thus hindering the research process and my skills in administering the research.

After each face-to-face class period and for each online independent learning pod, I made some generalized observations about interesting happenings that captured my attention and recorded these in the form of raw or rough field notes. If the incident proved to be significant, then I made further notes about the event on what actions and words occurred, and by whom. Concepts drove the data collection and analysis. The concepts were originally derived from my notes which were analyzed with my co-teacher. These concepts, in turn, became the basis for subsequent observations, though not entirely. Each additional day of observation offered another chance to follow up on previously identified concepts as well as discovering new ones. For better validation/triangulation, observations were followed up by informal interviews, conversations, checking progress on academic work, questionnaires/surveys.

## Video

Video is changing the way researchers practice their craft, offering not just new ways of presenting, but new ways of practicing, field research (Shrum, Duque, & Brown, 2005). It is quickly becoming part of everyday 21<sup>st</sup> century life. Video can provide the sights, sounds, and feel of the phenomena under study for not only the original investigators but anyone who wishes to view its contents (Ball & Smith, 1992). It can convey the visceral experience. In fact, technologies such as audio recording, film, and video have a long history of use in many areas of social and psychological research (Gibbs, Friese, & Mangabeira, 2002).

Furthermore, video has some benefits to note taking and tape recording. Both note and tape modes rely on the researcher's ability to observe accurately as well as the researcher's memory to distinguish auditory nuances, visual objects, and behaviors. While, on the other hand, video offers a researcher unlimited visual and auditory replay of observations and interviews (Kanstrup, 2002; Secrist et al., 2002), thereby usually providing a richer and more transparent stored data source for analysis and review by other researchers.

Video recordings were from four class sections. The full class periods covering Amy Tan's "Two Kinds" and Toni Bambara's "The Lesson" were taped. One of the technicians from the university's instructional technology department did the filming using a single camera. Video was a distraction only in the initial minutes of class. Then the participants acted as if no camera was present. I compared my observations from the

videos to the informal interviews, conversations, academic work, questionnaires/surveys and other observations for validation/triangulation.

### Student Work

Documents such as student work can be useful research data. These can provide background information. Content analysis was used to interpret this data. Researchers currently use this approach to focus on “the presence, meanings and relationships of ... words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages” (Busch et al., 2005). The main advantage of using this method is that it does not disrupt ongoing events. Student work can be collected without disturbing the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher determines the emphasis after the data has been collected. As in working with any type of qualitative data, a possible weakness is the span of inferential reasoning. That is, the student work entails interpretation by the researcher. Therefore, I took great care employing the logic of interpretation used in inferring meaning from the student work. This is explained in the following paragraphs.

I collected three assignments from three different students of varying abilities. One student was a high achiever, another was average, and the third was among the lowest achievers. The assignments were taken from different points in the semester. The first was the first assignment of the course, the second from mid-point in the semester, and the third was the last assignment before the final project. These individual samples of student work were scored on the ability to read critically and thoughtfully. Reading critically and thoughtfully involves two criteria for a literary analysis: insight and complexity.

Insight is defined here as the ability to arrive at an intuitive understanding of a literary work's big idea by using only small clues from the text to get there. The literary elements would supply these clues. By practicing insight, students use observations about character behavior to figure out his/her true emotions and motivations. Critical thinkers about literature pay attention to the little details in a text, because they add up to what is meaningful about a story. For example, Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice* openly declares his dislike for Elizabeth, causing readers to first assume he is an arrogant person. But by using insight, a reader will notice small details such as how Darcy's eyes linger on Elizabeth's face and how he was flustered when she is around. Add to this mixture the conflict of Darcy's surface behavior with his true feelings of attraction. His society believes the difference in the social classes he and Elizabeth come from would never work in a marriage. Thus, thinking about the story's small clues gives insights about some big ideas within the literary work such as appearance vs. reality, the power of wealth and social stratification, and the unpredictable nature of love and attraction.

The other criteria in interpreting literature through using the literary elements is acknowledging complexity. Like life, the situations found in a literary plot are complicated due to social forces such as interpersonal relationships, moral codes, personal desires, and power structures. Multiple factors shape what is true. In order to acknowledge complexity in a literary work, readers need to refrain from making broad generalizations about a text that make quick simple judgements about a character. Each facet of a literary work needs to be explored carefully and multiple influences on events considered. Tensions between multiple sources that create the story need to be explained.

For example, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* contains tensions between slavery, freedom, love, and injustice. A literary interpretation that has not looked at the complexity of this story might assume: Sethe murdered her own daughter. This act was wrong, and caused the ghost of the child to haunt her throughout the novel. This is a simplistic observation. It does not acknowledge all the different forces that contribute to what the character has done. A better analysis notices the complexities. For example, a culture of slavery may upend what is morally right and wrong. Sethe's past experiences with violence reinforce the fear she has for her daughter's fate and transforms the murder into a protective act. As the story progresses, Sethe is haunted by the angry spirit of her daughter and by the memories of everything that slavery took from her. Viewing the complicated nature of human experiences within the text allows us to access the big ideas that reveal the deeper meanings of a story. Ideas such as the parameters of maternal instinct, the consequences of injustice, and the question whether or not ethics can even exist in a corrupt moral system expose richer and deeper meanings of *Beloved*.

When determining at what level my students were for the first assignment, I divided their work into three groups (low, average, and high) based upon how they practiced insight and acknowledged complexity. In order to write good literary interpretations it is important that the reader think a lot about the story's small moments that complicate the storyline. This requires practice. This is why I decided to check students' progress also at the midterm and at the end of the semester with the final project, which entailed creating a PowerPoint where students take on roles of teachers of literature as well as literary critics. Much of this was explained earlier in the course

lessons section of this chapter. This assignment encouraged students to use all the levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy: recalling knowledge from memory; understanding by constructing meaning from different types of functions, be they written or graphic messages or activities like interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, or explaining. The students were also analyzing by breaking materials or concepts into parts, determining how the parts relate to one another or how they interrelate, or how the parts relate to an overall structure or purpose; evaluating by making judgments based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing; and creating by putting elements together to form a coherent or functional whole; reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure through generating, planning, or producing.

#### University Student Assessment of Teaching

At the conclusion of each semester, the university distributes anonymous evaluations to students. It is a paper survey asking students to provide answers using a rating system and open-ended feedback. Instructors are not present during the evaluation and did not see the evaluation results until after grades have been submitted. Even though no such evaluation generates 100 percent honest feedback, it can supply valuable feedback about a professor's attitude and teaching methods (Clayson, 2009). These evaluations were given for each of the four sections of the Introduction to Literature course. Data from this assessment appears in the next chapter.

### Action Research

In this section, a definition of action research and the rationale for why it was chosen as one of the methodologies for this study are provided. This section also explains how the researcher conducted the action research.

Action research “is a process in which participants examine their own educational practice systematically and carefully using the techniques of research” (Watts, 1985, p.118). Ferrance (2000) described action research as “a cycle of posing questions, gathering data, reflection, and deciding on a course of action”, while Lewin (1946) stated that action research is a process of planning, action, and searching.

I had various reasons for using action research as one of my methodologies. Not only was I researching, but also co-teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course. In exploring why action research is a valid research methodology, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) point out that action research, unlike other methodologies, allows a critique of teachers’ work and workplaces. Furthermore, I believe that I should have the power as a teacher to make decisions for my students based on the observations and interactions with my students as well as on all available evidence that I deem relevant as long as my students achieve. When a researcher’s purpose is based in a refocusing of ends questions and a reformulating of who gets to make decisions about curriculum and instruction, action research is the appropriate, systematic method of investigation since action research allows a teacher to reformulate the classroom’s purpose (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). According to Wang et al. (2015), the success of a BL course depends upon how well its subsystems interrelate and work with each other. Since one of the CABLS



subsystems is the teacher, I decided I needed to explore my own teaching practices to determine how to help myself and other literature teachers, present and future, understand BL. Action research best aligned with these goals.

According to Hopkins (1985) the basis for action research by teachers revolves around the following criteria:

- The teacher's primary role is to teach and the research does not interfere or disrupt this commitment.
- The methodology used is reliable enough to allow teachers to formulate hypothesis confidently and develop strategies applicable to the classroom situation.
- The teacher is committed to the research problem being studied.
- The teacher follows ethical procedures when researching.
- The research adopts a perspective where members of the educational institution build and share a common vision.

Action research is a cyclical process. I started out with a problem: to study the approach my co-teacher and I implemented for using web-based instruction to improve undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses in a BL environment. Then I designed a potential solution. I designed a blended format for the Introduction to Literature course using a face-to-face format the first half of the semester and an online format for the second half. The blending used the CABLS perspective. The course content used the transactional theory of reading and the TfU model. Next, I implemented the blended Introduction to Literature course. Once I started the implementation process, I also

reflected on the results I was experiencing. This process was repeated again and again several times throughout the two semesters of the study. After all, “a cycle of action and reflection is the heart of action research” (Bourner, Cooper, & France, 2000). Reflection was a process of entering into dialogue based on the data collected and being guided by a systematic framework to discover how I might best improve the Introduction to Literature course. While reflecting, I asked:

- What did my co-teacher and I intend to do with the blended Introduction to Literature course?
- What actually happened?
- Why did this happen?
- What are we going to do the next time?

“Taking the time to reflect critically on the things we are doing in our classrooms is perhaps the most effective thing we can do to ensure that what we are doing is having the desired outcomes, and is changing our practice in the ways we do it to” (Ham, Wenmoth, & Davey, 2008). Lastly, I needed to capture the learning. This was accomplished by writing the dissertation, a process that involved recording and storing the learning in a way that is accessible to others. Highlights of my reflections are presented in Chapter 6.

Throughout the course of this study, I kept a reflective research journal. During the entire process of designing, implementing, and co-teaching the Introduction to Literature course, I wrote in the journal as soon as possible after the end of each class session, as well as at other times when I had an insight that seemed important to remember. Reflections were recorded about the co-teaching: what went well, what did

not go so well, what was surprising, and what things to change. I also had weekly discussions with my co-teacher about my thoughts and feelings about the research process itself, as well as any frustrations, uncertainties, and difficulties teaching the course. It became “part autobiography, part field-notes, and part self-psychoanalysis” (Schulte, 2005, p. 36). This reflective research journal became a valuable artifact.

Traditionally, studying my own students would be viewed as biased (Creswell, 2013). However, the specialized knowledge I have of my students, the transactional model of teaching literature, and my own teaching experience, makes the study possible because my observations of the process are specific and context-rich. As Gruhler (2004), Black and Wiliam (1998), and Good and Brophy (2003) concluded, it is only the teacher who can observe closely, reflect, and comment on students and instruction in order to understand and ultimately make adjustments to improve classroom practice. Without an understanding of the Introduction to Literature context—from my vantage point as the teacher interacting with my students that comes from action research—the research questions could not be answered with such comprehensive data.

Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2009) state that action research is important for many reasons. First, it challenges and/or confirms our beliefs and assumptions as teachers. Second, action research helps us to share with colleagues about teaching. Third, action research allows teachers to focus on what interests them as teachers at a level appropriate to them. Fourth, action research puts teachers in the “learner” situation where they are also engaged in inquiry. Last, action research contributes to the knowledge pool at my institution and for my profession. The benefits of action research include improved

teaching and better student outcomes as well as improved teacher confidence due to evidence based teaching.

#### Ethical Considerations

Attention was given to all guidelines put forth by the Institutional Review Board at the university. Requirements for the Introduction to Literature course were not any different than what would be required if no research was conducted. The only difference is that some class sessions were videotaped to demonstrate blended teaching and student engagement. With that in mind, several steps were taken to make certain the privacy of study participants was protected (Locke, Spriduso, & Silverman, 2000). A protocol of informed consent was followed to make sure participants were protected. Prior to beginning class, every participant was asked to sign a consent form signifying his or her willingness to be filmed for the study (see Appendix J: Ethical Considerations-IRB Consent).

Additionally, consideration was taken to inform participants about the process of data collection, security, and storage. In this case, data from the study was stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office I shared with my co-teacher. Computer records were protected by electronic coding or passwords. For students who wished not to be filmed, their faces and bodies were blocked out in video clips. Furthermore, grades were not affected since the co-teachers did not see who wished or did not wish to be filmed until after grades were turned in. Video clips not used will be destroyed six months after the dissertation has been completed. Students were informed they had a chance anytime during the course to express their wish not to participate in filming without penalty. Also,

they were informed any extracts from student quotes, examples of student work, etc. used in this research will not identify the student. Names will not be attached to specific pieces of data presented to the public. If needed, pseudonyms will be used for qualitative data and aggregate results only will be reported for quantitative data.

### Summary

The goal of this research was to look at the use of web-based instruction to improve undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses in a blended format. A mixed-methods approach that was qualitatively driven with quantitative data added was appropriate in answering the research questions. Such methodology provided a better understanding of the research problems than using either a quantitative or qualitative approach alone. Various alternative sources of data afforded triangulation for the purpose of verifying data. Existing data for this proposed study had been collected from student pre- and post-tests, student surveys, student assignments, classroom observations, videos, student interviews, and the researcher's action research of the experience. The researcher acknowledged and responded to ethical considerations in the research process, as well as followed appropriate methods of data collection and analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of the student participants' perceptions and achievements in taking a blended Introduction to Literature course. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 follow with those findings.

CHAPTER 4  
RESULTS SUMMARY: STUDENT SURVEYS

Introduction

This research examined the use of web-based instruction to improve undergraduate Introduction to Literature courses in a blended format. I was interested in what perceptions college undergraduates (primarily freshmen) have regarding blended learning and the teaching of literature. To gain rich data, I employed a mixed methods approach. The data were gathered through multiple data points. These included student surveys, student interviews, students' pre-and post-tests, student assignments, the university's student evaluation of teaching, classroom observations, videos, and the researcher's action research of the experience. Each of these data points were discussed in Chapter 3. The various components of this study's research methodology provide triangulation. Triangulation is used to indicate that two or more methods are employed in a study in order to check the research of one and the same subject, the idea being to increase confidence in a result with different methods leading to the same result (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006).

The research questions of the study directed the collection and interpretation of existing data. These were:

1. What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes?
2. What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student achievement?

3. How do students perceive their teacher's practice and behavior in a BL environment for the Introduction to Literature?
4. To what degree did teacher practice and behavior affect students' attitudes about the course?
5. What insights did I gain while co-teaching this blended Introduction to Literature course?

However, after the data was collected and the analysis of it began, it became clear that research questions three (How do students perceive their teacher's practice and behavior in a BL environment for the Introduction to Literature?) and four (To what degree did teacher practice and behavior affect students' attitudes about the course?) were no longer pertinent. The data to these questions was absorbed by research questions one (What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes?) and two (What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student achievement?) Therefore, from here on out the study will no longer use questions three and four. Research question five (What insights did I gain while co-teaching this blended Introduction to Literature course?) will be dealt with in the Chapter 6.

Since so much data was collected for this study, the results are split among three chapters. This chapter focuses on student surveys. Chapter 5 focuses on student interviews, pre-and post-tests, student assignments, the university's student evaluation of teaching, classroom observations, and video. Chapter 6 focuses on action research.

### Surveys

Presented in this chapter is the summary of the results of the two questionnaires I designed that were used to survey students in the blended Introduction to Literature course to help answer the following research questions:

1. What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes?
2. What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student achievement?

A pilot study was conducted to review the questionnaires and evaluate their effectiveness. This was done with two sections of the blended Introduction to Literature course the semester prior to this study. The first questionnaire was given to students at midterm (See Appendix G: Course Lessons Midterm Survey). The second questionnaire was given at the end of the semester (See Appendix H: Course Lessons-Final Survey). The questionnaires were developed in order to survey students participating in the blended Introduction to Literature course on their perceptions and attitudes about our approach to BL and teaching of literature. The self-administered questionnaires were sent out and back through the university's email system. Once the questionnaires were returned, they were printed and student identifications were removed.

The responses of the participants provided many insights which are provided later in this chapter. Furthermore, in order to improve the course, the questionnaires/surveys helped to identify student expectations, measure satisfaction levels, and determine specific areas for improvement. In the area of student assessment,



good research is one of the most important bases for sound decision making. Light, Singer, and Willett (1990) argued, “If used wisely, it (survey research) can lead to improvements throughout the entire fabric of an institution” (p. 234).

Data for this study were gathered over two academic semesters (Spring 2015 and Fall 2015) with four sections of the Introduction to Literature classes (two sections per semester) using the BL format. The 102 participants surveyed consisted of mostly freshmen 18 to 19 years of age. All of the students returned the questionnaires since these were part of their assignments. Students were not graded on their answers. They were given credit for completing them.

The questionnaires consisted primarily of open-ended questions. Such questions allow elaborate responses, insights, and/or issues not captured in closed questions. Through the analysis, I examined patterns and trends in the student participant responses so that I could reach certain conclusions. Here are the general steps I attempted for the analysis of the open-ended responses. First, I read through each student response carefully at least twice. As I read through the responses, I saw some common themes emerging.

Next, I developed coding categories. It was helpful to use the theoretical CABLS model for my main codes since my study became grounded in theory after I realized that BL is a complex adaptive system. Using CABLS coding categories was a means of sorting the descriptive data I collected so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data. Therefore, the main themes and organization of this chapter are the CABLS subsystems: the learner, the teacher, the content, the technology,

the learning support, and the institution. As stated in Chapter 2, the complex adaptive systems theory provides concepts well suited to inform the design of blended learning environments. BL is not linear and externally controlled, but happens in a chaotic, yet guided manner. BL has a “great many independent agents interacting with each other in a great many ways” (Waldrop, 1992, p. 11). CABLS demonstrated this. It uses complexity science as a way of investigating and discussing BL which is resistant to being understood through reductionist analysis. Davis (2015) noted that, “Unlike analytic science, complexity science is defined more in terms of its objects of study than its modes of investigation.” (2004, p. 150). Unsurprisingly these “objects of study” are identified as complex and have behaviors and traits that in some ways exceed the aggregate of the components. Aristotle proclaimed in his *Metaphysics* that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts; complexity science revitalizes this principle after centuries of understanding the universe as clockwork mechanisms. However, complexity science in general and its applications to education in particular continue to be works in progress.

Third, I had to come up with a plan to narrate the qualitative data in tables. I looked at the survey questions and used them to form the table headings. After doing this, I began seeing what the patterns and trends were in the responses and the main issues raised by the student participants in their responses to each question asked. These became the subthemes. Once I categorized and coded the data, I charted the subthemes with a few examples of students’ comments. Since data reduction was essential, I employed summarizing talk due to the vast amounts of data that was collected. I wanted to provide a richness, breadth, and depth of information about the blended Introduction to Literature

course. However, including all of the students' comments would have been too overwhelming. Therefore, I included an exhaustive list of their comments within the appendices. This process enabled me to see what categories are related, where trends and patterns can be identified, and if there were common themes emerging.

The exception for this process was the information contained in the first table. According to the CABLS framework the learner co-evolves with other subsystems, constantly acquiring new identities. This is a result of undergoing a dynamic, adaptive process of change as they interact with other subsystems in the multimodal learning environment. I wanted to see if my BL study was confirmed by the literature (Forsey, Low, & Glance, 2013; Hsu & Hsieh, 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2013; Owston, York, & Murtha, 2013; Perez, Lopez, & Ariza, 2013; Kiviniemi, 2014) stating that BL often transforms students from being passive to becoming active participants in learning, improving their learning outcomes and behaviors, as well as their overall positive reception of BL. To do this, I tallied the number among the 97 percent of the students who responded to the questionnaires as being transformed some way by the course. This was then converted to percentages and my interpretation of how they saw themselves change.

As for the quantitative aspects, percentages were used for the number of students who answered the survey questions as positively or negatively about the course. Frequency counts were also used, because it is the most straight-forward approach to working with quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2009). This involved counting the number of times a qualitative theme/concept occurred (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003).

The frequency was then converted as a percentage of the total count. is the most straightforward approach to working with quantitative data (Creswell & Clark, 2009).

The questionnaire material is supplemented (triangulated) by other data such as student pre-and post-tests, interviews, classroom observation, video, student work, the University Student Assessment of Teaching, and action research. Results from this data are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

A few other things need to be noted. First, all the CABLS subsystems are dependent and interrelated to each other. This is so much the case that the data often proved difficult to separate into categories. Thus, the information slotted in one CABLS subsystem category could easily fit in another subsystem category. Second, this process by which data were generated, gathered, and recorded in order to piece together students' responses to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience with the blended Introduction to Literature course is described in greater detail in Chapter 3. Third, this study was submitted and approved by the institutional review board. The Informed Consent Form to be signed by participants and the Institutional Review Board form are included in Appendix J: Ethical Considerations-IRB Consent. The first subsection deals with data collected from the student surveys focusing on the learner.

### The Learner

The center of a BL course is the student. Given that each student has different learning needs at different times such as learning at different paces, having different aptitudes, and entering the blended Introduction to Literature course with different experiences and background knowledge, the co-teachers needed to design a course that

could offer customized instruction so that the individual students have the opportunity to realize their full potential. It was decided that these students would benefit most from curriculum that promotes independent thinking, active learning, and a joy in reading. Higher level thinking and open-ended assignments were included with frequent authentic evaluation. In BL environments, the co-teachers needed to keep in mind that the learner co-evolves with other subsystems, continuously attaining new identities (Wang et al., 2015). This study confirms the transformation of learners as reported in the literature from passive to active learners. This is a result, as Wang et al. (2015) explained, of “undergoing a dynamic, adaptive process of change as they interact with other subsystems in the multimodal learning environment” (p.383). Not only did students see themselves changing from passive to active learners, but as acquiring other new identities, too. These included being transformed from a knowledge repeater to a critical thinker, a dependent learner to an independent learner, a surface reader to a close reader, a non-literary person to a literary connoisseur, and from student to teacher. Appendix K: Surveys-Student Identities contains more detailed information on this topic.

Studies from the literature focused on learners in a BL environment in the following relationships: learner-teacher, learner-content, learner-technology, learner-learning support, and learner-institution relationships. As in the literature, the data in this chapter pertains to these relationships centered basically on student achievement and student satisfaction. To achieve a more comprehensive view of the learner subsystem, the data for the research question: “What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes?” needs to be considered.

The overall findings point to improved learning outcomes and behaviors, and students' positive reception of BL for an Introduction to Literature course. For example, this study supported Forsey, Low, and Glance's 2013 findings that "students feel more accountable regarding the ideas and theories explored in class" (p.481). Also, this study affirms Hsu and Hsieh's observations (2014) about the development of "metacognitive ability in comprehension, argumentation, reasoning and various forms of higher order thinking" (p.233). Furthermore, this study's data seemed to echo McLaughlin, Griffin, Esserman, Davidson, Glatt, and Roth's (2013) conclusions that BL "promoted student empowerment, development and engagement" (p.196). In terms of students' perceptions about BL, the data here confirms much of the literature that students feel that BL is a positive experience (see Perez, Lopez, & Ariza, 2013; Kiviniemi, 2014).

One of the characteristics students found appealing about the BL instructional design for the Introduction to Literature course was its flexibility. Students liked having the opportunity after establishing their independence, to be able to study anytime anywhere for the online portion. Most of the students (98%) enrolled in the course reported that besides university classes, they faced big demands on their time. The number one category was jobs. Other demands included: member and/or volunteer of student organizations; sports; cheerleading; fine arts extra-curriculars such as music, dance, drama, forensics, etc.; commuting to college; family; medical issues; personal problems; church; sorority/fraternity; ROTC; civic duties, and being involved with group projects. One student acknowledged the course as "a breath of fresh air". She claimed it

has shown her that professors are noticing what it takes to be a student and fully respecting that by shaping a course to fit our needs. She said,

I am one of those students working full time and going to school full time. It isn't easy, but this class has helped me feel better about my current situation. I don't feel like I am alone after taking this class.

The impact the instructional design for the blended Introduction to Literature had on student achievement was positive. The blended course was competency based. As stated in Chapter 3, this meant student work had to be "B" level or better. If a student earned a lower grade, the work was returned so the student could rework it until it met the "B" standard. Over two-thirds of the students earned an "A" grade for the semester. From student work assessments, it was found that students who did not earn an "A" grade did not consider gains in competencies as especially important. In contrast, those students who considered gains in competencies especially important, earned the "A" grades. Exceptions were two "A" students who expressed the same thoughts as the "B" students.

The majority of the students surveyed (97%) also reported they were glad they signed up for the course. They were already seeing themselves being transformed with new identities. These were from: knowledge repeater to critical thinker, dependent learner to independent learner, surface reader to close reader, non-literary person to literary connoisseur, and student to teacher. The remaining students said they were not changed. Table 1 presents their perceptions of gaining new identities.

## The Teacher

As Wang et al. (2015) proposed through the CABLS framework, instructors in BL environments co-evolve with other subsystems, particularly with learners, to become a generation of instructors with new identities and multi-disciplined professional skills.

Table 1

*Student Identities from Being Transformed from Passive to Active Learner*

Transformed from:	Supporting Themes
Knowledge repeater to critical thinker (97%)	Realized how literature opens minds and expands horizons
	Discovered complexity and gaining insight to realize literature is more than words on a page
	Became a stronger reader
	Understood that all previous events in a person's life shapes who the person is a moment, thus understanding that the author is writing a story based upon who he/she is at that moment, and we interpreted or gave the story meaning from the perspective who we are and have experienced at the moment we read the story
	Helped to learn more about myself
	Knew that stories can have multiple interpretations
	Recognized universality by applying stories to own life
	Compared and contrasted short stories
	Understood good writing involves much thought, planning, and time with structure
	Learned how to back up literary interpretations with specific examples and proof from short story text
	Concluded is okay for readers to have different tastes in literature
	Realized how well I like a story may not reflect how well the story is constructed
	Evaluated how each author studied impacted American literature
	Sought connections between reading and writing
	Developed ability to think on my own (table continues)



Transformed from:	Supporting Themes
	Became more creative and imaginative
	Found connections between literature and other content areas
Dependent learner to independent learner (94%)	Improved study skills
	Broadened literary analysis skills since can think on my own
	Became more marketable for jobs since more independent, reliable, responsible, and have perseverance
	Found reading entertaining and interesting so was more engaged
	Felt confident everything learned in face-to-face portion will be able to apply to online portion
	Increased confidence in self as college student
	Eased financial stress
Surface reader to close reader (94%)	Improved understanding of literature with better analysis skills
	Enjoyed reading closely
	Gained better writing skills from reading closer
	Learned life lessons from stories
	Understood lifelong readers need to be lifelong learners
Non-literary person to literary connoisseur (91%)	Gained greater enjoyment and appreciation of literature
	Improved understanding of literature with better analysis and thinking skills
	Developed more confidence in reading skills
	Gained exposure to other literary works, authors, and writing styles would not have experienced
	Became more aware of literary tastes
	Met people who share a common interest in literature
Student to teacher (100%)	Applied teaching pedagogy
	Found methods to teach literature to our future students
	Gained teaching confidence
	Experienced teaching as fun
	Realized teaching is hard work
	Discovered we not only learned from the professors, but professors learned from us

This supports Salmon (2004), who reported instructors often experience new roles in BL.

They are not simply information givers. Among the new identities students perceived the

co-instructors of the blended Introduction to Literature course having were e-moderators, facilitators, “guides on the side,” cheerleaders, advisors, promoters of learning, nurturers, literature lovers, and students. The students saw BL transforming their instructors, because they witnessed them taking big strides forward by not just employing technology to fit the changing world, but in fact adapting and redesigning their teaching to produce transformative learning experiences.

Furthermore, the students did not see the instructors as being less important in e-learning. On the contrary, the instructors’ passion for literature and their nurturing was very important in the students’ acquisition of knowledge, skills, competencies, and course satisfaction. Only students’ motivation, opportunities for self-regulated learning, and the clarity of the course structure were other criteria mentioned by students that contributed to their learning achievements or satisfaction. The students viewed these items as part of their academic support.

Basically, the teachers affected students’ attitudes in the blended Introduction to Literature course by giving them confidence to be college students in general and to transform into independent learners and readers as they moved from the face-to-face component to the online one. A student commented: “I was first nervous about the online portion, but by the end of the course I realized that my fears were unfounded. Our professors had done such a great job preparing us and teaching us how to be independent learners, have confidence in our interpretations, and to look at a story and divide it into elements and think about it from different perspectives. This made it very easy to complete the independent stories the rest of the semester.” By performing these roles

students felt the instructors cared about them. This was another important factor in student perceptions and achievement.

Such evidence was shown throughout the course. Throughout the semester, students expressed their appreciation towards the co-teachers' practice, enthusiasm, humanity, and knowledge. Since this information was so interwoven throughout the data, Chapter 6's action research examines this phenomenon in closer detail.

Students seemed especially grateful to their instructors for their support towards students and how the BL design for the Introduction to Literature course was implemented. Close to 85% gave us personal notes of appreciation. These were expressed throughout the semester. Here are a few examples of the notes of appreciation students attached to the student surveys:

- We felt you learned as much from us as we did from you. This was different, but good. Thanks for believing in us.
- I really enjoyed this class and I liked the schedule while we went half the semester until we knew what we were doing, and then it was independent. I liked the independent because it was different.
- Overall, I am glad I took this course. It taught me how to work independently and it was nice to work on my own time. Both of you were amazing. So nice and helpful. I am smiling thinking about this class.
- You both cared about the subject and teaching, making it worth waking up early.

- The structure of this class was very good. Thanks for making me an independent student, better reader, and critical thinker.

See Appendix L: Surveys-Notes of Appreciation for more examples.

### The Technology

Scholars such as Ni and Branch (2008) have recognized the complex nature of technology by describing multiple interactions within technology and between technology and the environment. Moreover, they have noted that research has insufficiently addressed such complexity, “thereby rendering the results of many research studies about educational technology lacking in generalizability or application” (p. 30). Also, the never ending technological advances usually rejuvenate BL while simultaneously keeping it balanced on “the edge of chaos,” stable enough to keep its internal structure, but yet, sensitive enough to the changing needs of the learner and the possibilities and strains brought forth by new technology. Empirical studies have revealed that new technologies generally undergo a dynamic adaptive process of emergence, adoption, and establishment or obsolescence. The self-organizing process of the systems for BL eventually retains the technologies that best serve it.

The student perceptions and achievement in this study involving Introduction to Literature courses in a BL format concur with the literature about the critical role technology plays in successfully implementing a BL course (see Alsabawy, Cater-Steel, & Soar, 2013; Chen, Wang, Kinshuk, & Chen, 2014). Another common topic in the BL literature is the need to constantly replace the older technology with newer. This topic did

not come up so much from the students' perspective directly, but more in the action research of the researcher/co-teacher. Refer to Chapter 6.

The Introduction to Literature course evaluated in this study was half face-to-face and half online. Students described the online independent portion in the following ways (from most mentioned to less mentioned): fulfilling (in terms of intellectual growth, emotional growth, independence, success for future, and catching up on sleep) enjoyable, demanding, challenging, exciting, helpful, disappointing (rather have class entirely face-to-face or online), and easy.

Student surveys indicated that the students enjoyed the experience of the online independent learning pods for the Introduction to Literature course. Most of the student participants (83%) said they enjoyed working independently on the stories during the online portion of the course, while 12% said they had mixed feelings, another 4% rather keep the class strictly face-to-face, and 1% preferred entirely online. A reply for keeping the class face-to-face was:

I do not care for online courses. This was not a difficult class to take online though, especially since it was taught in person for the first half of the course. I do not like fully online courses because they require more written communication and greater self-motivation.

Another student remarked that he/she

had a difficult time with time management. I missed deadlines during the online portion. It was like the saying, "Out of sight, out of mind." My high school never prepared me for anything like this. I rather the class was entirely face-to-face.

Others mentioned a preference for the traditional lecture/discussion format and that it was easier to understand content if they had someone in front of them explaining it.

Someone experiencing mixed feelings said:

I have mixed feelings. I enjoyed the online freedom to finish the assignments on my own time. However, literature classes, especially one set up this way, should be taught entirely in the classroom, because I enjoy listening to the opinions of others and discussing our own openly in class.

A student who preferred an entirely online course said, “I wished the class was entirely online since I am such an independent student.” Note that about a third of the students, even though they liked the online portion, brought up enjoying the face-to-face portion, too. The major reasons students enjoyed the online experience were convenience, flexibility, and independence. All of the students are coming from the perspective that the online portion goes with a face-to-face portion for a BL format. See Table 2 for major reasons students enjoyed the online experience.

Table 2  
*Major Reasons Students Enjoyed the Online Experience*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
21%	Can go at own pace	I liked having the independent online portion of the class because I was able to work on my own stories at my own pace. I enjoyed the in-class portion, but the independent portion of the class allowed me to see how much I have grown from the beginning to the end of this class!
20%	Have flexibility	I did enjoy working independently the second half of the semester. It was nice to be able to work on the critique sheet and PowerPoint questions when it was convenient for me. At the beginning of the semester I didn't want to do the online independent portion because I wasn't sure I would know exactly what to do, but by the time it came, I felt very well prepared. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
15%	Becoming an independent learner	Yes, I did. I think I have grown as a student because I have a better ability to think and act independently. This class made me step out of my comfort zone a bit and realize that I will not always have teachers and professors to answer every question for me and someday I will be responsible for thinking on my own. I also feel like I learned more being able to think at my own pace and do my own research on a story.
13%	Enjoyment	I enjoyed the independent portion a lot because it allowed for great freedom in my schedule. By trusting us to manage our time, we grew more adult.
9%	Able to apply what learned from face-to-face	I felt like the independent sections gives us an opportunity to show the professors how much progress we've made with understanding and interpreting literature.
6%	Grow as reader	Yes, I enjoyed having the chance to work on the stories individually. It really challenged me to read the stories and critically think to understand them. I was really engaged with the stories during the online portion.
6%	Relieved stress	I really enjoyed it. Being a student athlete, it helped my busy schedule by taking some of the pressure off and giving me more time to do my work at a high level.
4%	Novelty	I think that it's a very cool idea to have some courses set up this way. Obviously, not every subject would be able to do this, but it was a unique opportunity that allowed me to stay in my pajamas while still learning, and I'm all for that.
3%	Financial	I enjoyed working independently because it gave me two extra days a week to pick up shifts at work. This helped me save an extra \$2000 this semester alone, which is great!
1%	Better prepared for future work	This gave me a look at what I would be expected to do in the work world.
1%	Professors' responses	I liked the online because I can go at my own pace, and enjoy the professors' responses.
1%	Could sleep in	It was so nice being able to sleep in later and not have to walk in the cold on those mornings!

Appendix N: Surveys-Major Reasons Students Enjoyed the Online Experience gives more data sharing how the students enjoyed the online experience of the blended Introduction to Literature course.

Generally, the students perceived the online portion of the blended Introduction to Literature course as changing them as students and as readers (98%) while 2% claimed to not have been changed. In this latter group, a student commented: “It did not change me. If anything, I missed the opinions of the other students. There were so many literary interpretations, but I only got to experience my own opinions and conclusions.” Student responses about how the online portion of the Introduction to Literature course changed them as students and readers included:

- I didn't read too much when I started this class. I've started reading in my free time now!
- The independent/online portion allowed me to see how much I have grown since the beginning of the course. I was not too confident in filling out my critique sheets during the beginning of the course, but I was excited to do them towards the end of the semester, because I knew I improved! The feedback the professors gave really helped me!
- It changed me as a reader in multiple ways. Now I actually enjoy reading, especially short stories. It has helped me in my reading for other classes, too. This class has proved to be very beneficial to me.
- The independent/online portion helped me grow both as a student and as a reader. As a student because I was given the responsibility to hold myself



accountable for getting things in on time and doing the best work I can without being monitored. As far as reading, I have always been an avid reader, but I was not familiar with literary terms. Learning what these were and how to apply them is something I can continue to do in my future reading. It was also great to be able to dive so deep into a story and create a whole presentation from it, truly showing what I have learned.

- It gave me an opportunity to show what I truly knew as a reading student. I now understand how authors used the literary elements to manipulate their readers. Also, understanding that literary works can have multiple interpretations, makes reading more exciting. I will encourage my children to use this approach in their reading.

See Appendix M: Surveys-Sample Student Responses How Online Changed Them as Readers contains further data.

Other than the textbook, class materials such as the course syllabus, PowerPoints, critique sheets, and other handouts were on Google Docs. Even though student responses did not lend themselves to reporting percentages, most students appeared to have a positive attitude towards using Google Docs. A few students expressed preference for Blackboard. One said, “Since none of my other classes use Google Docs, I sometimes forgot where the information for this class was at. I would go into Blackboard then realized that nothing was going to be there.” Another student shared, “Google Docs was fine. They are easy to get to and easy to use. Though, I would rather have stuff on

Blackboard so that I do not have the fear of getting kicked out of the system, and everything would be in one nice area.” Sample comments included:

- I never had any problems accessing any of the files, and I could easily access them off my laptop, tablet, or phone.
- Google Docs was a good way to give us information.... stories in the public domain as well as the note takers. These helped a lot because they gave us information to help with our critique sheets before class.
- The use of Google Docs has been amazing. Prior to this class I haven't really used Google Docs at all. Thankfully, we did use it in this class, because shortly after three others of my classes started using it, and I had no problem then. I love having everything in one place and being able to access it whenever I need. Plus, it gives us another option of whether we want to type the information out or print the paper and hand write them.
- Google Docs is really easy to navigate. I used it in high school, so I had previous experience with it. I like that Google Docs automatically saves everything on its own, whereas in Word you have to manually save everything. Auto Save is nice, because if suddenly my computer crashed, everything I had is still there.
- I like using Google Docs because if everything is emailed, I lose what emails I need. If materials were handed out on paper, then I would probably lose one.
- My experience with Google Docs is good. I find it easy to create documents as well as being able to view them. It is also convenient that I can make folders and separate my various class documents into them.

More examples of student remarks about using Google Docs are in Appendix O: Surveys-Google Docs.

Besides Google Docs, another feature of the course design was PowerPoints. These were utilized in both the face-to-face and online portions of the Introduction to Literature course. This data is presented here instead of the content subsystem because the PowerPoints were created via technology, contained hyperlinks to the web, and were used for the online lessons. Practically all (96%) said the PowerPoint helped them become stronger readers by gaining a better understanding about the elements of literature used in story. See Table 3 for student perceptions of the PowerPoints. The other students (4%) said the PowerPoint did not help them as readers and working with the elements of literature. One of these students who answered this way claimed he/she was already an excellent reader. Another said, "PowerPoints are boring." Therefore, most of the students came up with reasons that supports the research which states that students perceive technology as aiding learning.

The other students (4%) said the PowerPoint did not help them as readers nor with working with the elements of literature. One of these students who answered this way claimed he/she was already an excellent reader. Another said, "PowerPoints are boring." Therefore, most of the students came up with reasons that support the research which states that students perceive technology as aiding learning.

Table 3  
*Student Perceptions of PowerPoints*

Percentage	Theme	Examples
42%	Developed stronger analytical skills of literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Helped to see text complexity and insights</li> <li>-Helped to comprehend more when reading</li> <li>- Helped to recognize how authors use the literary elements to often manipulate their readers' thoughts and emotions</li> <li>-Helped to strengthen literary interpretive skills</li> <li>-Helped to know what to look for in making a strong literary analysis</li> <li>-Helped to become an active reader by teaching us how to pay close attention to the stories' words and their meaning</li> <li>-Helped to go solo to readings by working on own without the help of the professors</li> <li>- Helped to expand arguments for literary analysis when stuck for ideas</li> <li>-Helped to find connections between authors' lives and historical context to the stories</li> <li>-Helped to organize and explain our thoughts about what we read</li> <li>-Helped us now to be conscious of the literary elements when reading</li> <li>-Helped to us use transactional approach to reading which thereby validates there can be multiple interpretations of a story</li> <li>-Helped us to approach literature as a literary critic by being able to pick out writers' strengths and weaknesses</li> </ul>
57%	Became a critical thinker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Helped to see text complexity and gain insights</li> <li>-Helped to expand arguments for literary analysis when stuck for ideas</li> <li>-Helped to make connections between literature and other contexts</li> <li>-Helped to make connections between literature and ourselves</li> <li>-Helped to actively and skillfully conceptualize, apply, analyze, synthesize, and/or evaluate information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication of the literary elements used in the short stories read</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;">(table continues)</p>

Percentage	Theme	Examples
6%	Obtained better study skills	-Helped us to understand that we often get out of reading what we put into it in terms of time and effort (e.g. multiple readings instead of a single reading usually leads to clearer understanding of text) -Helped to promote researching on our own the authors, historical context, etc. of the stories read
6%	Experienced teaching	-Helped to come up with our own discussion questions and answers like a literature teacher -Helped to experience the perspective of a teacher of literature, before had just student perspective
6%	Transformed into independent learner	-Helped us to “go solo” in our reading and analyzing literature with less help from the professors as the semester went on -Helped to motivate us as literary students
6%	Increased appreciation of literature	-Helped to appreciate how literary elements work to form a well-crafted story -Helped to make reading fun
6%	Retained content	-Helped us to remember more about what we read -Helped us to apply the literary elements so we have a deeper understanding of them, and thus more likely to remember them
6%	Gained reading confidence	-Helped us gain more confidence in ourselves as readers -Helped us to gain more confidence in ourselves as literary critics
4%	Understood more about creative writing	-Concluded that the elements of literature are the tools in a writer’s “tool box” -Helped to strengthen our own creative writing since now have a better understanding how stories are constructed

The literature further suggests that people learn new, abstract, and novel concepts more easily when they are presented in both verbal and visual form (Salomon, 1979). Also, empirical research has shown that visual media make concepts more accessible than using only text and help with later recall (Cowen, 1984). Willingham (2009) asked

in his research, “Why do students remember everything that's on television and forget what we lecture?” The answer: because visual media helps learners retain concepts and ideas. Other research such as Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) mentions the important role technology plays for creating learning environments that extend the possibilities of one-way communication media, such as movies, documentaries, television shows and music into new areas that require interactive learning like visualizations and student-created content. Overall, the students in this study had similar beliefs.

To help learn new, abstract, and novel concepts more easily, students were encouraged to use visual and audio aspects in their final projects by incorporating hyperlinks, music, and other specialty items. When asked how the hyperlinks, music, and other specialty items contribute to the major project, students responded by stating these helped them to learn new, abstract, and novel concepts more easily as well as retain them longer and better because these added the dimensions of sight/sound helped readers to not only have a deeper understanding of the story, but also made the lesson “come alive” to help students experience “worlds” beyond their own. Students surveyed expressed the following:

- Aided in understanding the author’s motives for writing his/her story
- Made the PowerPoints more engaging, interesting, and attention grabbing
- Showcased complex ideas in a short time
- Added a visual and/or audio dimension to aid in understanding the story especially by clarifying difficult literary elements (e.g. could see story acted out

thereby visualizing characterization, setting, summarizes a plot line that is non-linear, etc.)

- Enhanced the story's themes
- Become better acquainted with author by being able to hear and see him/her
- Encompassed various learning styles such as visual or auditory
- Supplied a cognitive and affective experience because the specialty items could promote discussion, an assessment of one's values, and an assessment of self
- Gave historical background/context
- Helped to connect the theme/ideas from the story to real world events and policies
- Explained and/or experienced an allusion or something referenced in the story such as a song mentioned
- Honed analytical skills by analyzing media

Note that the student responses varied depending on how they used the specialty items in the PowerPoint for their final project. A few students felt that the specialty items did not really add to the reader's understanding. For them, they did not believe that hyperlinks, music, and other specialty items contributed to the major project. Someone said, "These did not help with their learning, so why use it?" Another replied, "I did not use such specialty items because I felt such devices are distracting and go off subject. I prefer the traditional method of teaching."

Taking a BL course requires having access to technology. The students involved in this study reported their personal computers used the PC platform (55%), the Mac platform (38%), not sure (6%), and no computer (1%). One of the co-teachers used the

PC platform while the other used the Mac platform. Other than popularity due to personal choice, the platforms made little or no difference in the quality of student work.

Interestingly, students who reported not being sure of the platform were the ones who received lower than an “A” grade for the blended Introduction to Literature course.

Of the students who had personal computers, 54% of the students had Word, while 46% did not have Word. Also, 77% of the students had PowerPoint installed on their computers while 23 % did not. This means that those students who did not have Word or PowerPoint had to find access to computers that have these programs in order to complete their assignments.

Students varied in their opinions on the student surveys as to what they thought was the easiest and the most difficult part of the online independent work. For the easiest, these choices came up in order from the most mentioned (top) to least mentioned (bottom):

- Getting my work completed on time (includes flexibility to work at own pace)
- Reading the stories (Reading at the “surface level” while reading at a “deeper level” is another matter.)
- Critique sheets (Because these were uniform and used for each story, the elements of literature became easier and easier to identify with each progressing story. However, the interpretation became more complex with each assignment since our analytic skills were expanding with every story.)



- Completing the PowerPoint questions (Remarked since following Rosenblatt's transactional theory for reading, there was no one interpretation. Thus, we knew our interpretations would be okay if backed up with good reasoning by using specific examples and support from the stories.)

For the most difficult things about the online/independent section, these choices came up in order from the most mentioned (top) to less mentioned (bottom):

- Deeper meaning of stories beyond the surface level when reading
- Thoughtful answers for critique sheet that are supported with specific examples from stories
- Critical thinking for PowerPoint Questions (Some students remarked this is a good thing.)
- Time management due to procrastination and personal problems
- Not being in face-to-face class
- Amount of time required to complete well done assignments
- Final project research, design, and content
- Technology

However, when asked: *Did you have problems working independently and meeting deadlines? If so, please explain.* 76 % answered no, while 5% experienced some difficulties due to technology problems, 10% had some due to procrastination, and 8% due to experiencing forgetfulness at one time or another.

A vast majority of the students (95%) surveyed reported the lecture/PowerPoint presentations did help them to understand the stories. Only 5% answered somewhat. This set of students said the PowerPoints helped, but the discussions were more valuable. No students reported the PowerPoints did not aid in understanding the stories. Many believed their “comprehension was enhanced by the PowerPoints since these provided plenty of supplemental material to better understand the stories.” Students explained their answers:

- Even though the first half of the class and my prior knowledge allowed me to interpret and understand the stories well for the online portion of class, the PowerPoints continued to help me understand the stories even better by helping me to grasp concepts that may have been difficult. They gave specific points to look at or more information about the different elements of literature. This is information that I might not have seen before, and having other people’s opinions during the face-to-face portion gave me a different perspective of the story I didn’t see before.
- The PowerPoint presentations aided my understanding of the stories. They worked in conjunction with the discussion questions. I do not remember a time where it was unclear where a question came from.
- The PowerPoints were especially useful for the online portion. Understanding here was better than face-to-face portion, because I was able to do it at my own time, had a whole week to really compose myself in the story, and I was able to explore the stories further without the pressure of class time.

- The PowerPoints helped much to understand the stories. Usually, I would read a story, look at the PowerPoint, then read the story again. The second time I read it, I could usually pick up on things that I missed the first time around, and make connections I couldn't earlier.
- During the online portion, if I was ever unsure about one of the elements of literature or if I wanted to get a better idea why an author wrote in a particular style or how it was connected to his/her life, I went back to the PowerPoint.

Some students had to learn new technological skills during the blended

Introduction to Literature course. For some, the blended Introduction to Literature course was their first experience in creating a PowerPoint (6%) while for 94 % it was not.

Another technological skill not all students possessed before enrolling in the blended Introduction to Literature course was hyperlinking. A little over three-fourths of the students surveyed (78%) knew how to hyperlink while 22% did not. Some said they knew how to hyperlink because they were required in their high schools. One commented, "If someone did not know how to hyperlink, he/she should ask tech support, watch a how-to video, or ask the professors for help. After all, this is college, not high school." However, when it came to the project, and in spite viewing all the lessons the professors constructed using hyperlinks, several students (23%) had nonworking or no hyperlinks in their projects. Some volunteered information that they forgot to do it or did not even think about doing it; research did not lead them to any good material to hyperlink; they felt it was not a requirement, but a way to earn extra points for their grades; they disliked putting hyperlinks into their own work because find them

distracting; claimed they would not add anything to the project; or that hyperlinking takes extra time and effort.

Lastly, students with jobs and extra-curricular commitments expressed how much the flexibility of the independent online portion of the course helped them achieve as college students. Here are a few of their responses:

- I am in forensics and the blended approach took some pressure off during competition season. I also commute to college, so it was nice not having to make the trip in those early cold mornings. I got so much out of the class, even when we didn't meet. It was truly a great experience.
- It helped a lot. I'd have days full of classes, afternoons of work, and then either night class or studying. My schedule was much less stressful when the online independent portion began and time was freed up to complete more work, get caught up on sleep, and stay on top of my life. I wish more classes were like this.
- This class freed up my Tuesdays and Thursdays allowing me to pick up 2 to 4 more work shifts a week, making a huge difference in my paycheck.
- I have a morning job as a barista and also am taking three studio art classes that last three hours and then need to spend 6-15 hours outside of class time each week on them. The independent online portion allowed me to work not only my usual Monday and Wednesday mornings, but Tuesday and Thursday mornings, too, so I could have Fridays, most Saturdays, and part of Sundays to work on my studio classes. It was

extremely helpful and less stressful than when we were meeting every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

- Loved the flexibility. I could do my assignments any time anywhere. I even did some of my critiques at my job when there was a lull at Starbucks midafternoon, or 3:00 A.M. in my pajamas when I couldn't sleep.
- This was perfect for my schedule. We were gone almost every week for softball and instead of missing class and getting the make-up work, I already knew what I had to do and could get it done before we left and not feel rushed.

The intention of the researcher and her co-teacher when designing and implementing the blended Introduction to Literature course was even though we will be working with technology, we wanted the course to maintain the humanity of the traditional face-to-face classroom. This required us to emphasize our roles as nurturers, cheerleaders, and passionate literature lovers.

Serving as a tech moderators and BL facilitators, we required the work during the online portion of the class always due by midnight on the respective Friday nights. Students overwhelmingly thought there was no problem with the assignment deadlines for the online portion of class. In fact, 91% liked the setup. The other 9% either wanted another day for the online deadline or admitted they were procrastinators and they would probably do the same thing no matter when assignments were due. For example, one student wrote:

I am a procrastinator. However, I thought it was a fair deadline. Sometimes I was pushing the deadline, because it is not very convenient to have to do homework on a Friday night, but I could have avoided this dilemma if I had started my work earlier and not save it to the last minute. Friday is a fair due date because we have an entire week to work on it. It is our choice to not utilize all the time we have.

A few of other comments on this topic were:

- It was helpful to have a deadline. And I liked that I had all week to work on it and didn't have to worry about turning things in over the weekend.
- This was not a problem for me. I always turned mine in before that time anyway, but it was nice that they did not have to be due in the morning, because it made sure I turned the work in before going to bed, and didn't have to worry about sending it off in the morning.
- I liked that the due date was always the same. It was nice having a routine. This was very easy to remember and I never questioned when it was due!
- Sometimes it was hard for me to get it turned in by Friday because sometimes we traveled during the week and I did not have access to the Internet. Sunday nights would have been better for me, because I would have been able to turn it in when I was at the hotel and had Internet.
- No problem. In fact, I like that they are due later during the day, because then I have the opportunity to look it over in the afternoon before it is due.
- While it wasn't a problem for me, I can see how it could be for others in terms of forgetting. It is the weekend and if they forget to hand it in, odds are they will not be around to finish it on a Friday night. The deadline was just fine for myself and we are in college and need to hold ourselves accountable for our

work. I'd suggest having the due at midnight on Thursday to assure it's done.

Then the professors can grade it sooner as well.

We realize that life happens. As instructors, feeling that part of our humanity and caring might be lost during the online portion, we included a one-time "get-out-of-jail-free-card" to use if a student could not complete an assignment on time. This allowed the students to turn in one assignment late, no questions asked, with no penalty. This was not available for the project or the final. When students were asked if this "card" should be kept for future classes, most of them (91%) responded that it should be kept. On the other hand, 9% responded the "card" should not be used for future classes. One stated:

I don't think it was necessary. I didn't use mine. Students know from the very beginning of the course that everything during the online portion is due on Fridays by midnight. If they know that they have a busy week ahead of them, then they should do their work beforehand so they can complete it on time. It is important during the independent section to be organized and on top of things. I also think you shouldn't have one since we aren't in class, it the perfect time to do the work.

Other remarks included:

- Yes. Things come up in students' lives. I learned that this semester with many health issues going on in my family. This card option helps the students to be able to deal with things that may come up from time to time, and it shows that the professors truly care for the students' personal as well as their academic lives.
- Keep this card because it was nice to have one screw up.
- I never used it, but it was nice to know it was there if anything were to come up.

- Some people might forget their first online learning pod because of the change from in-class to the online independent portion. For this reason, keep it.
- Definitely keep it. Obviously, one could argue that better time management would avoid the need for this, but sometimes things come up that you just aren't prepared for. It's nice to have a backup and alleviate some of the stress.
- Definitely keep this! I'm not sure if this card was put into play because of me, but I am someone who is always on top of the assignments and schedule, but I am also a good example of "life happening" when I mixed up a due date. I was extremely grateful for the opportunity to try again.

But, one student noted,

I don't think I would have needed this card if it wasn't available. Right before spring break, I had a lot going on and I pushed this class to the back of my mind. If I had greater consequences not to finish on time, then I would have met the deadline. However, grace is good; keep the card.

A little over third of the students (37%) used the "get-out-of-jail-free-card."

Those who wished to share said they used it for the following reasons: no access to Internet, other computer problems, illness, family illness and/or problems, extra-curricular, lots of other course work, school breaks, just forgot an assignment or due date, extra busy week, started a new job, and work schedule changed. A couple of students who missed the deadline made a point that they were extra careful with due date reminders and time management after the missed date occurrence. In spite of the one-time "get-out-of-jail-free-card," 5% of the students had other late assignments.



We devoted much time evaluating student work throughout the running of the blended Introduction to Literature courses. The intentions of the assessments were to give students encouragement in interpreting the short stories, feedback their strengths and weaknesses at any particular time, and to give hints how to improve before the next assignment. When students were asked in a survey about the feedback their critique sheets and PowerPoint questions, students basically felt the assessment responses sent by the professors were adequate and appropriate (91%). Students, for the most part, liked that the responses dealt with both their strengths and weaknesses and gave suggestions how to improve for the next assignment. They further liked the responses were personal, timely, and in depth. However, a few (9%) stated that the responses were okay. For example, one said:

The responses were okay. I got mostly the same thing back and never really understood what they meant, because I think I did what they told me, but would get the same response. I just wish more detail was given to what they wanted instead of the same thing over and over so improvement can be made.

Another wrote, “The grading was too harsh for the final project, but came out okay in the end with the course’s final grade.” This student further equated time put into the work, not how well it was done, should determine the grade. It should be noted that numerous times students were asked to come in to visit with the instructors for such concerns, but for some unknown reason they never did. Also, two students thought the instructor responses included too much depth. One of them added, “but that is never a bad thing!” Some of the student comments for this survey item are reflected in Table 4. Appendix P: Surveys-Usefulness of Instructor Feedback contains more data of sample student comments about instructor feedback for the blended Introduction to Literature course.

Table 4  
*Usefulness of Instructor Feedback*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
31%	Helped to improve	They were very helpful comments. They helped me to improve every time I did a critique sheet and showed me specifically what I should work on.
15%	Pointed out strengths and weaknesses	I always got good and useful feedback that I could apply to my next assignment. I like that they give us things that we did well as well as things we need to improve on. It is nice to get both sides. Their feedback was also very easy to put to use in my next assignment because it was clearly laid out.
15%	Thorough and detailed	I thought the professors did an awesome job when they sent feedback for our work. It was evident that they wanted us to succeed just by the amount of comments and advice sent back with each paper. I was not expecting this much feedback each week, but it was nice to know that they took the time to look at our work so in-depth.
12%	Supplied encouragement	I loved that the profs were so thorough and encouraging with their responses! It made me feel like the work I was doing wasn't going unnoticed. I have had teachers and even professors here at college who give little or no feedback, and I am not fond of that. If I am going to do the work, I appreciate feedback. I love that they also gave pointers and suggestions for how I could improve while still saying they were proud of me and pointing out what I did well.
12%	Appreciated instructors' time and effort	The responses were wonderful! I have never had professors so detailed in feedback so that I know exactly what I'm doing well and can improve on. Each week I was impressed with the length and detail of feedback. The fact that the professors do that for each student shows great commitment to what they do and it is very constructive!
8%	Personalized	Yes, I liked the detail that was sent back to me. It was personal and they put a lot of effort into sending me back my results.
7%	Provided rationale for grade	I enjoyed receiving feedback on my work so I was able to know what my strengths and weaknesses are. The feedback was appropriate and I am thankful for the feedback I received. I do not like it when professors grade a project without commenting on my work, because that does not tell me why they graded my work the way they did.

Overall, students surveyed at the end of the semester perceived the importance of technology and its benefits from taking the BL Introduction to Literature course by stating the following:

- Technology can aid learning by engaging students.
- Technology has made online learning possible which gives students flexibility and made learning more convenient since they can do the course anytime at any place at their own pace.
- Technology can improve skills such as managing Google Docs, learning how to create a PowerPoint, typing faster and more accurately on Word, etc.
- Technology can enhance creativity.

The students surveyed also mentioned that technology was ever changing and one way to keep up with the latest in technology that they did not do before the course was to become familiar with the university's ITS and its supports from the university.

### The Content

The content in BL courses has never been as rich and engaging as it is in the present day as a result of continuous interaction with, and often determined by, the learner, the teacher, the technology, the learning support, and the institution. This study agrees with empirical studies such as Moore and Gilmartin (2010) that BL promotes deeper learning. Data collected here reflects Singh's (2003, p.52) categorization of BL, which refers to the type of learning content happening in BL. These are: blending offline and online learning; blending self-paced and live, collaborative learning; blending

structured and unstructured learning; and blending learning, practice, and performance support.

Furthermore, data from this study has reported improvements in learning content. The design of the blended Introduction to Literature course demonstrates the new principles of innovative curriculum design in BL as summarized by Elia, Secundo, Assaf, and Fayyoumi (2014, p.543): (a) the involvement of stakeholders (such as the teachers) in the course's design phase; (b) the focus on competence development rather than on knowledge transfer; (c) the choice of team work as an additional component to evaluate individual students' performances; (d) presence of remote and face-to-face interactions among peers and between teachers and students; (e) the usage of web 2.0 tools; and (f) continuous tutoring both for content and technological issues.

Moreover, continual advancements in technology and society's connections to the Internet are changing people's lives to the point that that they live "blended" with online information and services. BL offered us a chance to take huge steps forward by not just employing technology to fit the changing world, but in fact adapting and redesigning our teaching to produce transformative learning experiences that allow students to learn content in greater depth and at their own pace. Through the CABLS lens, it can be seen that the content, including content delivery in BL, has been transformed as it interacts with the teacher, the learner, and the technology. An absence of any of these subsystems would result in content not being as rich or engaging nor the content being as effective or powerful. In turn, the improved content and content delivery have transformed both the learner and the teacher.

The course content utilized a 50-50 BL formula. The first half of the course was face-to-face meeting in a classroom, and the second half, with the exception of two check-in meetings, was online.

The CABLS content subsystem is arranged around the research questions: What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes? What impact did the BL instructional design we developed for “Introduction to Literature” have on student achievement? Since the content subsystem has provided a considerable amount of data, it is subdivided into four sections: face-to-face portion, online portion, online portion-major project, and content overall of blended Introduction to Literature course.

Face-to-face portion. Students surveyed at the end of the face-to-face portion generally preferred reading many short stories (98.4%) as opposed to reading a few longer works such as novels, while 1.6% preferred fewer works in greater depths. Students mentioned being transformed from passive to active learner and from knowledge repeater to critical thinker due to the variety, novelty, and manageability (having fewer reading pages made more time available to comprehend material). Other reasons included building comprehension and analytical skills by gaining extra practice working with the elements of literature and decreased boredom for those with short attention spans. See Table 5. Appendix Q: Surveys-Reading Several Short Stories as Opposed to Few contains more sample comments about reading short stories vs. reading fewer longer works.

Most of the students (94%) reported that the blended Introduction to Literature course changed them as a reader and how they looked at the elements of literature. They were transformed as readers. On the other hand, 6% of the students reported that the blended Introduction to Literature course did not change them as a reader nor how they looked at the elements of literature. See Table 6. Appendix R: Surveys-How Blended Introduction to Literature Course Changed Students as Readers contains further sample student comments about how the blended Introduction to Literature course changed them as readers.

Table 5  
*Reading Several Short Stories as Opposed to Fewer Longer Works*

Percentage	Reason	Sample Comment
98% prefer reading many several short stories	Variety	We were able to indulge in a vast range of writing techniques and styles. Rather than concentrating on a couple of stories, we traveled through many worlds of imagination without having to worry about the sameness, boredom, or dragging of detail often associated with studying a few literary works. Instead, we embarked on a literary journey that was spiced up with varying settings, themes, and plots. In short, all of these stories gave us sneak peaks to other peoples' experiences (even though many were fictitious), urging us to learn much in so little time.
	Novelty	Covering many short stories instead of a just a few works was new to me. It was new to read short stories instead of novels. The average literature class assigns 200-400-page texts with short periods of time to read and fully understand them. The way this class was designed is a much more effective learning tool. More time can be devoted to comprehending the material since there were less pages per assignment. Variety can be shown as well by examining the way multiple authors wrote the way they did. (table continues)

Percentage	Reason	Sample Comment
	Manageability	I find it easier to manage my time when there are multiple small due dates keeping me on track. If I were assigned a long book to read in a couple of weeks, it would be extremely easy for me to put it off until the end, which isn't possible with critique sheets due every other day.
	Building comprehension and analytical skills	I prefer many stories, because I could apply the elements of literature to different selections which gave me practice in analytical reading. I'm the type of learner who needs multiple examples to learn a concept (or multiple concepts) and to keep practicing these concepts so I can fully learn it. Reading multiple stories helped me learn the elements of literature and to practice seeing them in various types of writing. Reading different stories made me more interested since I was able to see how different authors incorporated the elements of literature into their stories in various ways.
	Short attention span/less bored	Reading just a few books and getting in depth about them can get really boring. After looking at the same book for a while, I get burnt out and can't wait to just get done with it. Sometimes I find myself getting lazy in the end, because I'm just so sick of that book. It's a lot different with short stories because you don't spend so much time on it that it becomes boring. With every class, came a new story which kept the course fresh and interesting.
2% prefer fewer works in greater depth	More depth	I would have preferred reading fewer stories and going more in depth instead. I personally enjoy longer texts and getting to know the characters more in depth instead of having a new story to discuss every class.

To help blend the content material, the professors, for continuity sake, used PowerPoint presentations for both the face-to-face and online portions of the course. The kind of learning content within the PowerPoints facilitated blending offline and online learning; blending self-paced and live, collaborative leaning (sometimes work in pairs or groups of three to answer some PowerPoint questions); blending structured and

Table 6  
*How Blended Introduction to Literature Course Changed Students as Readers*

Percentage	How changed as reader themes	Sample comment
41%	Think more critically about literature	Now look for complexity, insight and depth when analyzing stories
15%	Better understanding of literary elements	Gained a new way of reading for understanding by examining how an author uses the literary elements as tools to manipulate readers to think and feel a certain way
11%	More enjoyment of literature	Now developed or have an even greater love for reading
7%	Gained confidence as reader	Realize reading is a lifelong skill so want to continuously challenge myself to improve my reading skills
7%	Stirs my imagination	Reading can take me places, on adventures, make me think, and time travel
6%	Learned about myself as reader	Now can better determine my literary tastes
4%	Improved reading comprehension	See the interconnection between reading and writing
4%	Expanded horizons to writing styles and cultures	Have a wider perspective-more open to various writing styles
3%	Became independent reader	Changed from being a dependent student of reading to an independent student of reading
2%	Better study skills	Not only a more successful student in reading, but a more successful student overall because can stay focus, not procrastinate, and manage my time better

unstructured learning; and blending learning, practice, and performance support. Most of the students preferred the PowerPoints (98%) over the traditional lectures, while 2% prefer traditional lectures over the PowerPoints. One of those who favored the traditional lectures commented: “The PowerPoints were overwhelming. There was so much information thrown at me at one time.” Several students stated that the visual mode, novelty, and information found in the PowerPoints the co-teachers designed for the



Introduction to Literature course aided in understanding the literature, was compatible with student learning styles, kept them focused on lessons, promoted class discussion, and offered a more modern approach to studying literature. Other themes regarding the use of Power Points were: stirring imagination, learning about self as reader, improving reading comprehension, expanding their horizons about writing styles and cultures, becoming independent readers, and developing better study skills. See Table 7. Appendix S: Surveys-Student Preferences for PowerPoints vs. Traditional Lectures contains further sample comments about student preference of PowerPoints vs. the traditional lectures.

Table 7  
*Student Preferences for PowerPoints vs. Traditional Lectures*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
33%	Aids in understanding the literature	PowerPoint presentations should be every student's best friend because they are quite useful in a variety of ways. First, each slide separates the topics discussed in class, and the most important information for someone to know is usually noted on the slides as well. Second, the more methods of teaching used in a classroom, the more students grasp onto information with more understanding and a greater percentage of retaining this information. Simply put, people learn, understand, and remember information differently, and by relaying information in multiple ways—through the teacher's voice and through the usage of PowerPoint presentations, more people gain the ability to process the information. Last, PowerPoints are great tools to look back on for future reference, especially because most people do not have a photographic memory or have the ability to write down everything mentioned in class. These presentations are simply helpful to remembering the core things from the class discussions. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
19%	Compatible with student learning styles	I enjoy the PowerPoints. I am a visual learner, so seeing pictures or videos works better for me. During traditional lectures, I often get bored. I don't remember things as well by just hearing facts or listening to someone talk than I do when I can look at something. The PowerPoints had questions written on them, so the class was able to talk, and answer the questions. This was nice because we could hear other people's thoughts. Communicating with one another is much more beneficial than listening to the professor speak. By hearing one another's ideas and thoughts we learn more and can develop a better understanding for one another which is good practice for us, so we can become not only more empathetic towards others, but we are better prepared for the workforce where we need to listen to others.
19%	Keeps students focused on lesson	I would much rather look at PowerPoints than being lectured because I am less likely to pay attention if I am being talked at. PowerPoints help me pay attention because the information is in front of me and the instructor is talking more in depth than what is on the PowerPoint. This helps me pay attention, because if I forget what we are talking about, the PowerPoint will guide me in the right direction.
19%	Promotes class discussion	I like the PowerPoints because we can base class discussions off of them. The PowerPoints allow the discussion to go a handful of different ways and it is a different type of discussion each class period. Also, the PowerPoints give a visual (and sometimes audible) dimension to things such as what the author looked and sounded like, the historical context, etc. This insured that we were participating and really thinking about how to critique each story.
5%	More modern approach	The PowerPoint helps me pay attention more, because it contains pictures and videos. Also, students are more likely to become bored or fall asleep in a lecture where the professor/s are talking and there is no communication between the professors and the students. The PowerPoints allow the students to interact more with the professors and other students. I appreciate how the professors always ask and accept our inputs on how to interpret stories. In addition, PowerPoints are more modern than lectures. Today's college students have more experience with technology, therefore, if class uses modern technology like PowerPoints, the students will be more alert to follow the class discussion. The PowerPoints were a modernized way to do lecture and discussion. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
5%	Agrees with teaching style	I think the professor's teaching style determines how to present the information. For this class specifically, it was good to use the visual PowerPoints so we could clearly see the questions and information. Also, the professors for this class are passionate and like to have fun with their subject area. The PowerPoints allowed them to do this like the wolves howling when we entered the room before our discussion of "The Interlopers". However, if a professor is traditional lecturer, and is really good at doing that, lecture would also be a good way to teach.

For every lesson for each short story, face-to-face or online, a portion was devoted to the author's biography. The importance of author biography to understanding a literary work involves two schools of thought. One is that an author's biography should never enter into understanding and interpreting his/her writing. The other says the author's biography is important because everything he/she writes is filtered through his/her life experience. Also, research has indicated that students are often curious about the authors. It made sense to focus on the active role the author's life plays in creating his/her short stories. In the long run, it will be up to the students to determine the usefulness of the author's biography in analyzing literature.

Most of the students (93%) liked the author biographies and found them helpful in understanding the stories, while 4% thought the author biographies sometimes helped in understanding the stories, and 3% of the students did not think the author biographies helped in understanding the stories. Comments from those who did not find the author biographies helpful included:

- Knowing information about the author didn't benefit my reading of the stories. Obviously, we know that the author got their inspiration for the story either through one of their own life experiences, a story they heard already, or simply a story they made up reflecting how they lived and/or thought. It really didn't matter to me how the author came about writing their story, it just matters that they wrote it.
- Author biographies didn't make a difference. If the story is made by having to do research about an author, it's not a story I will ever enjoy.
- Not essentially since I felt that my own experience and interpretation of the stories were more relevant.

A few students even noted that the author biography was their favorite part of the lessons. Those who thought the biographies helped, claimed the author backgrounds helped them see the connections between the authors' lives and how they used the elements of literature in their stories such as theme, setting, character, etc.; they liked the trivia/facts of an author's life, connected them personally to the authors; and the biographies gave them inspiration. See Table 8. Appendix T: Surveys-Favoring Author Biographies gives further examples of student comments about the use of author biographies in the blended Introduction to Literature course.

The PowerPoint presentations also contained discussion questions with the intent to guide students analyzing the short stories. Questions are valuable tools instructors have

Table 8  
*Favoring Author Biographies*

Percentage	Theme	Sample comment
50%	Gives insight into story	The authors' biographies help me to think more about the author's style and may give insight to the story. Sometimes learning about the authors reveals how or why they wrote their stories the way they did. The authors' personal experiences and/or influences often show in their work. When we hear about when the author was born, we can think about how the time period influenced the author's writing. If we hear about where an author lived, then we can think about the setting and how it may relate to the story. Also, this may help with theme if the characters go through the same hardships the author struggled with.
17%	Liked trivia/facts about authors' lives	I found this information valuable. I happen to be a fan of random facts, so it made me pay more attention because I was interested.
17%	Helped students make personal connection	The author bios provided us as readers a personal connection to the writers.
16%	Gave inspiration	The author bios provided us as readers a personal connection to the writers. It's also very interesting to see how they came to be as successful, which is motivating and inspiring!

to support the understanding, thinking, and achievement of reading literature (Christenbury & Kelly, 1983). Students who ask questions learn more about subject matter, discover their own ideas to argue and sharpen critical-thinking skills, help them function as experts and interact among themselves, and give the teacher valuable information about students' ability and achievement (Christenbury & Kelly, 1983). According to the student surveys, students' attitudes were favorable toward the content of the discussion questions written by the professors in the lecture/PowerPoint presentations used in the blended Introduction to Literature course. They felt the questions were helpful

(91%). Many remarked the questions promoted critical thinking and encouraged them to reread the story or portions of it for a deeper level of comprehension. Others responded (9%) with a mixed view toward the discussion questions. These students felt overall the questions were helpful, but did not see the point to all of the questions. Zero percent claimed the questions were not helpful. Some of the comments were:

- Sometimes I felt the questions were a bit repetitive. I felt my answers were sometimes justified as answers for many of the questions asked so I felt it occasionally seemed like tedious work. But, some of the questions allowed me to explore the literature more than I was doing before reading the questions.
- I thought the questions were very helpful. They revolved around important parts of the story and things that we should have picked up on. They made me look further in depth at the story, and many times, there were questions about things I did not pick up my first time reading the story. Many times while answering the question, I would have to go back and reread parts of it several times, so I could give a complete answer to the question. They contributed to a deeper understanding of the story.
- The questions at the end of the PowerPoints were extremely helpful in understanding the stories better. Sometimes I think I understood everything, and then a question at the end of the presentation would make me think of something in a completely different way. Put simply, the questions at the end of the PowerPoint made me think of the stories from more than just one point of view.

Refer to Appendix U: Surveys-PowerPoint Questions for further comment examples.

Besides the discussion questions from the PowerPoint the students had to complete a critique sheet for each of the short stories they read. These would help students to interpret the literature by examining each of the literary elements. For the first few assignments students responded to the short stories aesthetically. According to Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional theory, readers take a stance toward the literary work on a continuum of efferent to aesthetic response. An efferent response as defined here focuses on information that can be taken away from the literary work—for example, reading a story to learn facts. An aesthetic response as defined here focuses on personally experiencing the text such as reading a story to examine personal values or attitudes. Rosenblatt (1986) suggests that students should be directed toward aesthetic stances during experiences with literature, rather than efferent ones. Then they were guided to take a more critical, analytical approach filling out the critique sheet on subsequent assignments. A framework for the literary analysis of a literary work can be developed by examining its literary elements.

Overall, students (91%) surveyed found the critique sheets valuable and preferred them over traditional research papers, while some had mixed feelings about their value (9%). None of the students reported the critique sheets had no value. When it came to making a choice between doing critique sheets or research papers, 91% of the students surveyed said they prefer the critique sheets. Another 4% preferred research papers over the critique sheets. One student explained:

I prefer doing more traditional research papers because they require a large amount of knowledge on the story before the research paper can actually be put together. Although I find critique sheets do a great job of breaking the story down, it is more of an outline than a review of the story.

A final 5% said which they prefer depends how both these items are used. A comment illustrating this:

Basically, it comes down to the professor's objectives. If the professor's main objective for his/her literature class is to enhance students' writing skills, then the professor should have their students do research papers. However, if the main objective is to help students understand the importance and working of the literary elements, then the professor should use the critique sheet method.

Those who preferred the traditional essays said so because: they like to write essays; this is a skill all need to develop; or it was fine to do the critique sheets, but for the online portion, switch to essays. One student wrote:

I prefer research papers because they are more valuable later in life, because you learn handy skills such as how to construct a paper properly, make text citations, and wording. I plan to go on to graduate school and will need to know how to write research papers well.

Students found the critique sheets valuable for thinking more deeply and critically about the literary elements, increasing the likelihood they would read the stories, preparing better for discussions, retaining more what has been learned, establishing consistency, measuring growth in understanding the literary elements, promoting a greater variety of literature, experiencing a new and better way to read literature, finding their literary critic voices, encouraging creativity, transforming to independent learners, allowing expression of their own literary thoughts and opinions, giving accountability, eliminating notes, organizing, increasing interest, building reading skills, giving confidence to non-writers, and promoting improvement.



Even though the survey question asked students about critique sheets versus traditional long research papers, a couple of students commented that the critique sheets are better than tests. The student stated:

And even though research papers can be very useful and applicable to completing further projects beyond the scholastic world, sadly, there are many problems with research papers that should be addressed because they inhibit learning. Like standardized testing, research papers are structured in a very rigid manner, and learning is being implemented in schools for merely a good final product—a good research paper. By following given guidelines, students learn how to write a so-called ‘good’ paper. There should not be one definition to what a good research paper should be like as there is no definitive answer in standardized testing how reading should be interpreted. On the other hand, there is no one way to write a good critique sheet. Students do not have to research the information (they will probably never use again) to fill them out.

Another student said:

I am glad tests were not used as an evaluation. I hate tests; they just seem to be memorization work you will probably never use or remember a year from now. I prefer the way this class made me learn. It’s something that I’ll remember because the things I learned were useful and will continue to be useful. I won’t remember the next time I will have to remember the Chinese dynasties in order on the spot, but I will remember how to dig deeper into the words on a page and pull out deeper meaning from them. Thank you.

Also, students mentioned that critique sheets are less stressful than research papers, made them more thoughtful how stories are constructed, gave them more practice working with the literary elements than long papers, helped them find their own literary critical voices instead of restating what others have said, encouraged “out-of-the-box” thinking, retained learning to long term memory, exposed them to a larger number of stories, spent less time writing even though the sheets required the same amount of thinking. See Table 9. Appendix W: Surveys-Usefulness of Critique Sheets includes other sample student comments about preferring critique sheets over research papers.

Generally, students (81%) found the blend of discussion and information good for the face-to-face portion of the course, while 10% preferred more discussion and information for each story, and 9% preferred less. One student felt there were “too many discussion questions.” Another stated: “Less information would be better for me. I like reading a story and then trying to figure out where the author got the idea and why he/she wrote the story that way.” Those who liked the blend said it helped them to pay attention, to enjoy literature, to think more deeply and critically about the stories, to open them up to various literary interpretations, to have information not overwhelming or insignificant, to create personal connections to the literature, to promote engagement, to help visual learners, to make note taking easier, to learn how to critique, to retain information, and to feel their thoughts and opinions mattered. See Table 10. Appendix W: Surveys-Blend of Discussion and Information for Face-to-Face Portion has more examples about the blend of discussion and information in the blended Introduction to Literature course.

Table 9  
*Usefulness of Critique Sheets*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
34%	Aided understanding how stories constructed	The critique sheets have helped me know what to look for and think about when reading the stories.
10%	Allowed more practice working with literary elements	Logistically we could do more critique sheets than papers. With the critique sheets, we had to apply the comments from the professors to the next assignment. We would not be as likely to apply the advice from the papers' comments since we do only a few of them, we could get by not applying the advice. So, we would develop better skills interpreting literature since we would be continuously practicing working with the elements of literature and with a variety of stories. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
9%	Less stressful	Research papers make me anxious, and I would spend more time thinking about the spelling and format than I would about the literary elements. Also, the critique sheets make the class more casual, making me more relaxed, and willing to share my thoughts and ideas with the class in discussion.
7%	Accountability	I prefer the critique sheet because it helped us to grow as people since these helped with time management skills and responsibility since every week had a critique or two.
7%	Clear assessment/growth	I rather have the critiques sheets. With them we could chart and keep track of our growth throughout the semester, not to mention it was an easier way to see our strengths and weaknesses in interpreting literature through the elements of literature.
6%	Better prepared for discussion	One of my favorite aspects of the critique sheet was being allowed to share our own personal thoughts and opinions after reflecting first on a story's structure based on the literary elements. The critique sheets also allowed the professors to have some sort of accountability from the students in making sure that we read each of the stories and had the opportunity to "bring something to the table" when we came to class to discuss the stories.
4%	Allowed exposure to more stories	The critique sheets allowed us to cover a larger number of stories than having to write long drawn out papers over fewer stories. By having more stories, class discussions are run at a quicker pace, giving us the opportunity to move onto a different story, which is good especially if a student can't connect to a particular story. And even occasionally if we couldn't relate to the story at hand, we still walked away with literary knowledge and felt we had another chance to contribute more for the next assignment.
4%	Finding literary critic voice	We were encouraged as said earlier to incorporate our own views, interpretations, and opinions about the literary work to become real literary critics. This is a skill we can apply in real life to other school work, readings, movies, etc.
4%	Encouraged "out-of-box" thinking	With critique sheets, students use their powers of imagination to think critically about reading literature created from the world of someone else's imagination. Ultimately, critique sheets encourage creativity instead of being shackled to believing and going along with social norms. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
3%	Not as time consuming	The critique sheets gave us more chances to improve grades for the course. We could not do as many papers, because they are more time consuming.
3%	More likely to retain information	I personally prefer doing the critique sheets, because I have learned, understood, and retained information better than writing traditional papers. With papers I would have simply looked up the information in a book or online article and typed what I found in a Word Doc without even thinking about what I wrote.
3%	Build confidence as reader	I like critique sheets better. They feel safer than papers for interpreting literature, because we had to have confidence in ourselves first with our interpretations and they allowed us to grow as writers by taking more baby steps to develop those skills than having to write a ten-page paper.
3%	Increased interest in literature	Critique sheets are valuable. By completing a critique sheet, I was able to look at different literary techniques more in depth. This is because I was thinking about them individually rather than altogether. Therefore, I could spend more time on a certain technique and really be able to see how the author uses it to persuade the reader's thoughts. For example, before this class I didn't think much about the setting of a story, other than it describes where and when the story took place. But now I see how setting can influence a reader's thinking and how it can be used to shape a story. This has helped me to become more interested in literature.
3%	More fun and engaging	Critique sheets are more interesting, fun, and engaging than papers.

Table 10  
*Blend of Discussion and Information for Face-to-Face Portion*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
29%	Stimulated deeper and more critical thinking about stories	The amount of information we received about each story was good. When I get too much information, I get overwhelmed and don't know how to organize the information or decide which information is relevant and important to know. The information was enough to understand the story, but still have some unanswered questions for me to think about. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
14%	Presented information that is not overwhelming and/or insignificant	There was just enough information about the story and just enough discussion over each story. We picked the story apart and explored it in detail, but we didn't interpret every possible meaning for each word or what detail symbolized.
11%	Promoted student engagement	I like the blend of discussion and information we had. Helps me know more information about the story that I did not see earlier, and it makes the students get involved.
9%	Increased literary enjoyment	I also liked the little add-ons the professors threw in. This made learning fun, not boring.
9%	Learned how to critique	I would say the blend of discussion and information that has been provided in class is just the right amount of information to facilitate class discussion, create a fun learning environment and give students an opportunity to learn how to properly critique a story and what to look for as a critic.
6%	Opened students to various literary interpretations	The blend was good. If too much time was spent on discussion, the critique sheets from everyone would be very similar because too much of the interpretations would be done in class.
6%	Created personal connections to stories	Sometimes I don't like when the professors call on me, but when we relate our lives to the stories, I enjoy talking and listening to my peers.
5%	Related to visual format	The visuals drew me in as a learner.
3%	Aided in gaining student attention	I pay better attention the way class was set up. The questions encouraged deep and critical thinking.
3%	Eased note taking	There was enough time between the discussion and visual aids for me to jot down notes so I would be able to retain the information, because I retain and learn information better when I write it down.
3%	Retained information	I would say that the information given in class had been perfect to help me retain the information. The background of the author gives us a good idea of what he/she is like and why they might write the way that they do. Going over the story really helps when it is confusing to completely solve on our own. Lastly, the questions at the end were awesome. They helped us recap everything we had learned and highlighted the important lessons.
2%	Felt that students' thoughts and opinions mattered	I really enjoy the amount of information, the relevancy of the information, the way it was presented on PowerPoint, and the class discussions. I felt as though each students' views and opinions matter and we as students can go back and forth in both large and small group discussions.

When we asked students for suggestions after the face-to-face portion was concluded, 41% had no suggestions. Several of these students remarked how passionate the professors were and to keep this up for all future classes. A number of students also remarked the class was fun, they had never experienced anything like this before, and they enjoyed it. They thought the class was nicely set up. Representative comments from students who had no suggestions about the face-to-face portion include:

- Overall, this class is unique and interesting. It goes in depth about several short stories to show many styles and genres of writing. I appreciated how the professors demonstrated how to access documents online and how the course was organized. The passion of the professors toward the students and the subject area carries over to the students.
- I love how our professors are always so passionate about what they are talking about. Having professors who don't care and don't love what they are teaching really turns students off of the subject. Our professors love their job which makes it easy for us students to love this class. Literature was my favorite class that I took this semester.
- Honestly, I have no suggestions on ways to improve this course due to the fact that I feel everything is running very efficiently as well as having very approachable professors. By allowing this course to be face-to-face as well as incorporating independent online time not only helps the students be able to grow, but also forces them to try things for themselves first before asking a teacher right away for help. This combination of learning is very

effective as well as very convenient for the students. I am very impressed with this class and extremely appreciative of how compassionate both professors are about helping their students reach their full potential. So, in short, keep up the good work, and I hope to see more of these classes appearing in the future!

Appendix X: Surveys- No Suggestions for Improving Face-to-Face Portion contains more sample student survey comments.

Suggestions given for improving the face-to-face portion were various and usually not repeated. Suggestions have been broken down into three categories: improving content, improving use of technology, and improving teaching methods. See Table 11.

Table 11  
*Suggestions for Improving Face-to-Face Portion*

Improving Content	Improving Use of Technology	Improving Teaching Methods
Have a mix of genres that includes poetry	Add more details to PowerPoints	Make it easier to get perfect scores
Cut back on author information	Have less details for PowerPoints	Not make the critique sheets the same
Add more author information	Use Blackboard	Add some of the PowerPoint questions to the critique sheets so students can think about the answers before class
More information about the stories and their literary elements	Post grades online	Don't force involvement with discussions. If a student has something he/she feels is worth sharing with the class, he/she will speak answers voluntarily. (table continues)

Improving Content	Improving Use of Technology	Improving Teaching Methods
Less PowerPoint questions	More information on Google Docs	Use small groups or partner discussions more, because it's sometimes harder to communicate in a larger group
More PowerPoint questions	Put all stories online so don't have to buy text	Include full calendar for semester
Take a vote the first week on which stories to read and use these for the course	Make critique sheets fillable so easier and encourage to write more	Longer class periods
Include more stories written recently-the language is easier to understand	More videos	Slow down professor delivery
Have more activities	Less videos	More share time of literary interpretations
Include a research paper assignment	Use Google Classroom for turning in critique sheets	More time given to read longer stories
Add more requirements to critique sheets so students can analyze more information about each story		Make sure everyone is called upon in discussion
More on symbolism and theme		Give more response time
Watch entire video instead of parts		
Questions too repetitive		

Students surveyed gave various recommendations/suggestions for future students enrolled in the blended Introduction to Literature's face-to-face portion. Some of these are:

- Don't take the stories at face value. It probably has a deeper meaning.
- Pay attention to the elements of literature. These are key.



- Pay attention to the PowerPoints, because many of the same types of questions will be asked during the independent section.
- Always use your planner and feel free to ask questions in class.
- Be active in class. Do not be afraid to share your own opinions and answers to questions. Your opinions are what makes this class fun! There is no ONE way to analyze any piece of literature. As long as you can explain your answers and opinions, then you are not wrong!
- It gets less stressful during the second (online) half of the course. The first half is quick paced and a bit overwhelming, but it truly gets you fully ready for the second half.
- Try your best at filling out the critique sheets, even if you are not confident, because the professors give wonderful feedback that will help them improve in the future. Also, read the story early, take a day or two to think about it, then fill out the critique sheet and answer the PowerPoint questions. This will allow you to think deeper about the story and pull your thoughts together.
- Read each story more than once. Read it on different days or take a break for a little while and come back to it.
- Keep up with the class work and don't be lazy in completing the assignments. The practice you get now will be hugely beneficial later.
- Take notes from what the class discussion. Others will bring up good points about the literature that you have not thought of.

Online portion. All (100%) of the student participants surveyed responded with finding the information in the online lectures/PowerPoints useful. Almost all of the students (98%) found the information in the online lectures/PowerPoints easy to understand. Some of their comments included:

- I wouldn't change anything.
- I liked how the PowerPoints gave background information first and then went into information about the story. I think that really helped me put everything together.
- Yes, I found them easy to understand, because we had extensive practice with them during the in-class portion of the semester.
- Sometimes the questions at the end of the PowerPoint were difficult to understand and I had to really think about them.

Appendix Y: Surveys-Online Lectures/PowerPoints Usefulness has more sample comments about this topic.

A vast majority (95%) of the students reported that they did not have any difficulty completing either the critique or the questions at the end of the lecture/PowerPoint material during the online portion, while 5% had some difficulty. Some of the students used the Internet on their own as a teaching aid. A few of the comments pertaining to whether students had any difficulties completing either the critique sheets or the questions at the end of the online independent learning pods were:

- It was easy to complete the critique sheet and the questions. The critique sheet provided new insights to the stories.

- I did not have a lot of problems answering the PowerPoint questions or filling out the critique sheet. But when I did, I either asked the instructors for help during their office hours or emailed them. Sometimes I would look up some hints on the Internet as a guide for my responses.
- There were never any times that I absolutely could not complete a question or a part of the critique sheets. There were times questions were a little more difficult or a literary element was harder to pick up on. To solve these problems, I would go back and try to reread a section or the entire story if I needed to. The PowerPoints usually helped me to understand the story. So, if I got confused, I would try to find help through the slides. If not, I found that the Internet is a great source to find additional information on the story and help understand the work at a deeper level.
- Personally, I didn't struggle with anything in the online independent learning pods. By the time the first part of the semester was over, I was extremely comfortable with filling out the critique sheets and answering the questions. With all the critiques we did in class, I felt I was extremely well prepared for the independent part.

Appendix Z: Surveys-Difficulties Completing the Critique or PowerPoint Questions contains more sample responses.

When asked as to what improvements can be made to the Introduction to Literature course, 73% of the students replied it was fine the way it was. Suggestions others gave were: more author biography, less author biography, more historical context,

more encouragement to look at outside resources, promote resources that are not online, more detailed feedback, less detailed feedback, vocabulary list with definitions of difficult words for each story, more about other literary works each author has written, and more in depth with literary elements.

Further survey evidence revealed perqs students perceived from independent learning pods in the online portion:

- Developed time management skills
- Gave me the flexibility and freedom to make my own schedule to complete assignments when I had the availability
- Became an independent learner since I had to learn to think more critically
- Helped with financial stress since I was able to work more hours
- Developed responsibility
- Experienced less stress due to the flexibility, because I could go at my own pace reading and comprehending the literature and completing the assignments
- Transformed into a better reader because could go at my own pace reading to comprehend the literature and work the assignments
- Was rested since I could sleep in Tuesday and Thursday mornings
- Gained greater understanding of stories since I had more time to come up with thoughtful answers for the discussion questions
- Could prioritize my classwork

Most of the students (97%) surveyed claimed they liked the freedom to work on their own. A few of the representative comments are:

- The independent learning pods helped me by freeing up my own time and allowing me to do the work for the class on my own. Not that the professors weren't great teachers, but their PowerPoints really did the teaching of the stories justice. At first, their presence and involvement in our learning was highly important in the fact that we needed to know their expectations of the work and what to look for. From there it was like a guided learning process, which I very much enjoy. I like to learn from my mistakes and grow from them. It was nice to have the material and expectations presented to us, and then the professors let us fly.
- By doing the independent Learning Pods I learned how to create my own schedule and how to stick to it. The professors gave us a sample schedule to stick to in order to remain on track. However, when we get out in the real world we are going to be on our own, and we will then have to create our own schedules. So even though the professors helped us along the way, it was good practice making our schedules. But also, the independent Learning Pods helped me to think on my own. Too many times the professor(s) will give the students the answer to a problem, which does not allow them to develop creative thinking, problem solving, and time management skills, not to mention independence and responsibility. This class was not the case.

- I was taking 19 credit hours and had to work 10-12 hours a week. By having the Independent Learning Pods, I had more freedom getting the pods done on my own time, creating less stress in my other classes and work. I liked having this freedom to create my own schedule. I knew exactly what to do.
- It was much nicer to be able to work around my schedule. I work a lot and my schedule changes every week so I just did it when it worked best for me, and not when I was told to.

One student surveyed who did not like the freedom and flexibility of the online independent learning pods wrote: “I tried my hardest to work on the independent portion of the class during the time I normally had class, but since I didn’t have to go to class, I put it off. My time management was not good. Sometimes I worked on other homework during that time.”

Online portion-major project. The culminating assignment of the Introduction to Literature course was the final project. For this, students selected a short story of their choice and created a PowerPoint lesson with discussion questions. The students gave this lesson to a peer who had read the story. Then that person viewed the PowerPoint lesson and completed the discussion questions and critique sheet. The peer also exchanged his/her lesson with the person teaching him/her. The final major project appeared to have captured the kinds of learning content within BL: blending offline and online learning; blending self-paced and live, collaborative leaning; blending structured and unstructured learning; and blending learning, practice, and performance support. It also reflected the new transformations students saw themselves having: from knowledge repeater to critical

thinker, dependent learner to independent learner, surface reader to close reader, non-literary person to literary person, and primarily as student to teacher. Technology and support played important roles.

Many students reported they became close readers by rereading. Before enrolling in the blended Introduction to Literature course, they would either skim or read a story once, if at all, for an assignment. However, many of them changed. For example, many did multiple readings. For the final project, students reported:

- 16% read their story once from beginning to end
- 27% read their story twice from beginning to end
- 27% read their story three times from beginning to end
- 7% read their story four times from beginning to end
- 13% read their story five times from beginning to end
- 10% read their story six or more times from beginning to end

Several of the students also mentioned skimming parts of the story several times as they worked on the project. It should be noted, too, that a few students said they had read the story they selected before this course. Therefore, they might have done more readings if the story was totally new to them.

Those who did multiple readings made the comment that with each reading they saw something new in the story. They also commented that the first reading was to get the gist of the story. Then they looked for literary elements and how they were used as well as hidden or deeper meanings of the story with each subsequent reading. Doing so helped facilitate their transformations from knowledge repeater to critical thinker,

dependent learner to independent learner, surface reader to close reader, non-literary person to literary person, and student to teacher.

Furthermore, students varied in how they put their projects together. About two-thirds of the students (67%) began by putting the PowerPoint together, while 33% began with the critique sheets. Those who completed the critique first, used it as an outline to help them to organize their thoughts and material for the PowerPoint; as a check that their analysis would correspond to what they found about the author's life, historical context, and what other literary critics said; and/or this was the habit they formed when they used the critique sheets in the face-to-face sessions. Those who began with the PowerPoint, said they wanted to do outside research first to help them in fill out the critiques.

While assuming the role of the teacher, as well the other identities mentioned earlier, no one left out author biography in their final projects. This happened in spite of the fact not all the students surveyed agreed that it was important to know the author in order to better understand literature. Also, all the students retained the literary elements in the student questions they composed, but some failed to have a discussion about the literary elements within the body of their PowerPoints. The other item some students failed to include was the historical context. When asked if they included both these areas, some students "skirted around the issue," thus making it difficult to come up with percentages. However, those who admitted leaving out one or both of these items said it was because they forgot, did not think it was important, or had difficulty finding information. One student said he/she did not include this information because it was the duty of the peer to come up with on his/her own interpretation of the literary elements



and historical context without any help from the PowerPoint. Another student felt time put into the project mattered more than the content.

Those who included a discussion about the important literary elements of their story remarked that doing so helped them to better perform the teacher role. First, it helped them to guide others to explore and compose claims about what deeper layers of meaning lie beneath the surface of the text. Second, by noting how the literary elements are used and/or repeatedly appear in the story, readers of the story will be more likely to read more closely and critically. They also noted that by breaking down the story in such a way in their role as teacher, helped them as students gain a deeper understanding of the story themselves.

Those who included information about the historical context remarked that it is important because it brings information external to the text to support, deepen, or discover a new interpretation of the story. Providing such context may involve including details about the historical time period in which the text was written, cultural references in the text, the historical definitions of certain words, other texts alluded to within the story, and/or other writings by the author of his/her contemporaries. They added that this demands extra time since it requires research.

Furthermore, students noted that historical context can make a literary analysis persuasive and helps reveal the story's complexity. Many students pointed out literature is a product of its age and the meaning of a story can only be discovered by fitting it around other discourses from the same period.

The estimated amount of time the students completing the survey put into this project varied from two hours to seventy-five hours. A few students said they had no idea how many hours they put in on the final project. Eight to ten hours was the most common time students reported.

A majority of the students (68%) reported having no difficulties putting together the major project, while 32% reported having some difficulty putting it together. As far as the most difficult part of completing the project, 27% listed coming up with good discussion questions. They stated it was challenging to come up with ones that would make their partners think critically about the story, but were not too difficult or easy. Many remarked this was not a task they had to do before. These and other difficulties mentioned appear in Table 12. Appendix AA: Surveys-Difficulties Putting Together Major Project contains more examples. Moreover, in spite of being given a checklist, two students said they did not know what the expectations were from the professors and one student wished the checklist was a rubric instead.

Several commented taking the role of teacher furthered their critical thinking and analytical reading skills. They enjoyed the project, mainly because it helped them to become deeper thinkers, better readers, more creative, and independent learners.

Most of the students (74%) claimed nothing could be done to help them with their final project, while 26% had suggestions. Those who had suggestions listed: supplying at least two good resources to find information about the story, so if the story was not understood, the student could go to these resources for help; giving more direct information about the author; presenting an overall background about the story; making

Table 12  
*Difficulties in Putting Together Major Project*

Researching Difficulties	Technological Difficulties	Other Difficulties
Finding material about author's background	Laptop needing repairs	Had some trouble understanding and analyzing story
Finding material about historical context of story	Embedding video	Time consuming
Finding fitting video clips	First time made PowerPoint	Organization of project
Locating visuals to use	Learning how to hyperlink	Not using time efficiently
Determining if facts were indeed factual and reliable	Sending in project (e.g. too massive or in wrong format)	Choosing the story
	Technological difficulties with PowerPoint applications	Putting thoughts into words
	Formatting, organizing, designing, and layout of PowerPoint	Prefer to have a rubric rather than a checklist of what was required
		Wanted a second opinion to give confidence was on right track with analysis (Note: student took responsibility for not coming in during office hours or emailing)
		Writing text that will promote understanding of the story
		Making information creative and interesting
		Deciding how much information to include

recommendations for story selection; sharing more or different slide examples; listing good websites about the authors, stories, and historical contexts; and sharing where the professors got their information in preparing their lessons. Many of these suggestions dealt with researching. Two interesting comments from the surveys were:

- A lot of things would have helped. However, it was our task to be the teacher for this project, so I believe it should be the way it was where we have to understand

the story and author completely on our own without any professional assistance.

The major project shows how well students can interpret literature and how well they can research about the author and historical context, as well as experiment with creativity. If the information was given to the students, then the project simply becomes one that determines whether a student is capable or not to handle the technology to create a PowerPoint. By not going this route, we have grown from dependent to independent learners.

- This was a great chance for us to spread our wings and show that we could apply what we have learned. My major project was about “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. By having a good understanding of the literary elements and researching how women in general and mentally ill women specifically (e.g. the rest cure) were looked upon during Gilman’s life really helped me understand and appreciate her story more. Also, discovering Gilman’s feminist beliefs helped immensely. My project was much richer, and I was a better teacher because of this.

Overall, the majority of the students seem to have taken the initiative to conduct research, look at and evaluate multiple sources, be willing to reread several times and think critically about what they had read for their final project. Many of them expressed appreciation to be independent and creative. They liked being the teacher.

Students (90%) surveyed expressed a strong preference for creating a major project as opposed to writing the traditional 7-10-page paper. However, 3% claimed they would rather do the paper, while 7% of them claimed they would enjoy doing either the

project or a paper. Students expressed teacher appreciation in their replies to this survey question. See Table 13. Appendix BB: Surveys-Project vs. Research Paper has more student comment examples.

Table 13  
*Reasons Prefer Project over Research Paper*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
21%	More enjoyable	I had to write a paper for all my other classes and I absolutely hated it. I put much more time and effort into the project because it was actually enjoyable.
17%	Think deeper	I am burnt out on paper writing. Also, papers tend to be regurgitated facts. I thought deeper with the project.
13%	More imaginative and creative	Traditional research papers have many rules and constraints. Professors usually require students to research information on a topic that isn't their choice. In most cases, we combine a bunch of facts together that represent what we think the professor wants to hear. In reality, these papers are very dull to read and a nuisance to write. They lack imagination and creative expression.
13%	Chance to teach	It was fun to be the teacher!
6%	Better way to demonstrate what was learned	I am an awful writer. With the project, I was able to apply what I learned about reading literature. This may not have come through with a paper.
6%	Novelty	The project was a good idea. I do not mind writing papers but his was very refreshing and I think I did the same amount of work I would've done for a paper, but in a way, that was more enjoyable for me and someone else to review.
5%	Learned to work with technology	The project allowed us to be creative, think deeply, and work on other important skills such as learning how to master computers and to work visually. It felt like the project accomplished the same goals as a paper would have, but in a much more enjoyable way.
5%	Had choices	Being given student choice as to which story to select and creativity in teaching about it increased my interest in the assignment.
3%	Less stressed	The project seemed more casual than the traditional paper, so less stressed about perfection. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
3%	Able to work visually with text	YES!!! Working with both visuals and text is more beneficial than working with text alone in a paper. Adding visual elements to text and being creative will help me to remember the literature much better.
3%	Better use of time	The project was a better use of my time and helped me interact with the story.
2%	More oriented for a blended course	I definitely enjoyed the major project over the paper. It was more oriented for a blended class. It was a total flip from the professors teaching us to us becoming the teachers. I liked that!
2%	Retained information better	I liked doing this project because it gave me more of an insight of how the professors put things together and actually helped me learn a lot more and retain the information about the story than I would have just doing a paper.
1%	Easier	It is easier and less time consuming than a long paper.

Generally, the students surveyed felt they learned a lot by creating the major project. Things students learned and/or benefitted from included those items found in Table 14. However, a couple of students felt they learned more during the face-to-face portion of class. They said that the PowerPoint was just another project to work with a subject they “already have a handle on”. Appendix CC: Surveys-Learned from the Final Project contains further examples of what students perceived they learned.

Breaking the major project down into its major components gives further information how students perceive the blended Introduction to Literature course. One of the components was the story itself. When students were asked in a survey what would help them better understand the story as they completed the major project, 81% of the students responded “nothing else.” A representative quote for this set of students follows:

How well I understood both the story and the author depended on how closely I paid attention to the reading and how much I researched the author. Since it was an independent/online portion, I don't think that anything needed to be added to help us comprehend the information better. Knowing that I'd have to dive deep into it, I did what I needed to best prepare myself.

Suggestions included provide a list of websites about the stories, historical contexts and authors; spend more time with literary technique of author style; and show how to do online literary research.

Table 14  
*Examples of Learning from Final Project*

Percentage	Themes
30%	Stronger analytical skills
9%	Greater appreciation of literature
9%	Teaching skills
7%	Confidence as reader
7%	Expanded horizons
6%	Became independent learner
6%	Increased study skills
6%	Strengthen writing skills
6%	Creativity
5%	Processed how reader adds meaning to text
3%	Improved research skills
3%	Learned about self as reader
2%	Gained technical skills
1%	Learned new vocabulary

Most students surveyed (85%) reported no difficulties finding information about their stories and authors for the major project, while 15% of the students reported having some difficulty. A few of the students claiming no difficulties expressed that this may be

determined by how well known the author and story are. The better known the author and/or the story, the more abundant the information will be. Students who had no difficulties finding material also stated they knew how to research efficiently since they had already written numerous research papers. It was noted, too, by some of these students they knew that they could always ask the professors for assistance if needed.

Students who reported some difficulty listed the following challenges:

- Difficulty in finding enough information about author
- Difficulty finding enough information about historical context of story
- Coming up with a variety of images
- Accuracy of resources varied from source to source about the same subject, thereby making it difficult to determine what facts are true
- Finding what literary critics wrote about the stories
- Found so much information that it was a sorting process what to include
- Time consuming because it took some “digging” to come with appropriate information

However, a few reported they were “ahead of the game” to see how much information was available by Googling their stories and authors before determining which story they would select for the project.

Many of the students surveyed remarked their partner’s work on the critique sheet and PowerPoint questions changed their views about the story and possibly about the author. This is how this topic broke down through percentages:

- 46% said could recognize another interpretation/perception of story and/or author



- 37% said their partner's work verified their interpretation
- 8% said their partner's work increased the enjoyment they had from story
- 2% said they felt they did not teach well enough for understanding about story
- 7% had no response

One of the students who had no response said he/she did not pay attention to the partner's work because the professors never specifically said read the partner's work.

When students were asked in the final survey what would change if they had to do project over, the highest responses went to the following: manage my time better, add more information pertaining to the historical context, add more discussion about the literary elements, include more visuals, and be more creative and interesting. Other responses included: add hyperlinks, learn how to hyperlink, include more video, learn more about PowerPoint formatting and layout, proofread better, do more revising and editing, select a different story, have more citations, expand the author's biography, give more effort, and use the checklist. Some of the students (13%) replied that they would not change anything.

A vast majority (94%) of the students surveyed reported the major project should be continued in the future for the Introduction to Literature course, while 3% said not to continue with project, 3% said the project should be an option with the traditional paper. See Table 15. For more data, look at Appendix DD: Surveys-Reasons Major Project Should be Continued.

Table 15  
*Reasons Major Project Should be Continued*

Percentage	Reasons
30%	Expanded our thinking to be more critical and developed higher level thinking (Bloom's Taxonomy) in literature
19%	Benefits of students teaching
7%	Less stressful than a traditional paper
7%	Novelty is nice
4%	Chance to be creative
4%	Opened us to different interpretations of stories
4%	Fun caused greater student engagement
4%	Is visual
4%	More likely to retain information
4%	Learning can be applied to other classes, jobs, leisure, future, etc.
4%	Strengthened technology skills
4%	Allowed us to bring ourselves to the text when interpreting (transactional theory)
3%	Student-centered (gave students power over their own learning)
2%	Brought the entire course together (was the culmination and marriage between face-to-face and online portions)

Content overall of blended Introduction to Literature course. Reading literature for understanding is a complex act of constructing meaning from print. According to the NCTE policy on reading (1998-2015), people read in order to “better understand ourselves, others, and the world around us; we use the knowledge we gain from reading to change the world in which we live.” Reading is a process. No fixed point exists when people suddenly become readers. The NCTE policy continues:

Instead, all of us bring our understanding of spoken language, our knowledge of the world, and our experiences in it to make sense of what we read. We grow in our ability to comprehend and interpret a wide range of reading materials by making appropriate choices from among the extensive repertoire of skills and strategies that develop over time. (NCTE, 1998-2015)

This is similar to the transactional theory of reading. The co-teachers of the blended Introduction to Literature course also believe that great stories need to be read. In spite of being lovers of literature, the co-teachers recognize that the students who have enrolled in their course may not share their passion. The stories a typical American first-year student has read are limited. When he/she have finished their senior year in high school, a typical student before he/she begins college might have read and intentionally studied 40 to 50 books in their English classes (assuming five or six books per year from fifth through twelfth grade). Because this small number of books forms the foundation of their knowledge about literature, the co-teachers of the blended Introduction to Literature course had to consider not only what is “good,” but also what the totality of the stories they chose for this course accomplishes as the part of students’ broader education. Therefore, we decided to use short stories.

Short stories allowed the co-teachers to use a variety of authors. Almost all of the students (97%) responded they would rather study a full range of authors than just a few, while 3% responded they would rather have a few authors than a full range. Student comments from the surveys and casual interviews revealed that they felt short stories were a low-risk way to expose them to different types of text complexity. After all, 20-page experiments are often more forgiving than 350-page experiments. They liked that a short story could be studied in a few days versus a few weeks for a novel. The shorter material length often made it easier for students to reread. Nothing builds an awareness of the elements of literature like rereading a full narrative. Because of the brevity of short stories, students were exposed to a greater variety of authors and their works than reading

a few novels. Many students expressed appreciation for this. Students who wanted fewer authors said they were less likely to mix up the authors and stories. Table 16 presents sample reasons to study a full range of authors. Appendix EE: Surveys-Reasons to Study a Full Range of Authors has more data.

Table 16  
*Reasons to Study a Full Range of Authors*

Percentage	Theme
26%	Experienced a diversity of stories which exposes us to many writing styles, themes, authors, etc.
21%	Had better understanding of the literary elements to see complexity and gain insights about the stories
11%	Made us more well-rounded readers since dealt with stories we would not have selected to read on our own or even knew existed causing us to be exposed to how others view life
11%	Gained clearer understanding how history and authors influenced writers
11%	Helped those of us with shorter attention spans since less likely to get bored and knew if disliked an author we soon would be working with a different one
5%	Meant working with fewer authors and the professors less likely to “beat a work to death” by analyzing everything
5%	Working with various authors in shorter works such as short stories made creating a literary analysis less overwhelming
5%	Made class feel as if it was constantly new and exciting which increases student engagement
5%	Enabled me to better figure out my tastes in reading

Generally, students seemed satisfied with the BL structure. Most of the surveyed students (83%) felt nothing should be changed about the BL structure, while 17% of the surveyed

students had suggestions. See Table 17. Appendix GG: Surveys-Suggestions for the BL Structure contains more data about the blended Introduction to Literature course.

Table 17  
*Suggestions for the BL Structure*

BL Formula/Theme	Sample Comment
More face-to-face meetings	Wished the class had more face-to-face meetings, because I would have liked to have met after each learning pod was due so we could discuss the problems or our thoughts on the story with each other. The class discussions over each story were my favorite part of the course, because they helped me see how each story can be interpreted a different way depending on who is reading the story.
Entirely face-to-face or online	Because I don't like change
Entirely face-to-face	Then we could express interpretations of stories to instantly and physically hear, see, and feel what peers and professors had to say
Entirely face-to-face	Because this is what I have always known
Entirely face-to-face	Because online is "out of sight, out of mind" meaning I am more likely to mismanage time and forget about the class if not physically coming to a classroom on a mandated schedule
Entirely online	I like working independently
Entirely online	I am an introverted person
Other	Wished could have got the final sooner so could have finished this class super early and could then focus on my other major classes
Other	Wished to have the first six weeks be face-to-face just as normal. Then, on the seventh week, have a trial run to what the independent part of the course would be like with learning pod one, and on the eighth week, have the final week of face-to-face classes with the midterm exam. Then, if anybody has any initial troubles with doing the independent part, these troubles could be addressed and resolved in class as a whole instead of over email.
Other	Wished could start the major project at the beginning of the year instead of after the end of the first half-semester. I felt like I had plenty of time to do this project, but many other students have more time restraining schedules where this extra time would be very beneficial.
Other	Wished the independent online portion contained a few extra stories. I spent maybe an hour a week on the class, and while it was fun enough, I don't feel like I did a lot to earn my credits.

BL Formula/Theme	Sample Comment
Other	Wished changed due dates of assignments because that's a lot of work in a short amount of time, especially for independent work.
Other	Wished for more of a range in time periods. I recommend adding one or two more American short stories from the past few years or just in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century in general to give course more relevance and universality to the students' lives.
Other	Wished during the Independent Learning Pods, we met once a week for maybe a half an hour or so just to discuss the story for that week and to turn in the assignment. By meeting for that half an hour and turning in the assignment, it could cause less confusion than sending the assignment through e-mail, and maybe minimize the amount of times people forget to do the assignment or turn it in.
Other	Wished for the major project work to be split and evaluated before doing the next chunk for it. For example, the first assignment would have students read the short story selected, fill out an independent critique sheet for the story that they chose, a draft of the questions they would like to add at the end of the slideshow, and then have them include these questions and answers with the completed independent critique sheet by Friday at midnight like when the usual independent work was due. The professors would critique the work and the students would finish the project based on their feedback.

Some of the representative comments from those who were surveyed and liked the blended format are:

- I really liked being part of the experiment of the in-class portion then the independent portion. It taught me what class style I prefer and taught me how to make myself better as a student. I do not think the professors should change anything about either section of the course. It was taught and structured very nicely.

- I really enjoyed this class set up. I learned a lot throughout the course and doing the learning pods on my own was actually quite fun. I liked being able to interpret them my own way without hearing everyone else's interpretations.
- I liked meeting as a class first because we knew what was expected of us. We knew what the professors wanted on our critique sheets. We were also able to practice developing our thoughts during this time. Then when we worked independently, we applied the information we learned during the face-to-face portion to create the work ourselves. I like that the structure of the PowerPoints and the critique sheets were the same from the face-to-face to the independent online section. This helped us know what the professors expected from us. I enjoyed meeting with the class to hear what other people thought about the stories.
- I really enjoyed this format. Since the class stopped meeting around midterm time, it was nice to take advantage of the ability to set my own schedule. The frequency of major projects in other classes seemed to pick up after midterms, so it was really nice to have a chance to restructure a bit. I wouldn't change anything about the format of the course. It was awesome! I loved it!
- I thought that the way this course was structured was perfect. It is awesome for students who are scared of taking a completely online course, but also don't have the time to take a completely face-to-face course. I also liked that it was perfect for extroverts and introverts because it gave each of us a chance to be successful.

- I thought the way that this class was formatted was perfect for my liking. I enjoyed meeting with the class to get to know other students, my professors, and to show each other's thoughts about the stories. I also liked the independent part because I could work on my own schedule and think individually.

See Appendix HH: Surveys-Liking the Blended Format for further details.

One benefit students perceived from taking the BL Introduction to Literature course was acquiring new identities is the process of transforming from passive to active learners. Table 18 reveals these identities. Appendix II: Surveys-New Student Identities has more detailed from the blended Introduction to Literature course.

Furthermore, the students surveyed perceived many technology benefits from taking the BL Introduction to Literature course. These included:

- Technology can aid learning by engaging students.
- Technology has made online learning possible which gives students flexibility and made learning more convenient since they can do the course anytime at any place at own pace.
- Technology has improved technical skills such as learning about Google Docs, how to create a PowerPoint, type faster and more accurately on Word, etc.
- Technology can enhance creativity.



Table 18  
*Acquired New Identities*

New Identity	Themes
Independent learner	Able to work independently
	Able to be more marketable for future jobs since can work on my own
	Able to ease financial stress since independent learning allowed me to pick up more work hours
	Able to do independent research
	Able to thrive in classes by managing time effectively
	Able to enjoy learning by practicing good study skills
	Able to be more reliable and responsible
	Able to be confident that I can make it as a college student
Critical thinker	Able to construct effective literary interpretive arguments based on specific examples and proof from text
	Able to challenge myself as a learner to grow as a thinker
	Able to find ways to be creative and imaginative
	Able to find learning fun when going beyond merely reciting facts
	Able to be more aware of the world culturally and historically
	Able to see interconnections between literature and other content areas
	Able to apply reading skills to other classes and in life personally
Close reader	Able to recognize literature may have multiple interpretations
	Able to apply the literary elements to look beyond the surface of the text to find insights and complexity
	Able to gain new insights in how to read literature by examining and looking at the elements of literature
	Able to have well thought out opinions when creating literary interpretations
	Able to discover the universality in literary classics
	Able to better understand how stories are constructed
	Able to see connection between writing and reading
	Able to see that literary elements are author tools that can be used in various ways to manipulate how their readers think and feel
	Able to gain a better understanding of the elements of literature
	Able to improve reading comprehension
	Able to recognize through close reading the connection to writing skills
	Able to realize that literary elements must interrelate to create a well-constructed story
	Able to learn life lessons from stories
	Able to recognize various writing styles
	Literary Connoisseur
Able to discover how to become a better literary critic	
Able to not ever read literature the same way again	
Able to make reading part of my lifelong learning	
Able to help determine my major-now know I want to major in literature	
Able to discover my passion for literature	(table continues)

New Identity	Themes
	Able to add to my knowledge of classic American literature
	Able to learn about great short story authors
	Able to experience exposure to authors and literary works that would not have before
	Able to appreciate the authors' craft
	Able to obtain confidence as a reader
	Able to read for pleasure again
	Able to explore how stories are usually influenced by something author has experienced
	Able to figure out that all of us are capable of interpreting literature
	Able to gain a greater appreciation of literature-want to take more literature classes
	Able to discover we all literary critics
	Able to meet people who share a common interest in literature
	Able to find reading is fun, relaxing, engaging, etc.
	Able to compare and contrast writing styles of authors
	Able to have greater awareness of my literary tastes
Teacher	Able to have confidence in my education major-that I can be a teacher
	Able to teach others how to analyze stories
	Able to realize the characteristics of good teachers: knowledgeable about subject, passionate, and caring
	Able to feel how BL is a blend of both face-to-face and online learning environments
	Able to realize different learning styles
	Able to honor diversity
	Able to recognize how hard teachers work
	Able to apply knowledge learned to create a lesson
	Able to experience teaching as fun

In the blended Introduction to Literature course students experienced several types of blending. These were: blending offline and online learning; blending self-paced and live, collaborative learning; blending structured and unstructured learning; and blending learning, practice, and performance support. From the multiple types of blendings, many of the students surveyed perceived that “BL is a marriage with the best of face-to-face learning with online learning” and saw it as “a good fit” for them. They

felt the blended Introduction to Literature course's structure of the first half face-to-face and second half online worked well. They claimed the following benefits from the course content:

- BL let me go out of comfort zone in a non-scary way to experience something other than a full face-to-face class.
- BL allowed personal growth by becoming more independent, responsible, and reliable.
- BL allowed the flexibility to learn anywhere, anytime, at own pace for online portion.
- BL enhanced deep learning.
- BL eased financial and time burdens to work, raise a family, do extra-curricular, etc.

If given the opportunity, most of the students (91%) surveyed claimed they would take another BL course in the future, while 3% of students claimed it would depend on the subject, and 6% of students claimed they would not take a BL course in the future. Among the few students who would not take a BL course again comments reflected a preference for entirely online (2%) or entirely face-to-face courses (4.0%). As mentioned in other places in this study, students who do not have good time management or study skills, as well as social needs, prefer the face-to-face. The fully online preference was from those who claim to work better independently. For the "it depends" responses, it centered on course content. If it was a subject area the student felt uncomfortable in, he/she would be less likely to take it. Students shared the following comments about their

initial feelings taking a BL course. Many of them changed how they felt at the end of the course. See Table 19. Appendix JJ: Surveys-Initial Feelings Towards Blended Learning presents further examples of student remarks.

Table 19  
*Initial Feelings about BL*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
20%	Excited	I was excited for the opportunity. I have taken online classes before and I almost prefer this BL style because of the interaction between people. With an online course you get so bogged down because you always seem like you don't have the same connection with people. I would rather get to know the teachers and people in the class and then transfer to an online portion. For some reason, it just feels more human and you know you're talking to someone you kind of know. I would definitely take a BL course again.
15%	Nervous	I was nervous about taking this class after hearing that it was BL. That was because I was worried that I would not get my homework done on time. I also thought it would be too time consuming and stressful for me to handle. I never took any BL course prior to this, so I was unsure as what to expect, considering it as a bad idea because of thinking that I would always forget to do my assignments. Now, the stress is off, and I would highly recommend taking a BL class if people could handle scheduling out the time and working harder in order to not be in face-to-face class as much. I would now recommend taking BL classes and hope to take more BL courses in the future.
10%	Liked novelty	I thought it was a cool and new way to take a course. I never had taken a BL course before so it was interesting to be in one. I would definitely take another BL course if it was similar to this.
10%	Oblivious	Quite frankly, at the beginning of the semester I was just taking the course to see if I wanted to have English or TESOL as my major. I never actually knew what the course entailed other than reading literature. I didn't even know that the course was a BL class until the first day of class. I have taken BL courses before. One was great and the other not so much. The class fit well with my schedule, so I didn't change. I'm sure glad I did because this has been an excellent class.
10%	Interested	I thought it would be an interesting class and study to partake in. I thought the BL class would be a good fit for me because then I could have both the class discussion but also have the time to work on projects and other things on my own. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
10%	Unsure	I wasn't sure what BL meant being a freshman. I honestly didn't know it would be this style of class until the first day, but I'm so glad I signed up for it! I would jump at the chance to take another class designed like this again. My schedule with work changes a lot and its flexible being in a course like this.
5%	Sure	I honestly took this class because I knew that it was going to be a BL course. I would definitely take these types of course again in the future.
5%	Curious	In the beginning, I was curious to see what BL was and how it would work. It ended up begin one of my favorite classes. I would definitely do one in the future.
5%	Liked	I've always pulled to have more BL courses; I have really liked the idea ever since the beginning and that has only become clearer after taking this class. I find that this format is much more realistic to college students today as well as the flexibility of the format that allows students to be at several places while still learning and getting a fairly quality education.
5%	Scared	BL classes scared me before because you are on your own; therefore, you make up your own schedule and do the work whenever you want. This scared me because I was afraid I would forget to do something. However, now that I have a taken a BL course, my fears have diminished and I'm no longer afraid of BL. It was a fun new thing to try, and I'm glad I decided not to drop this class.
5%	Boring	I thought it was going to be boring. I honestly just took it to get it out the way, but it ended up being my favorite class that I took this semester.
5%	Skeptical	I have never really heard about a BL class like this before, but I found it to be an interesting idea. I was a little skeptical at first to see how it would work since I never had heard or taken a BL class before, but in the end, it turned out to be a pretty good idea. I would definitely take a course like this again in the future to see how it would work in a class like a math class, since I want to be a math professor one day and my class might run that way one day.

As for suggestions for future Introduction to Literature courses, the students surveyed (62%) recommended no change as the most popular answer. One student wrote: "I think this was a great course overall and a great learning experience. I really enjoyed it.

It was beautifully structured. Keep doing what you guys are doing! Thank you.” Another student surveyed said:

At the end of the day I don't see how you can make this course any better. It was a very straight forward class; in other words, you were always clear as what was expected of us. Everyone learns differently and has different preferences; thus, you will never be able to please everyone. Plus, if you make this class any easier, students will start slacking off especially since this is a class that freshman can take. For instance, most professors give a check list similar to the one you gave us. Thus, if you change it to be “easier” to read, then students will expect other professors do the same. However, not all professors are as nice as you two.

The next popular answer involved changes in technology for improving the course. These included adding tutorials and making sure the technology always worked (19%). Some others wanted less time online (4%), and 3% of the students wanted an online discussion forum. Those who had other suggestions (12%) brought up the possibilities of less information about the author, more information about the author, vocabulary list of difficult words and their definitions for each story, links to websites and videos in Google Docs, frequently asked questions and their answers, answers for critique sheets and PowerPoint questions, more detailed feedback, less detailed feedback, formal unit on literary techniques, use e-learning as technical vehicle (meant Blackboard), calculate cumulative student grades at any time during the course so students do not have to keep track, include more hints to answer questions if get stuck, a different critique sheet for online than used in the face-to-face sessions, include a lengthy essay, have knowledge-based tests, more online learning, and wished the course lasted longer.

Students surveyed varied greatly in what they liked best in this blended Introduction to Literature course. See Table 20.

Table 20

*What Students Liked Best About Blended Introduction to Literature Course*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
16%	Variety of stories and authors	I like reading the variety of stories and breaking them down in class. Each story had its own uniqueness and meaning to learn from.
14%	Flexibility of online portion	The thing I liked most about this class was the free time which I had in the second half of the semester. Because of the online Independent Learning Pods, I could schedule to work on the assignments around times which best fit my schedule when I would be able to do them, and be less stressed in the long run when trying to work on homework for other classes and tutoring other people in math.
11%	Discussion	I really enjoyed the class discussions, since they opened my eyes to many different ways of thinking.
9%	Furthered my skills as a reader	I really enjoyed being able to read multiple stories, learn about lots of the authors as well as learn how to apply the elements of literature and have the opportunity to take the class online and learn independently for the second half of the semester.
9%	Becoming an independent learner	I liked that we were able to work on our own and manage our own time.
9%	The professors	My favorite part of this course was the professors who taught it. Both professors seem to enjoy their job, as well as, truly care about every single student. Every once in a while, you get a professor who could care less and doesn't care if the students pass or fail. However, this is not the case for this class. Both professors made class fun and interesting. It made me kind of sad during the independent part of this course that we did not meet as a class twice a week because I looked forward to attending class. Also, both professors provided excellent feedback that helped me grow as a student. Not many professors will sit down and go through thirty plus papers and provide as much feedback as they did. Since they did this, I was able to expand my thoughts and to develop a better appreciation for what authors do.
6%	The creativity	I liked the major project the best since it was creative.
5%	The feedback	Throughout the whole entire BL course, I liked the profs' feedback the best. The feedback always gave me something to take away. There was always advice and a helping hand in their feedback. I always felt like I could improve with this feedback.
3%	Student centered	I liked being given the freedom to select our own story for the major project. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
2%	Discovered more about myself as a reader	I enjoyed getting the chance to read stories from so many different authors and discovering more about what makes me tick as a reader.
2%	Non-scary environment	I liked that the course was a very laid back environment, and you could speak in class without being scared of saying the wrong answer.
2%	PowerPoints	I liked looking at the PowerPoints. I enjoyed the visualizations to the stories. I thought the information about the author was interesting and helped me understand the stories. I enjoyed answering the questions and hearing what my peers had to say about what we read.
2%	Not over dissecting story	I liked not being forced to dissect a short story to death.
2%	Appreciation of literature	What I liked best about this class was how it taught me to appreciate literature. It made me question why I liked a story or didn't, and how the elements intertwine with each other to push the story and characters forward.
2%	Transactional theory	The best thing about this course was its different factor. I never took a course like this one before where your imagination and creativity were so involved with the work done in the class. I enjoyed how there was not one right answer like there would be with a bunch of factual information from a history or science course. We had to digest these stories and interpret and critique them as if we were book critics. I liked its flexibility, yet its need for diligence and how each of us individually was supposed to improve and grow as a person and as a writer.
2%	Critique sheets	I liked the critique sheets a lot. I felt like I was able to clearly explain what I liked about stories, since each small part (point of view, plot, etc.) was laid out for me to individually assess.
2%	Element of fun	I liked that it was a good learning environment, and it was fun to attend. I can tell that the professors really cared about the success of the students and that pushed me to do better to be the best I could be.
2%	All of it	I liked it all!

Surveys-Appendix LL: What Students Liked Best about the Blended Introduction to Literature Course contains further representative data.



Most of the students (91%) surveyed would recommend this blended Introduction to Literature course to others, while 9% of the students would recommend it to others with stipulations. For example, one student said, “It is a good class, but not for everyone. Some students do better in an entirely face-to-face situation. Some just need that immediate human interaction.” Another student recognized this might be a good course for many. However, he/she stated that was not one of them:

Many students liked this, but there are some like me, who need the constant face-to-face, because when the class is online, I slack off by forgetting assignments and not managing time well. I need to have a regular schedule to go to class and have the instructors “lead me by the nose” telling me what to do next.

Some of the comments of those who would recommend this course to future students can be found in Table 21. Appendix LL: Surveys-Students Recommending the Blended Introduction to Literature Course goes into more depth about this topic.

Students surveyed at the end of the course perceived themselves as having benefited from the content of the blended Introduction to Literature course. This was attributed to the types of blending that happens in a BL course: blending offline and online learning; blending self-paced and live, collaborative learning (sometimes work in pairs or groups of three to answer some PowerPoint questions); blending structured and unstructured learning; and blending learning, practice, and performance support. Sample Comments by the students included:

- Liked BL structure of first half face-to-face and second half as online

Table 21  
*Recommendations for the Blended Introduction to Literature Course*

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
18%	Engaging/entertaining	I would and have recommended the course. I thought that it was very well put together. It was worth going to class. There wasn't a day that I wanted to skip. I enjoyed class that much.
16%	Furthering my skills as a reader	Yes, I found the course to be not only helpful in furthering my skills as a reader, but also in allowing me to gain independence as a student. I believe that others may benefit from its format.
11%	Became independent learner	Yes, because it was a fun class and it also helped to teach you responsibility.
9%	Flexibility with schedule	YES, YES, and YES. This is something I tell my other friends about a lot. They go to college in other areas and work just as much as me, but they don't get the flexibility and they hate that. They want this implemented everywhere.
9%	Fell in love with literature	Yes! Most definitely. I truly enjoyed this course. It really broadened my understanding of literature, and made me fall in love with it even more.
5%	Opportunity to have exposure to BL	Yes, I would definitely recommend this course to others, especially ones who have not tried a blended or online course before, but have been thinking about giving it a try. This class is a perfect way for students to see if they would like taking an online course with the first portion of it meeting face-to-face and then switching to the online format. There is not a better way to show the difference between meeting face-to-face and having the class online rather than doing both in one like this class.
5%	Easy demands to follow	I would. It's easy to understand what you are being asked to do and students follow a simple guided critique sheet. Also, the class was engaging, unlike a lot of college classes where you simply sit there in silence during a lecture. This class was a lot of fun; I will miss it.
5%	The professors	Yes. The professors make the class interesting and make you feel welcome each class time.
4%	Chance to see if like online learning	I will recommend this course to others because I think it is helpful to see if an online course is right for you.
2%	Challenged my thinking	Heck, yes. This class made me a better reader and challenged my thinking, and it was online half of the semester so I'd tell everyone to take it.
2%	No huge essays	Yes, it was an interesting class. I learned a lot. It also didn't have huge essays like other classes. I appreciated that. (table continues)

Percentage	Theme	Sample Comment
2%	Variety of stories and authors	Yes, I have recommended this course to my roommate and friends. I told them about how this course looks at many different stories. I told them that they don't spend much time reading each story, so if they don't enjoy that story, another one will soon take its place. They also get to look at many different types of literature rather than just one or two.
2%	Novelty	I would recommend this course to other students because it is something different, and I think that pretty much everyone in the class enjoyed the layout. It was really neat and helped free up some time for busy students.
2%	Offers best of face-to-face and online learning	Absolutely. I would tell anyone and everyone that it is literally the perfect course for everyone because you get the best of both worlds (face-to-face and online) in every way possible.
2%	Easy grade if do all the work	I would highly recommend this course to people wanting to get this liberal arts core requirement out of the way. It is neither easy nor hard. They will learn a lot of new techniques, habits, and perspectives from it. It requires an adequate amount of work that is not extremely restrained—not having numerous, picky requirements to it. The demands of this class are simple and easy to follow. It can be time consuming sometimes, especially with the major project, but like any other class, you put the amount of time into it that you want to get out of the class. People can easily get good grades in this class if they put in the time, effort, and energy to do everything done on time with great quality.
2%	Learn takeaway tools to apply to other parts of life	I would most definitely recommend this class to others because it allows you to learn takeaway tools and information that you can apply in so many other parts of our life.
2%	Work with technology	Yes, I enjoyed this and would tell others to at least try it. It isn't for everyone, but in the 21st century, a lot of people enjoy technology more.
1%	Become a better teacher	It will make me a better teacher, and so everyone in education should take it.
1%	Interactive	Yes, I would recommend the course. It is easy to get a good grade if you do all the work but it is also a fun and interactive class. I would really recommend this class to anyone that has other major time commitments, and the assignments for class you can do anywhere.

- Enabled me to grow as a person by becoming more independent, responsible, and reliable
- Appreciated that BL allows flexibility to learn anywhere, anytime, at own pace for online portion
- Enhanced deep learning
- May ease my financial and time burdens because BL lets me work, raise a family, do extra-curricular, etc.

Appendix MM: Surveys-Blending of the Introduction to Literature's Content includes more examples about this topic.

### The Learning Support

Learning support mechanisms are informed by the needs of the learner, effectuated by the expertise of the teacher, necessitated by the continuous advances in technology, and ensured by institutional support. Using the CABLS lens for BL moves the learning support component from the background to the foreground. Doing so, reinforces the premise that the student has control over his/her learning, a central tenet in the learner-centered approach. To review, learning support in this study refers to two types of support: (1) academic support which focuses on helping students to establish effective learning strategies such as time management, study skills, reading, writing, and collaboration, and (2) technical support which focuses on helping students to improve their knowledge of technical tools and the fluency with which they use these tools to complete specific learning tasks such as creating the major project. This CABLS subsystem works with the other five subsystems. Therefore, the development of the

learning support mechanisms need to be informed by the needs of the learner, effectuated by the expertise of the teacher, necessitated by the continuous advances in technology, and ensured by institutional support. The technology played a crucial role in student learning which concurs with the literature (e.g., Elia et al., 2014; Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, Rodriguez-Ariza, & Argente-Linares, 2013).

Students surveyed also brought up on their own their appreciation of the learning supports provided in the blended Introduction to Literature course. Learning supports were both academic and technological.

Academic supports. Academic support focuses on helping students to establish effective learning strategies such as time management, study skills, reading, writing, and collaboration. The basic academic struggles students reported while taking the blended Introduction to Literature course included: reading (83%), writing (58%), time management (27%), study skills (5%), and collaboration (2%).

The biggest academic challenge students mentioned was reading. It was the most challenging at the beginning of the semester. Later most of the students reported being transformed from surface reader to close reader and/or non-literary person to literary connoisseur. Reading challenges included a dislike for some of the material, vocabulary, and comprehension. Students who expressed a dislike for some of the material either did not consider themselves as readers or preferred to read one or two types of genre such as mysteries, action stories, recently published romances, etc. Those who reported having problems with vocabulary were generally not used to reading multisyllabic, difficult-to-pronounce words; dialect; or texts written in the 1800s or early 1900s. Comprehension

problems were related to not being able to find meaning in the text. A commonality among the students who expressed reading challenges was their lack of confidence in themselves as readers.

The second biggest academic problem students mentioned was writing. Most of the students who admitted to challenges with writing expressed a dislike for it and/or not having good writing skills. Like reading, the students often stated that they did not have confidence in themselves as writers.

The issue of time management came up next. It was most evident when students were switching from the face-to-face portion to the online portion of the blended Introduction to Literature course. Students who mentioned having time management issues declared procrastination and not having enough time in the day to get everything done and still maintain some resemblance of a “normal” life as the biggest obstacles in mastering time management. A few others reported personal issues such as parents getting divorced; a death in the family or of a personal friend; and experiencing health problems, both physical and mental made time management difficult.

Study skills was the fourth biggest academic challenge students mentioned. This category included problems keeping information in long term memory for recall, following directions, and researching. For instance, with assignments a few students had problems remembering the previous stories. As for examples in not following directions, these lapses sometimes happened in formatting and where to send online assignments. Also, directions were not followed by some students not having all the required pieces for

the final project. The basic research problem students felt was a frustration locating the information they wanted.

In terms of difficulties with collaboration, two students reported their partners did not have contact with them while starting to work on the final project.

Lastly, the co-teachers used weekly reminders to help students achieve. Students saw these as academic learning supports. We sent these out on Thursdays for the course's online independent portion. Most of the students (91%) recommended continuing to send weekly reminders. The others (9%) said that they did not pay attention to them or they did not help because they sent their assignments in early. One commented: "I did not pay attention to the reminders, mainly because I always had my work done before that Thursday. I always knew they were due Friday, so I did them beforehand. I think they were helpful to some people." Other comments included:

- I liked the weekly reminders because with all of other classes and us not meeting in class during the online portion, it becomes easy to forget about the independent part. Thursdays are a good day to send the emails because it is close to the due date, but it still gives time to finish the assignment.
- These were wonderful reminders for me. If people don't like them, they can simply ignore them.
- The weekly reminders are good. Thursday is a great day to send them out because it is not so far in advance that the reminder is forgotten by Friday, yet it still gives us time to adjust our plans in case we forgot.

- I wouldn't change a thing about the weekly reminders! They were very helpful and they just show that you guys really care about us as students and want us to succeed! I thought you guys were awesome at communicating!
- Yes, students enjoy receiving friendly reminders from professors about when assignments are due because students have a lot going on and have a lot of things to remember. If the professors go out of their way to send out a reminder, it displays to the student that they may actually care about students' learning.

Furthermore, a majority (91%) of the students liked Thursday as a day to send out the weekly reminders while some (9%) thought Wednesdays were a better day, because this gives “a heads-up a day earlier so, if students really forgot about the work, they would have an extra night to find a way to fit it into their schedule.”

Technological supports. In addition to academic supports, the need for technical supports should be explored in implementing a BL course. Technical support focuses on helping students to improve their knowledge of technical tools and the fluency with which they use these tools to complete specific learning tasks such as creating the major project. Even though many of the students expressed no technology problems, there were a few who did experience some technical obstacles during the semester for the course. These included not having the technical skills needed for this course nor having access to technology.



Student problems with technical skills were evident in challenges with Google Docs (5%), sending assignments electronically to professors (33%), and creating the PowerPoint (14%) for the final project.

Most students had a good experience using Google Docs (84%). They claimed a working history with Google Docs whether it be from high school, on the job, or with other college classes. Those who had problems (5%) mentioned not always having Internet, problems opening up the folders, not being familiar with Google Docs before this course, trying to send assignments through Google Docs in spite of receiving numerous directions to send them through the University email system, and not finding items. Also, a few reported preferring Blackboard (Students named it e-learning.) because other classes were using it, and it automatically figured their grades for them. Furthermore, one student, for some reason, did not download his critique sheets from the Google Docs site, so he used the two critique sheet handouts from the first face-to-face class session. With each new story, he would erase the answers to one of the sheets and write in new ones for the current story. Others reported having a neutral experience with Google Docs (11%). Some students surveyed had no advice, because they thought the Docs were great. Those who gave advice for future students working with Google Docs included the following:

- Be familiar with Google Drive before starting this class. Do not wait until the last minute when an assignment is due. Be sure to speak to the professors if you have issues with it.

- Create your own folder for the class and keep everything stored in there that you need.
- Utilize everything that is available in the Google Drive site. It is very useful when it comes to understanding the stories.
- Go to the document that was sent out and click file>copy to \_\_\_\_\_. This will give you your own copy to use the entire semester, just in case someone edits the original.
- To make sure your information is shared only with people you want to share it with. Opening files in the class folder shares all your stuff with classmates.
- If they have never used the site before, go find a brief tutorial explaining how to use it. Other than the two professors did well explaining how to use it, and it is very helpful and simple once you have used it a couple of times.
- Make sure to check it repeatedly.
- Do not be afraid to “personalize” your own Google Drive site. Move things around and rename things so you are able to know where your documents are at and so you are able to find them when necessary. Your Google Drive is YOUR Google Drive, so make it your own.
- Make sure you put the documents into separate folders once they are emailed to you. For example, I put all the independent PowerPoint presentations together, then I put all the stories that were not in our book into another folder, and so on. Having everything well organized was extremely helpful during this class.

Another set of technical problems for some students happened when they sent assignments in electronically. Whether this was due to not listening and/or a lack of technical skill yet needs to be determined. In spite of covering it in the syllabus, repeating directions numerous times during the last two face-to-face class sessions before going online, and giving two email reminders to send assignments as Word documents through their university email accounts, some still did not do it. The most common error was trying to send assignments through Google Docs. This was followed by sending their work through another email account other than the university's or attaching their assignments to an earlier email message. The last made it difficult for the professors to find the assignments because the header was for something other than the assignment. Other problems sending assignments electronically included: viruses, unexplainable email glitches, and lacking the background or knowledge how to attach a document or copy people on an email address.

A third challenge was students not having basic technology. Some reported not having Word and/or PowerPoints on their computers. They, therefore, had to go to one of the university's computer labs to finish their assignments. Another student, who was an older minority student from a lower socioeconomic class, did not have a computer.

Furthermore, a few students in each section, in spite of the directions, tried to use Blackboard because another class did. They did not seem to comprehend various methods of delivery exist. Not all professors on campus use Blackboard. On the other hand, students reporting no trouble sending their assignments in electronically mentioned having lots of high school online experience.

The last problem with technology was lacking the technical skills to create the final PowerPoint project. While 86% claimed no technical difficulties, 14% did. They listed: needing repairs on laptop; embedding video; having to learn how to make PowerPoints; having to learn how to hyperlink; facing assignment hiccups such as project too massive or in wrong format; experiencing difficulties with PowerPoint applications; researching on the Internet; formatting, organizing, designing, and layout of PowerPoint; and allowing enough time to work on project so if they ran into technology problems, they could deal with these and still meet the due date. Note that the challenges with creating the final project could be solved with both academic and technical learning supports.

What was interesting was how students began researching their stories for the final project. All of them used the Internet as a starting point. Instead of making a trip to the university's library or a public library, the students decided to pull up an Internet search engine and click away. Overall, the students believed the Internet made it easy to access information, while a few also reported it made it easy to access misinformation that was inaccurate or biased. Students began their Internet searches one of three ways. These were: begin with the author as the search topic (23%), begin with the story (22%), or begin by Googling the author's name plus the story title (55%).

In spite of experiencing technical difficulties, only 2% came to the university's tech support or professors' offices for help. The way the students usually dealt with technology problems for the online portion was to send an email to the professors for help. However, this did not happen for the final project.

At the end of the semester students stated:

- Academic supports helped them establish effective learning strategies such as time management which encouraged independent learning
- Appreciated the professors were so approachable and caring. They could go to them anytime for either academic or technology help
- Academic support helped them to establish effective learning strategies, such as collaboration, with the final project
- Could get technical support which focuses on improving their knowledge of technical tools and the fluency with which they use these tools to complete specific learning tasks such as creating the major project by asking professors, peers, or technology itself such as YouTube
- Learned about tech support on campus and what it has to offer

### The Institution

The institution plays a critical role in the success of a BL course. By including the institution as a subsystem within the CABLS framework, BL is elevated from the course level to the institutional level. It is critical that the institution provides policies, resources, support, services, and strategies, (Graham, Woodfield, & Harrison, 2013). Otherwise, BL cannot be sustained. As stated numerous times in this study, the institution subsystem is interrelated and informed by the other CABLS subsystems: the learner, the teacher, the technology, the content, and the learning support. In turn, the institution becomes an important piece influencing the development of the subsystems around it.

Students surveyed for this study did not have much to say about the role of the institution other than hoping the institution will offer more BL courses in the future.

### Summary

In summary, most of the student surveys revealed that learners perceived the blended Introduction to Literature course positively in terms of attitude and achievement. They felt that the course's design engaged them in learning, provided a good understanding in using the elements of literature to improve reading skills, and helped them become independent learners. They also credited the co-teachers practice, enthusiasm, humanity, and knowledge as important factors contributing to their positive attitudes and achievement. However, in spite of such overwhelming response for the blended Introduction to Literature course, BL may not be for everyone.

The next chapter discusses the findings from the student interviews, students' pre- and post-tests, student assignments, the university's student evaluation of teaching, classroom observations, and videos. This will be followed by Chapter 6's action research of the blended Introduction to Literature course.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS SUMMARY: OTHER STUDENT DATA

#### Introduction

As described in detail in Chapter 3, we collected several types of data about the blended Introduction to Literature course. Results of the student surveys were presented in Chapter 4, and the action research results are provided in Chapter 6. This chapter focuses on the results from interviews, pre- and posttests, student work, the university's assessment and course evaluation, and videos of the blended Introduction to Literature lessons. This chapter is organized by the types of data listed above.

#### Interviews

Interviews were used in this study to help explore the experiences, views, and beliefs of learners in the blended Introduction to Literature course. Employing qualitative methods such as interviews are believed to provide a “deeper” understanding of phenomena than results obtained from purely quantitative methods (Silverman, 2000). Interviews were primarily unstructured. Other than the first two questions addressed to classes about liking BL and knowing what BL was when starting the semester (since this was information we had planned to learn), the other questions did not reflect any preconceived theories or ideas and were given with little organization. Interviews aimed to help answer the research question: What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes? The student participants in this study were 102 undergraduates enrolled in the blended Introduction to Literature course in four sections across two semesters.

When explicitly asked about liking BL, students seemed satisfied with the BL structure. Almost all (98%) claimed to have liked the BL format. Most of the students (85%) when interviewed felt nothing should be changed about the BL structure. This closely matches the results of the student surveys as presented in Chapter 4 with 83% of those students having no suggestions about changing the BL format.

Even though all of the students knew about purely online classes, few of them (14%) knew what BL was when they began the course. For 86% of the students, this was their first experience with a BL course. Forty percent of the students had taken a fully online course at some time prior to taking this course. A vast majority of the student participants (95%)- at the end of the course -claimed in a final interview that they would take another BL course since it had many benefits. These included:

- BL allowed student flexibility and convenience. Students often remarked that they had outside commitments such as work, family, and extra curriculars. The online portion allowed them to do assignments anywhere anytime, yet they did not want to sacrifice the human and social interactions they were used to in a face-to-face classroom.
- Blending helped to promote interest in the course material, especially in the content. Many learners indicated the BL approach helped them to go in more depth in analyzing the stories. Some said the online portion gave them more time to think about the meanings and how the literary elements were used in each of the stories.



- Learners felt more engaged with the course material in the BL format because of its novelty, visual quality, and “fun factor.”
- Students reported that the major skills they learned as a result of using the BL format were better time management and organization, more responsibility and self-discipline for learning, and increased proficiency in the use of technology for learning. One student commented: “BL taught me responsibility. This is great since we are not always going to be spoon-fed the material.”

When asked in interviews which modality they preferred, 4% said entirely face-to-face; 6% said minimal use of the web with mostly a face-to-face format; 85% said an equal amount of face-to-face and web content; 4% said extensive use of the web, but still some face-to-face class times; and 1% said entirely online with no face-to-face time. All the students were glad the Introduction to Literature course was face-to-face for the first half of the semester. Comments were (See Appendix FF: Surveys-50-50 Formula for more details.):

- I think splitting the semester in half between the face-to-face and the online learning pods is good, because it gives us time to really understand it with a teacher so we are able to do it on our own online successfully.
- I got the hang of the critique sheets and PowerPoints way before we moved to the independent online portion, but I am glad we did not have to do more online independent learning pods. The independent stories took a long time.

- I wish we had more online independent learning pods. I feel that if the main portion of the class was the independent portion and we were given one or two class meet ups to ensure that everyone is fully encompassing the material, it would be better since we can work at our own pace and schedule more time for jobs and/or activities.
- I was not too fond of the independent online portion of the class, because I believe it is important for students to be able to share their opinions face-to-face with other people and receive immediate feedback for their thoughts.
- I manage my time better and am more disciplined when meeting face-to-face.

The other new point about BL that came up in interviews was discussion boards. Several of the students (96%) said they liked the flexibility and independence of online learning, but they also liked hearing the different viewpoints and interpretations of the stories their peers had in the face-to-face portion of the Introduction to Literature course. However, when asked if discussion boards then should be incorporated into the online portion, the vast majority (95%) said no. The major reason given was the discussion boards they had experienced were “a waste of time.” They felt the boards were extra assignments only with the purpose to incorporate technology. The students added that the answers given were usually forced, not thought out, done hurriedly and often were only completed as a “necessary evil” in order to earn grading points for the course. Second, discussion boards are not the same as being face-to-face. Students pointed out discussion boards are not as spontaneous as conversations; nor with the boards could they experience nuances such as the energy in the room, nonverbal cues, tone of voice, etc.

Last, they thought discussion boards were too time consuming, because it involved writing. Those students (5%) who favored discussion boards echoed this sentiment. They said if the boards were done correctly, it would demand a lot of time and effort on the part of the students.

Besides discussion boards, the transactional theory was another topic of interest. When analyzing literature, printed words are important, but so is the knowledge and experiences the reader brings to the process of making meaning from a text. Revolutionizing literature instruction, the transactional theory of reading stresses that comprehension results from the transaction between the reader and the written word. Practically all of the students (99%) liked the transactional theory of reading. General comments about using the transactional theory of reading included:

- Experienced the joy of reading. Student comment: “The classics of literature are no longer something to suffer through and forget like a bad case of the flu.”
- Was no longer cut off from the personal value college literature has. My opinions and thoughts matter in interpreting literature. Student comment: “Such an approach engages me in reading.”
- Realized we all can be literary critics.
- Learned stories may have multiple meanings.
- Enhanced reading skills especially comprehension and close reading because now looking for insights and complexity. Student comment: “I

will never look at literature the same way again. Close reading enhanced my critical thinking skills.”

Lastly, the co-teachers implemented the TfU model as one of their frameworks in designing the blended Introduction to Literature course. Students attributed much of their understanding of literature not only to the BL format, but also to effective teaching. Students commonly remarked that the co-teachers seemed happy to work with students and to teach literature. This echoes Noddings (2005) who explained that an instructor’s happiness can affect the classroom climate and therefore affect students. Moreover, the teacher’s psychological influence on learners has been linked to their achievement in different effectiveness studies (e.g. Collinson et al., 1999; Peart & Campbell, 1999; Wentzel, 1997). Primary characteristics students perceived their co-teachers as having and which attributed to a better understanding of literature included:

- Passion for their subject and students.
- Caring about their students by listening to them; understanding their concerns and questions.
- Knowing students individually through learning style, needs, and understanding their personalities.
- Encouraging full potential of students.
- Creating a supportive climate.
- Having a good sense of humor.
- Continuously respecting students in spite of their knowledge level, gender, and cultural development.

- Willing to spend extra time preparing and reflecting upon instruction and feedback for student assignments.

### Pre-and Post-Tests

The concept of using pre- and post-tests on learners is commonly accepted as a viable means to assess the extent to which an educational intervention has had an impact on student learning (Dimitrov & Rumrill, 2003). Learning looks at increased knowledge. Pre- and post-tests helped to reveal the difference between what students knew at the beginning of the semester of the blended Introduction to Literature course compared to what they knew at the end of the semester about literary elements. Results are used to help answer the research question: What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student achievement?

The pre-test (see Appendix I: Data Collection-Pre-Post Tests) was given the first day of class right after the co-teachers greeted the students, introduced themselves, and went through the IRB information. It asked students to name and define the elements of literature. None of the students could complete this task. Half of them could name half of the elements. The most popular ones listed were setting, plot, theme, and character. None of them could name the author's style. Only 15% tried defining any of the literary elements. The biggest mistake students made was confusing a literary element with literary technique. They did not understand that a literary element is a constituent of all narrative fiction. A literary technique, on the other hand, is a non-universal feature of literature that accompanies the construction of a certain work rather than forming the essential characteristics of all narrative fiction. To illustrate, things such as plot, theme,

and character are literary elements, whereas irony, foreshadowing, and figurative language are considered literary techniques.

The post-test, which was the same as the pre-test, was given during the final face-to-face class session, right before the final. Almost all of the students (97%) could list all of the literary elements and 94% of the students could define all the literary elements. The definition the students missed the most was style which means how the author employs words—through word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and other literary techniques to establish images, mood, and meaning to the story.

### Student Work

Summative assessments, such as literary analysis critique sheets and the PowerPoint final project aided the co-teachers to measure the growth of individual student learning in the blended Introduction to Literature course. Overall, students showed good growth on these assessments. However, if a great number of learners did not do well on these assessments, the co-teachers would have needed to reflect back on the teaching and the design of the blended Introduction to Literature course. Furthermore, final semester grades were used as well to help determine student achievement. This subsection is divided into critique sheets, the PowerPoint final project, and semester grades. These materials helped to answer the research question: What impact did the BL instructional design for the Introduction to Literature course have on student achievement?

### Critique Sheets

Basically, student work on the critique sheets showed a progression in understanding the elements of literature and looking for insights and complexity in their readings of the short stories. To illustrate this progression, representative works of three students are used here.

The first set of critique sheets are from the initial story students had to read on their own, “The Cask of Amontillado” by Edgar Alan Poe. The second set of critiques are from the “The Ransom of Red Chief” by O. Henry. This was the first online assignment. It was assigned at midterm. The last examples are from PowerPoints created for the final project. For each set of assignments there are three representative works of varying quality. One typifies work from the bottom third, the next typifies average work, and the third one typifies the top third or high quality work.

When the students first came to class and encountered a literary text, they focused, as they should, on the characters and the story: who are these people, what are they doing, and what fantastic or horrible events are happening to them? Practically all of the students responded first of all, and sometimes only, to their reading on an emotional level. They become emotionally and instinctly involved by experiencing joy, anger, anxiety, fright, tears, etc. In other words, when they read Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado,” the students basically answered with affective responses to the story. Since they were just getting used to what the elements of literature are, they all had not yet developed their skills looking for insight and complexity in the stories through the use of these elements of literature. Soon, (by the third or fourth story for most students,) practice

generally aided in developing these skills for literary analysis. The other common characteristic all three students share is how much they liked and understood a story determined how well they thought the story was constructed. If the student liked the story and felt he/she understood it, the story would often receive top rankings for its construction based on the various literary elements. If the student disliked the story, then the work would often receive low rankings for its construction based on the literary elements. Note that the student answers were very short, incomplete, and written much like they phone text.

Student A's critique (see Appendix NN: Student Work-Student A Critique for "Amontillado") is the weakest of the three examples here. She fills in all the elements of literature, but these answers are very sketchy. She seems to simply be trying to find a major example of each of the literary elements from Poe's story. She has yet to start working with gaining insights and looking for complexity within the literature. The notes she takes for the face-to-face lesson are only on the author's biography; none are on the literary elements (see Appendix OO: Student Work-Student A Notes).

In comparison, to Student A's critique, Student B (see Appendix PP: Student Work-Student B Critique for "Amontillado") has a bit more to it. It fits in among the average critiques. With the exception of the author tie-in, she, too, is trying to find a major example of each of the literary elements from "The Cask of Amontillado." She includes a minimal amount explanation, such as "the catacomb setting made her think of dark and gloomy." She has the insight that irony is being used as part of the author's style, but does not supply any specific examples of it. She needs to look for the tale's



complexity in order to become a critical reader and to write a literary analysis. It was surprising that she did not include anything in the author's biography in spite of me blatantly telling classes, "Hint. Hint. Here is something for the author biography tie-in" after presenting background information to the story. Even though her notes from the face-to-face class primarily include information about Poe, she does venture out with a little information about the literary elements (see Appendix QQ: Student Work-Student B Notes).

Student C's critique is typical of the top third of the literary critiques (see Appendix RR: Student Work-Student C Critique for "Amontillado") for "The Cask of Amontillado." She fills in all the literary elements and is starting to apply the literary elements to the story through setting, plot, and style, although her insights could be more developed. She writes more in complete sentences. Her notes are longer. They have more about the literary elements than the other two samples, even though she, too, dwells on the author's biography (see APPENDIX SS: Student Work-Student C Notes).

Right after midterm, the students went online. Their first critique was about "The Ransom of Red Chief" by O. Henry. Most students now have reached the point of not only being able to name the elements of literature, but to apply them to what they read. The three samples show a growth in having insight and looking for complexity, although in varying degrees. Notes from the face-to-face classes up to this point are devoted more to the elements of literature than to the author's biography.

Student A (see Appendix TT: Student Work-Student A "Red Chief") is writing in complete sentences and has filled out all the elements of literature. The first half of her

assignment needs specific examples from the story to support her claims as well as proof that she is seeing the complexity in the literary work. She does a better job with this in the second half of the assignment.

Student B (see Appendix UU: Student Work-Student B “Red Chief”) also uses complete sentences and has filled out all the elements of literature. She is able to set up her argument for her interpretation, but still needs to present specific examples from the story to support her claims. The second half of the assignment is stronger than the first half. She is starting to see the complexity of O. Henry’s work, but needs to push this skill even further.

Student C (see Appendix VV: Student Work-Student C “Red Chief”) is the strongest of the three examples. She not only recognizes the literary elements, but is able to apply them. Student C supplies specific examples from the story to support her claims. She has a sense that the elements of literature need to work together in a well-constructed story. Student A could have played with the idea that “The Ransom of Red Chief” is not simply a story in the O. Henry tradition of surprise endings; it is also a story in the pattern of classical comedy, which assures the reader that sometimes in this world the underdog can win. Although generally, in such stories it is the slaves or servants, wives or lovers, who have prevailed by outwitting their masters, in “Red Chief” it’s the little boy kidnapped by two experienced con men.

### Final Project

The last assignment for the blended Introduction to Literature course was the final project. For this, students were to select a short story from the text book that was not read

in class, read and analyze it, then make a PowerPoint lesson to teach a class peer about it. The peer needed to answer the discussion questions in the PowerPoint and fill out a critique sheet. Three student samples of varying quality are provided in the appendices. Overall, the students' analytical skills advanced for the most part with each subsequent short story studied. Eventually, they were able to advance their thinking to the highest level of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy- being able to create.

Student A's lesson was about John Updike's "A&P" (see Compact Disc: "A&P": Student A. Final Project). The plot revolves around three teenage girls, wearing only their bathing suits, walking into an A&P grocery store in a small New England town. Sammy, a young man checking, watches them closely and quits his job.

Even though it is the weakest of the three examples, Student A has demonstrated much growth from the first day of class, when she lacked technical skills, confidence as a reader, and was unfamiliar with the elements of literature. By the end of the semester she has learned how to hyperlink, put together a PowerPoint, become more confident as a reader, and can recognize the elements of literature. A large portion of her project is spent on the author's biography. However, she does not link the author's life to his writing. The PowerPoint template is not symbolic of the text. Her visuals are simple. Several of A's slides contain only the visual from the PowerPoint template. Students were encouraged to find at least one visual per slide. She did not. Student A claimed she used her time to teach herself technical skills such as hyperlinking and creating a PowerPoint. She admitted she needs to master better research skills.

Furthermore, even though her analysis demonstrates recognition of the literary elements and the role they play in a story's construction, much of her information is on the surface level. She gives a basic plot summary and describes the characters, but needs to start playing more with complexity and insight. This could be accomplished by linking the literary elements to each other. For example, asking herself the question what is the significance of setting "A & P" in 1960? she might have looked at the historical context of 1960, and come across the generational and establishment conflicts of that era.

Also, authors often thrust their characters into settings that either confirm their personalities or challenge them to evolve. The main character Sammy's actions reflect the generational and establishment conflicts of the 60's. For example, Student A mentions Sammy and acknowledges he is the narrator of the story, but she could have gone in more depth by examining the methods of revealing character. What does Sammy say? If she looked at what he said, she would have been able to peg him as both a romantic and a cynic. Sammy made comments such as what the "bum" in the "baggy gray pants" could possibly do with "four giant cans of pineapple juice." This contrasts with the time he watches Queenie and her friends in their swim suits at the checkout, noting how "with a prim look she lifts a folded dollar bill out of the hollow at the center of her nubbled pink top.... Really, I thought that was so cute." Also, by looking at what Sammy does, Student A would have to note that Sammy quit his job. Then she needed to explore why he quit his job at the A & P. Was it because he wanted to be a hero to the girls and prove that he is a rebel against an intransigent society? This would make the

plot structure work. It would explain the epiphany he reaches when he realizes “how hard the world was going to be hereafter if he refuses to follow conventional paths.”

Her themes are wonderful, but there are no explanations or aids for the partner she is teaching about how to find them or how they are used. Her questions are adequate, but she does not connect them on a personal level to her readers. She reveals a lack of complexity by viewing the swim suits the girls wear in the grocery store as showing the freedom to dress any way one wishes, but misses that part of Updikes’s style is to invoke symbols. Perhaps then she might have developed a more complex interpretation by symbolically seeing the swim suits as an emblem of the girls’ casual disregard of the town’s social rules, or as how they use this as a deliberate provocation to attract men, etc. For Sammy, the swim wear might symbolize freedom and escape from the environment he is in. He is attracted not only to the girls in their swim suits, but also how they disrupt the rules of a small-town society, such as the inappropriateness of wearing swim wear in a grocery store. This is underscored by looking at the store manager’s character, Lengel. He is the authority figure. This is shown by this character’s thoughts and actions. He tries to enforce the rule the girls have violated. This adds meaning to Sammy’s actions when he quits his job, and removes his apron and bow tie (the corporate uniform) that establishes his place in the system. But, the freedom of the girls remains unavailable to him. Sammy ends up alone, in the white shirt his mother ironed for him, pondering what to do next. Hopefully, the student’s analytic skills will expand with time and practice.

The second PowerPoint example (see Compact Disc: “A Worn Path”: Student B. Final Project) is from Student B. She chose “A Worn Path” by Eudora Welty as her story

to teach. This story is about an elderly African-American woman who undertook a familiar journey on a road in a rural area to acquire medicine for her grandson. She expresses herself, both to her surroundings and in short spurts of spoken monologue, warning away animals and conveying the pain she feels in her tired bones.

Student B does a good job laying out the PowerPoint. Her major strengths include excellent biographical information about the author, nice visual representation of the author and story, appropriate slide layout/presentation, nice background details/information about the story, significant depth of thought in the questions for discussion, listed references/sources, and detailed critique sheet responses. She has some insight into the story and is able to demonstrate finding complexity in the story. For example, she said she designed the template to represent dried up plants one might find along an old path. She views the story as a tale of undying love and devotion that can push us toward a goal.

Student C pulls out all the “bells and whistles” for her PowerPoint (see Compact Disc: “The Yellow Wallpaper”: Student C. Final Project) about “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The story is a collection of first person journal entries narrated by a woman whose physician husband shuts her in a room with yellow wallpaper so she can recuperate from what he calls a “temporary nervous depression -a slight hysterical tendency.” With nothing to stimulate her, her mental health suffers as she becomes obsessed by the pattern and color of the wallpaper.

Student C has insight and is able to find the complexity of the story by exploring how Gilman manipulates her readers to think about the role of women in America at the

time she was writing. Student C's insight allows her to see how Gilman manipulates her readers to reflect upon issues such as women's lack of a life outside the home and the oppressive forces of patriarchal society. Like Student B, her PowerPoint presents excellent biographical information about the author, nice visual representation of the author and story, appropriate slide layout/presentation, nice background details/information about the story, significant depth of thought in the questions for discussion, listed references/sources, and detailed critique sheet responses. Student C also used technology to her advantage. When asked about her PowerPoint, Student C replied that she added elements of music and intense overpowering images to create feeling of insanity. She wanted to manipulate her student like Gilman has manipulated her as a reader. Much time, effort, and thought has been spent on this project. She has "fallen in love" with the short story and appreciates its craftsmanship. This is so much so, that she tried out for the university's forensic team with a dramatic interpretation of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." She has done well in competition. Her critics said this is because she has such a strong understanding of the major character and the story.

### Grades

One reason for grades is to provide learners feedback about their progress and achievement (Airasian, 1994). The best referencing system for grading is content-specific learning goals: a criterion-referenced approach (Marzano, 2000). Hattie (1992) remarked: "The most powerful single innovation that enhances achievement is feedback. The simplest prescription for improving education must be 'dollops of feedback' " (p. 9).

This is why we as co-teachers spent so much time with feedback. The student surveys concur with Hattie's assertion.

Evidence of achievement was seen in the student work. All the students were able to achieve competency ("B") work or better before an assignment was accepted. Compared to the other literature courses the co-teachers had taught that were not blended, the students were writing more effective and longer critiques, engaging in deeper and more meaningful discussions about literature, demonstrating a better understanding and deeper exploration of the elements of literary concepts, and succeeded at an equal or higher rate than students in traditional courses. The final project demonstrated that all of the students were able to achieve the highest level of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. In order to achieve this level, the students had to have the prerequisite cognitive skills of knowing, understanding, applying, analyzing, and evaluating the literary elements.

Lastly, most of the students (97%) received a B- or higher semester grade for the blended Introduction to Literature course. It needs to be noted again that those students who took the Introduction to Literature course in the spring were academically stronger overall than those who took the course in the fall.

In summary, it appeared as if the students, overall, were better prepared from readings, wrote more effective and longer critiques as the semester progressed, created higher quality projects, engaged in deeper and more meaningful discussions of course content, demonstrated a better understanding and deeper exploration of the elements of literature concepts, and succeeded at an equal or higher rate than students in the traditional Introduction to Literature courses.



### University Assessment and Course Evaluation Form

Students' evaluations of teaching effectiveness are commonly collected at most U.S. universities. Appropriate purposes of these evaluations, according to Marsh (1987) are to provide:

- diagnostic feedback to faculty about the effectiveness of their teaching;
- a measure of teaching effectiveness to be used in personnel decisions;
- information for students to use in instructor/course selection;
- And an outcome or a process description for research on teaching.

At my university, the evaluation is used primarily to provide feedback to faculty about the effectiveness of their teaching and to serve as a means of teaching effectiveness to be used in personnel decisions. These evaluations are given at the conclusion of each semester, before final grades come out. They are anonymous paper surveys asking students to provide answers using a five-point Likert scale rating system and open-ended feedback that describe both their instructor's strengths and weaknesses. Instructors are not present during the evaluation and do not see the evaluation results until after grades have been submitted. Even though no such evaluation generates 100 percent honest feedback, it can supply valuable feedback about a professor's attitude and teaching methods (Clayson, 2009). These evaluations were given for each of the four sections of the Introduction to Literature course at the end of each of the semesters.

Results from the university student evaluation are divided into three parts for this study's purposes: student actions, teacher practice and behavior, and content. The

questions about students studying for this course and tests reflecting content were thrown out since the wording caused confusion because tests were not given in the course.

### Student Actions

The first eleven questions of the instrument report how students perceived the course in terms of their behavior, thinking, and understanding. Overall, students perceived themselves as seeking help when needed, doing the required reading, being well prepared, attending class, having improved independent thinking, having new ways of thinking, improving problem solving, enabling skill application, improving understanding, and organization helped learning (see Table 22).

### Teacher Practice and Behavior

As stated in the literature review, educational research has suggested that blended courses are more effective than both face-to-face and online courses (Yates et al., 2009). Much of this hinges on the BL teachers. The following information from the university's student evaluation of teachers supplies some data on how students from the blended Introduction to Literature course perceived the teaching. Many of the teacher strengths students shared in comments reflected the various roles we had to play such as e-moderators, facilitators, "guides on the side," cheerleaders, advisors, promoters of learning, nurturers, literature lovers, and students. These identities helped learners to achieve. The next set of data helps answer the research question: To what degree did teacher practice and behavior affect students' attitudes of the course? Characteristics instructors were evaluated on included being well-prepared, used time well, gave appropriate amount of work for credit, had clear expectations, had clarity in grading

Table 22  
*Student Actions Perceived*

Evaluated On:	Likert Rating 1	Likert Rating 2	Likert Rating 3	Likert Rating 4	Likert Rating 5	Sample Comment
Sought help when needed	10%	7%	19%	19%	29%	Class was so well designed and material explained, many of us didn't need help.
Did required reading				10%	90%	I was engaged.
Well prepared				10%	90%	Knew what was expected.
Attended class					100%	Fun and easy to comprehend. I enjoyed coming to this class and that is rare.
Improved independent thinking			7%	23%	68%	I liked the structure. I had to think independently for the online portion.
New ways of thinking			7%	48%	45%	I felt like my thinking was challenged in this class since I was able to think many different ways about the stories.
Improved problem solving			32%	32%	36%	Engaged us in relatable discussions to help with literary analysis.
Enabled skill application			3%	29%	68%	I learned a lot. Will apply to my personal reading as well as reading done for other classes.
Improved understanding			6%	36%	58%	Understanding the literary elements helps with interpreting literature.
Organization helped learning				26%	74%	Well prepared and organized. Made it easy to know what was expected of us.

criteria, had clarity of explanation, were clear in directions, demonstrated skill in handling questions, teaching reflects description, feedback helped learning, encouraged questions, gave timely feedback, contributed to student understanding, cared about teaching, and an overall quality rating. Basically, students gave the instructors high ratings for these characteristics (see Table 23) for the teacher evaluation results based on a five-point Likert-type scale. Appendix WW: University Evaluation has further details about what students saw as professors' strengths teaching the Introduction to Literature course.

Table 23  
*Teacher Practice and Behavior*

Evaluated On:	Likert Rating 1	Likert Rating 2	Likert Rating 3	Likert Rating 4	Likert Rating 5	Sample Comment
Well prepared					100%	Both instructors really showed how much they like teaching the class. Always prepared and made class fun.
Use of time				10%	90%	Lecturing in an engaging way, sparking discussion, and providing feedback.
Amount of work for credit			100% just right			Making class interesting and getting us engaged. They were passionate about what they were teaching and that made me want to do the assigned readings. Work was challenging but not overwhelming.
Clear expectations				81%	19%	Communicating with students their expectations, mentioning important things more than once, explained key concepts in a relatable way and making class fun. (table continues)

Evaluated On:	Likert Rating 1	Likert Rating 2	Likert Rating 3	Likert Rating 4	Likert Rating 5	Sample Comment
Clarity of grade criteria			3%	32%	65%	Made what was expected clear.
Clarity of explanation				19%	81%	Building PowerPoints easy for students to understand. Always open for questions. Challenges us to think outside the box. Always prepared. Cares for students.
Clarity of directions				23%	77%	Communication more than anything kept directions clear. Great at consistently keeping students engaged in lecture and are always prepared for class.
Skill handling questions				23%	77%	Answering questions whenever asked. They wanted us to learn. They did a great job at making the PowerPoints and documents available to us through Google Docs. They also provided good feedback and graded things right away.
Teaching reflects description				10%	90%	Engaging the students into discussion, caring about the information that they were teaching and helping students if they needed it.
Feedback helped learning			10%	32%	58%	It was really helpful to get such great feedback. Every time I handed/emailed one of my assignments, I got great feedback. It was very helpful for me in the future. It was also nice to get praised for our work. Not many professors do that.
Encouraged questions				23%	77%	Always provided answers to the questions I had in a reasonable time.
Timely feedback				19%	81%	They were able to grade and give feedback by the next class. They explained everything clearly, not like a third grader, but so the class knew what to do. (table continues)

Evaluated On:	Likert Rating 1	Likert Rating 2	Likert Rating 3	Likert Rating 4	Likert Rating 5	Sample Comment
Contributing to student understanding				23%	77%	Describing events that took place in an author's life and connecting them to the story to see how that event affected the style of the short story. Another strength was keeping me engaged in the lectures by connecting it to our lives.
Cared about teaching				3%	97%	Both instructors really have a passion for teaching. They always came to class prepared, sent out plenty of reminders throughout the semester to help us students, they made instructions very clear, always gave great feedback in a quick amount of time, always available and willing to help.
Overall quality rating				6%	94%	Made class fun and interesting. Best professors I've had so far in college.

### Content

The final set of data from the university's student evaluation of teachers concerns course content. Teachers hoped that the course content would enable students to gather meaning from the text at both a surface and deep level, think critically about what they had read, make connections between the reading and what they already know, find joy in reading, and allow them to apply their analytical skills in creating a project when they became the teachers of literature. In order to promote the personal pleasures and intellectual benefits of literary analysis, we aimed to provide our students with access to a

wide range of classic American short stories that mirror the range of students' abilities and interests, a strategy using the elements of literature to interpret literature, a transactional theory framework, and access to the literacy skills needed in a technologically advanced society.

Data for this section helps answer the research question: What impact did this BL instructional design for Introduction to Literature have on student attitudes? Generally, the content appears to have been positive for them (see Table 24).

The responses to the textbook and other materials contributing to learning might be skewed since a number of students did not answer and the way the percentages fell did not match what came out in the surveys, observations, interviews, and video. Perhaps students were looking at the textbook as the source of providing the stories, but learning how to interpret them came from other multiple sources such as discussion, PowerPoints, teacher feedback, etc. Since these were not listed specifically or that the question asked about multiple sources, students might have been confused as how to answer. Overall, students seemed satisfied with the content.

#### Video

Video can provide the sights, sounds, and feel of the phenomena under study. I videotaped four face-to-face sessions of myself teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course. These were from two class sections where I was teaching Amy Tan's "Two Kinds." The main things I was interested in reviewing from these videos was the amount of student engagement and if students were beginning to find insights and complexity from what they were reading.

Table 24  
Content

Evaluated On:	Likert Rating 1	Likert Rating 2	Likert Rating 3	Likert Rating 4	Likert Rating 5	Sample Comment
Accuracy of syllabus				19%	81%	I wished the assignments for online portion were released when we started the face-to-face portion so I could work ahead.
Course work contributed to learning				19%	81%	The professors did a great job teaching this course. We were able to critique the stories well even though we are not experienced book critics. I was impressed and would highly recommend this course.
Textbook contributing to learning			3%	42%	48%	Liked the variety of stories.
Other materials contributing to learning			13%	42%	29%	Interesting information came from multiple materials.
Lecture contributing to learning			6%	26%	68%	Demonstrates passion and intelligence on part of the professors. Lectures easy to comprehend. Humor made the time go fast.
Content made interesting				19%	81%	We were always engaged.
Met as scheduled			3%	10%	87%	When I registered for this course, I didn't understand what BL was. I thought I was going to meet face-to-face the entire semester.
Understood material	3%		13%	16%	68%	Their humor, passion for the field of study, and caring ensured students got the main points and ideas of class.



Student engagement is increasingly seen as an indicator of successful classroom instruction (Kenny, Kenny, & Dumont, 1995). Learners are engaged when they are attracted to their work, persist in their lessons despite challenges and obstacles, and demonstrate visible delight in accomplishing their work (Schlechy, 1994). Student engagement also refers to a “student’s willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process” (Bomia et al., 1997). Definitions from numerous studies about student engagement have identified it as a desirable in education; however, little consensus exists among students and educators as to how to define it (Farmer-Dougan & McKinney, 2001). Therefore, I used the following characteristics as represented in Table 25. These are from tallying each time I noticed them happening as opposed to them not happening in the “Two Kinds” lesson video.

Table 25  
*Traits of Engagement Witnessed*

Traits seeing in students:	Percentage:
Paying attention (alert, tracking with their eyes)	98%
Taking notes	95%
Listening (as opposed to chatting or sleeping)	98%
Asking questions (content related)	3%
Responding to questions	99%
Following requests (participating, following directions)	100%
Reacting (laughing, smiling, nodding, etc.)	97%
Reading critically	99%
Interacting with other students (discussing others’ interpretations by agreeing or debating)	83%

Interpreting a short story can be tough because literature does not always reveal its deeper meanings immediately. In order to better understand a literary work, the reader needs to become a literary critic. This entails all the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy. Some examples illustrating this can be found in Table 26 which presents some tasks students had to do to analyze the stories.

The sample lesson described here is the one I designed and taught about Amy Tan’s semi-autobiographical “Two Kinds.” one of the stories in *The Joy Luck Club*. It is about a disconnected mother and daughter. Jing-mei’s mother, an immigrant, wants her daughter to have the chances she did not have. She tries to make her daughter a piano prodigy. But Jing-mei just wants to live her own life. Only after her mother’s death does Jing-mei appreciate what her mother was trying to do.

Table 26  
*Bloom’s Taxonomy: Literary Criticism*

Level	Explanation	Sample Questions
Recall/Knowledge	Cite textual evidence	Find an example/s of literary elements in story.
Comprehension	Demonstrate understanding of how the literary elements can be used	<p>What textual evidence do you see that can support your claim how a literary element was used?</p> <p>Interpret how the literary elements can help you to interpret the text.</p> <p>Explain how the literary element selected can be applied to this particular text.</p> <p>Compare and contrast how two different authors used this literary element.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(table continues)</p>

Level	Explanation	Sample Questions
Application	Use your knowledge and skills about the literary elements.	<p>How can the literary elements be applied to the text?</p> <p>Identify facts in order to explain the plot in a different light.</p> <p>Develop an organizational plan through the critique sheet to show how the plot utilizes the literary elements.</p> <p>Utilize examples from the plot that demonstrates your knowledge about the literary elements.</p>
Analysis	Examine and break information into parts by identifying motives or causes. Make inferences and find evidence to support generalizations.	<p>Compare/contrast minor characters with the protagonist (foil figure).</p> <p>Analyze characters' motives, actions, decisions using various literary elements.</p> <p>Infer why the author might have manipulated the literary elements this way for this story.</p> <p>Examine how the different literary elements add to or detract from the plot.</p>
Synthesis	Combine information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions.	<p>Compile facts about the literary piece.</p> <p>Discuss how you would improve the story by using the literary elements differently.</p> <p>Formulate one or more theories behind the plot of the story.</p> <p>Elaborate on why using different interpretations can provide reasons for reading the story.</p>
Evaluation	Present and defend opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas or quality of work based on the literary elements.	<p>Defend why you feel a particular lens is the best for analyzing this text.</p> <p>Criticize the author's thesis or intent.</p> <p>Determine whether the characters are static or dynamic.</p> <p>Support the motivations of each character...or author.</p> <p>Dispute the novel's ending or justify why the author chose to end the story in such a manner. Interpret the protagonist's motives for acting or deciding to act.</p> <p>Explain themes.</p> <p>Assess themes.</p>

Watching the Introduction to Literature videos over this lesson revealed not only engaged learning, but revealed students taking steps towards having insights and finding complexity in Tan's short story. At the lesson's beginning, the learners did not like the story. They had a difficult time relating to it. They could not get past the immigrant experience and believed that the main character's mother was horrible. However, this all changed. As the discussion advanced, two themes of the story strongly emerged: the tension between mothers and daughters and the American Dream. These themes, lesson design, and the transactional theory of reading helped make the story personal for them.

I began class by setting the mood. On the screen in front of the room was a projection of the cover of *The Joy Luck Club* next to a photo of Amy Tan and her mother as adults (see Compact Disc: "Two Kinds"). Playing in the background was piano music, "Mother's Dream." After a brief biography about the author, which included some "fun" elements such as Amy Tan on *The Simpsons* and a clip of her performing in the Rock Bottom Remainders, a rock band which comprises authors such as Stephen King, Dave Barry, and Barbara Kingsolver. The aim was to personalize her, make her more relatable to the students.

In my lesson, I focused on only three literary elements. This way I was not "beating a literary work to death" by analyzing everything. The goal was to pick the elements the author uses exceptionally well and/or in an innovative way. For Tan, it was the double perspective point of view, theme, and characterization. I tried to incorporate some light-hearted elements as mentioned earlier to make the lesson both visual and auditory. Also, I tried to explain any historical references that may add meaning to the

story. In this case, it was Shirley Temple. She was the model Jing-mei's mother wanted her daughter to emulate. Most students did not know who Temple was. I shared that she was an American film and television actress, singer, dancer, and public servant, most famous as a child star in the 1930s. And as a child star in the movies, Temple was one of those small sparkling lights that helped guide Americans through the Great Depression. To back this up, I shown a video clip of Temple singing "The Good Ship Lollipop." I further explained that my dad's family came from Germany. He and his siblings experienced the tension between European and American ways. Furthermore, his family adored Shirley Temple. In fact, I shared that his parents let the seven oldest kids name their baby sister Shirley in honor of Temple.

Then (and this is where it gets interesting) to help students relate to the story through what they know, I asked questions (which we stressed there are no wrong answers to) such as:

1. While growing up, each of us tries to find our own identity. Sometimes this requires breaking away from our parents. What do your parents/guardians want from you? What does the mother want for Jing-mei? Give an example. What do you want? What does Jing-mei want?
2. Think of the narrator's mother and how she wanted her daughter to be a prodigy. Parental pressure can be very powerful. Have your parents ever wanted YOU to do something because they felt it would be good for you, even though you didn't care for it at the time? Has something similar ever happen to a friend of yours?

3. The narrator finally blurts out to her mother, “Why don’t you like me the way I am? I’m *not* a genius!” The mother then slaps her and responds, “Only ask you be your best.” Most of us could do better, do more, to “be our best” – but we don’t do it. What could you do to be closer to your “best”?
4. The narrator rebels, especially during the piano lessons, and says, “But I was so determined not to try, not to be anybody different...” We all rebel against authority at times as we grow older – and no matter how old we get. However, there are fine lines between being the rebel and being lazy or uncaring and being one’s own person. What is something you have done to rebel? Are you now happy with that decision – or would you like a “do-over”?
5. While playing the piano, the narrator says, “I daydreamed about being somewhere else, about being someone else.” There are so many people in this world who are not doing what they would really like to be doing. Sometimes this can’t be helped (because of circumstances). Other times people just don’t try hard enough to achieve their real goals. Question: Why, then, do some people just “settle” in life?
6. Another important concept to the story is The American Dream, which is a set of ideals, achieved through hard work, that life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement regardless of social class or circumstances of birth.

Do you believe in the American Dream? Why or why not? Do your parents/guardians believe in the American Dream for you? What is your family background – where from? How do immigrants to this country look at the American Dream? Tan once wrote, “Everyone must dream. We dream to give ourselves hope. To stop dreaming - well, that's like saying you can never change your fate. Isn't that true?” Do you agree with her?

While asking these questions, student engagement happened. No one was looking at a cell phone, doing other college work, etc. The students were attracted to the “Two Kinds” information, employed the literary elements, and demonstrated visible delight in thinking about the story. Learners had a willingness, need, desire, and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the lesson.

The other thing happening was the learners started to have deep discussions. Many of the students in some sections could not relate to the immigrant experience when first reading the story. Some of the students had no idea where their families had immigrated from to come to America. However, as the lesson continued, students were able to transcend the Chinese immigrant details and make the story universal. The discussion took a turn about how they, and perhaps others like them from many cultures and backgrounds, have probably refused to believe in their parents’ dreams for the future. Whether or not the parents were misguided or on-track, it was not uncommon for their offspring not to see the value of applying themselves to achieving a goal, practicing a skill, and cooperating with others’ plans. Furthermore, a sympathetic turn towards Jingmei’s mother occurred. Students read more closely the passage where, in a refusal to

accede to her mother's wishes, Jing-mei became cruel. She struck back with the strongest weapon she could think of by shouting the words: "I wish I were dead! Like them." This was in reference to the children the mother left behind in China, the central tragedy of her mother's life. An interesting discussion developed. For example, did Jing-mei win the argument, or not? Other interesting discussions developed around which character the students now felt sorrier for. Some said the mother, some said the daughter, and some said both. Many remarked that this sudden revelation made them understand more the mother's motivation in her actions toward her daughter and more about their relationships with their parents. Later, students continued to look for complexity and insights on their own by coming up with various interpretations about what the piano symbolized and the meaning of the story's title. They even started comparing the story to others they have read.

Since I taught this story on Amy Tan's birthday, I brought in cake and we sent Amy Tan photos of the classes wishing her a happy birthday. She wrote us back. Students now felt a connection with Tan and her writing.

These observations confirm student interviews and surveys. One student commented: "The approach to literature in this course had opened us up to relationships with the stories we read. Since we have gained a new understanding of what goes on while authors write, we can begin to recognize the choices writers made in manipulating us as readers. This helps us to better develop meaning, inferences, symbols, themes, and other skills good readers have."



### Summary

This chapter is the second of three outlining the results about the perceptions of the blended Introduction to Literature course. The results are from interviews, pre- and posttests, student work, the university's assessment and course evaluation, and videos. Overall, this data seems to reveal the course had a positive impact upon learners. The next chapter takes a look at the action research data.

## CHAPTER 6

### RESULTS SUMMARY: ACTION RESEARCH

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the results highlighting my action research for this study about the blended Introduction to Literature course. Action research is an attractive methodology for teacher researchers, education administrators, and other stakeholders in teaching and learning settings (Mills, 2011). As described in Chapter 3, action research requires three conditions that are individually necessary but work together jointly (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). These are:

firstly, a project takes as its subject-matter a social practice, regarding it as a form of strategic action susceptible of improvement; secondly, the project proceeds through a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, with each of these activities being systematically and self-critically implemented and interrelated; thirdly, the project involves those responsible for the practice in each of the moments of the activity, widening participation in the project gradually to include others affected by the practice, and maintaining collaborative control of the process. (pp. 165-166)

In other words, action research in education can be defined as the process of studying a school situation to understand and improve the quality of the educative process (Hensen, 1996; Johnson, 2012; McTaggart, 1997). Specifically, action research in education provides practitioners with new knowledge and understanding about how to improve educational practices or resolve significant problems in classrooms (Mills, 2011; Stringer, 2008). Action research uses a systematic process (Dinkelman, 1997; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996), is participatory in nature (Holter & Frabutt, 2012), and offers multiple, beneficial opportunities for teachers (Johnson, 2012; McTaggart, 1997; Schmuck, 1997). These opportunities include facilitating the professional development of educators

(Barone et al., 1996), increasing teacher empowerment (Book, 1996; Fueyo & Koorland, 1997; Hensen, 1996), and bridging the gap between research and practice (Johnson, 2012; Mills, 2011). Furthermore, action research helped with this study's authenticity. "Authenticity means that one is faithful to one's mode of human existence, which is actualized in language and the ways of storytelling; there is a certain way of being human, and to live authentically you must follow your own way" (Taylor, 2009, p. 13).

Data from the action research portion of this study helped answer the research question: What insights did I gain while co-teaching this blended Introduction to Literature course? The action research information came from excerpts from journal entries written by me, the researcher/co-teacher, as I designed and implemented the course. Since one of the theoretical lenses used in this study views BL as a complex adaptive system, this chapter's insights are organized around the six essential CABLS subsystems as proposed by Wang et al. (2015): the learner, the teacher, the technology, the content, the learning support, and the institution. Similar to any complex system, these six subsystems act within themselves and upon one another in a dynamic and non-linear fashion. Hopefully, my insights will help meet the goals of action research: to stimulate learning and make a difference. For a detailed description of the research context, participants, the Introduction to Literature course, and research design I used for the action research portion of this dissertation, please refer back to Chapter 3.

### The Learner

My action research is based upon journal entries I wrote from insights I gained while examining the student work, student surveys, student interviews, and observations

from co-teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course. I agree with the student perceptions as presented in the survey section from Chapter 4 that most of my students changed from passive to active learners, acquiring new identities such as being transformed from knowledge repeater to critical thinker, dependent learner to independent learner, surface reader to close reader, non-literary person to literary connoisseur, and student to teacher. Additionally, I recognized what it meant for learners to read a work of literature. Some of the insights I gained are the same as for any instructor who teaches an introductory literature course, blended or not. The other insights pertain directly to BL. Each of these will be discussed in turn, in this section. To aid in understanding what I found out about the learner while teaching the Introduction to Literature course in a blended format, this section will be subdivided into two subsections: insights gained using the transactional approach and insights gained from BL.

#### Insights Gained Using the Transactional Approach

The first set of insights involve what it meant for learners to read a work of literature using the transactional theory of reading. The transactional theory of reading requires gaining students' confidence and giving them experience interpreting literature. To do this, some "battles had to be fought." The tensions are described in the following paragraphs.

The first battle the co-teachers had to fight was getting the students to believe that stories can have multiple interpretations. A lot of confidence building needed to happen. Students were used to summarizing stories or memorizing their high school teachers'

interpretations of literature and “spitting it back to them” in an essay or a test. They never thought of themselves as literary critics. Students had to understand that analyzing literature means making debatable claims. Others who have read the same text must be able to disagree or agree with the key claims in a literary analysis. This is why summaries that described what happened in a story are ineffective: Anybody who has read the story would agree on the characters’ names and the order of the events and actions that occurred. But a strong literary analysis involves gaining insight and finding complexity in a text through the elements of literature. This does not mean reciting another’s views. Furthermore, interpreting literature cannot be sufficiently assessed through standardized testing. Such methods encourage a simplistic way of thinking, where there are only correct and wrong answers. Also, interpreting literature requires certain qualities such as critical thinking, creativity, a sense of wonder, etc. To help students trust themselves as interpreters of literature and that we the co-teachers would honor multiple interpretations, we had to grade leniently the first two-to-three assignments.

Another battle involved experiencing some tension with the transactional theory of reading. The co-teachers, as more experienced readers, have acquired through time a “language of reading”, something to which the students are now being introduced. What this is, is a grammar of literature. Every language has a grammar, a set of rules that govern meaning and usage. The language of literature is the same. This involves working with the elements of literature. Stories have conventions. For example, when catacombs are mentioned as the setting in a story such as Poe’s “The Cask of Amontillado,” the chances are excellent that the story will have a frightful ending. Catacombs conjure up a

set of associations: death, darkness, coldness, etc. And when adding the time of year, carnival season, to the catacombs' setting, this may lead readers to more abstract concepts such as madness.

So how did we get our students to recognize these? The answer is practice. For example, when the students first came to class and encountered a literary text, they focused, as they should, on the characters and the story: who are these people, what are they doing, and what fantastic or horrible events are happening to them? Practically all of the students responded first of all, and sometimes only, to their reading on an emotional level. They become emotionally involved by experiencing joy, anger, anxiety, fright, tears, etc. This is the wish of virtually every author of literary works.

However, when literature professors teach, they will not only accept the affective response to the story, but will also pay a lot of attention to the elements of literature by asking probing questions such as: Where did that effect come from? Whom does the character resemble? Which of my personal experiences are similar? Where has this situation been seen before? Did Shakespeare, the Bible, Sponge Bob Square Pants, Homer Simpson, etc. say that? If literature instructors can get their students to examine stories through such questions while examining the elements of literature, students will probably read more deeply and closely, to get beneath the text's surface. Often, when this happens, the students also teach the teachers themselves to look even deeper at new possibilities of interpretation.

An excerpt from my journal from meeting with my co-teacher about teaching "Sonny's Blues" by James Baldwin illustrates this. When this story was taught during the

pilot semester, it went over like a “lead balloon” with students. They had a difficult time relating to it or making sense out of the story. The co-teachers even discussed swapping the story out for another. However, it was decided to keep it, because one of the purposes for literature is to broaden reading experience. Thus, the lesson for “Sonny’s Blues” was reworked. The major problem was that too many students were approaching it with the perspective of the year 2015, not Baldwin’s Harlem 1957. Furthermore, they were viewing Baldwin’s work as Sonny’s story instead of understanding it as the unnamed brother’s. Lastly, they were used to straight-forward plots, not flashbacks.

Here is an incident that illustrates how the story was misunderstood. A brief summary of the plot is needed to understand the challenge. “Sonny’s Blues” is about an uptight unnamed teacher in Harlem during the 1950s. His brother Sonny has been released from prison for heroin possession. Sonny loves playing jazz. Throughout the story there is a lot of tension between the brothers. The teacher does not fathom the troubles that drive Sonny, his music, and his drug problem. Nor does he understand jazz. The only jazz musician he can name is Louis Armstrong, proving to Sonny he is hopelessly “square.” At the end of the story, the brother goes to a jazz club to hear Sonny play for the first time. As the brother listens to Sonny’s playing, he begins to hear in the beautiful, troubled music the depths of feeling, suffering, and joy that lie behind it. So, he buys Sonny a scotch and milk, which reveals understanding and brotherly love. Sonny sips it, places the drink on the piano, and acknowledges the gift, which simmers like “the very cup of trembling.” This scene is deep, emotional, and Biblical.

Now this is where the literary analysis gets interesting. Some of the students focused on Sonny's addiction. They were horrified that someone would supply alcohol to a recovering addict. After all, Sonny needs to be strong to stay clean. True. But in this context, such interpretations do not supply the complexity and insight to read deeply and critically. This story was published in 1957. Using the best information about Baldwin's purpose when he wrote this story, the text is better read as a "brother" relationship, not a treatise on addiction. If the story is read with the theme of recovery, the ending will be lost. This is why the students were confused about the ending. If the story is read, on the other hand, with the theme of redemption, the resolution will be understandable and probably satisfying.

Thus, a tension between Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading and understanding the story arose. Students, especially undergrads starting college, expect a certain amount of faithfulness to the world they know in what they watch and read. On the other hand, a too rigid insistence on the world of fiction corresponding on all points to the students' world may be very limiting not only to readers' enjoyment, but also to their understanding of literary works. So how much freedom of interpretation is too much? This is a dilemma literature teachers need to examine.

Yes, literature teachers need to allow students to bring in their own interpretations, but there needs, too, to be an effort to try to take the literary text as it was intended by the authors. Therefore, we needed to gently nudge our students to read not only from their own fixed position in 2016, but to also find a reading perspective that allowed for sympathy with the historical moment of the story, that understood that the



story had been written against its own social, historical, cultural, and personal background.

Sometimes this is difficult. For instance, one of the students when reading O. Henry's "The Ransom of Red Chief" during the online portion of the blended Introduction to Literature course missed the story's humor. The plot functions on irony. "The Ransom of Red Chief" describes the trials of two men attempting to kidnap and ransom a wealthy Alabaman's son. But their plan backfires. The kidnapped boy's spoiled and hyperactive behavior forced the kidnappers to pay a ransom to the boy's father to take back the brat. Missing the humor, a student insisted on her critique sheet that the kidnapping was wrong, especially when it involves the abduction of a small child. Her comments about kidnapping a young boy reflected a certain mind set about social problems, but were at odds with the unique history of artistic and popular culture of the Old West that O. Henry used to write his story. She did not understand "The Ransom of Red Chief" follows the tradition of the tall tale which ordinarily answers humorously questions such as "How big was the fish that got away?" or "How far did the frog jump?" In this story, the question is "How bad was the kid?" Yes, the story deals with kidnapping, but not in the way she expected. Not only was she clueless on what fiction is about, she was locked in how today's popular culture is reflected in news magazines, daytime talk shows, movies, magazine articles, etc. that lead society to think in terms of identifying a problem, such as child abduction and to seek solutions for it. In its place, such thinking makes sense. However, O. Henry is only slightly interested in the act of kidnapping. What he really cares about is the humorous twist in events.

Every literary element points to these twists. The point of view (first person, told through Sam, the leading con man, as if he is relating his story to an audience); the characterization of the kidnappers with their malapropisms and frontier talk as well as the little boy who is worse than most boys his age, but not so unlike them to be a monster; and the themes of underdogs and poetic justice, etc. all relate to the humorous twist. And, even though I wanted to honor each student's interpretation brought to a story, I still needed to broaden their reading experiences to respect the story's goals.

Even though I like the transactional approach to reading, I still experienced some tensions as a teacher. In my case these involved building student confidence to overcome their earlier experiences with literature and to somehow blend the author's intent while still honoring my students' interpretations of the stories. However, experiencing these tensions gave me a greater understanding as to why students have so much trouble seeing multiple perspectives in literature as well as offering their own.

In summary, the insights recently described involve the transactional approach to literature. The remaining insights for the learner subsystem reveal that BL was especially beneficial to those students who were introverted, tech savvy, managed time well, and have strong reading and writing skills. These will be described in the next subsection.

#### Insights Gained from Blended Learning

Students and instructors appreciated the flexibility the BL course offered. The first set of insights gained support Garnham and Kaleta (2002). They pointed out that both students and teachers liked the convenience of the BL course model. Backing this claim is the fact that BL allowed my co-teacher to go on book tours to promote the

publishing of one of his books since he could communicate with the students online. Also, many of our students had multiple responsibilities outside of college, making flexible education an important determinant. BL courses offered them the convenience and flexibility of wholly online courses without the loss of faculty and student interaction (Sitter et al., 2009). As Alvarez (2005) stated, “the online environment is not the ideal setting for all types of learning. Classrooms are not perfect either. That’s why so many teachers and corporate trainers are concentrating their efforts on integrating internet-based technologies and classrooms to create blended solutions” (p. 17).

Today’s college students face a complex set of dilemmas about whether to attend college, where to attend, how to pay, how much to work, how many jobs to take, how to pay credit card bills and car payments, how to juggle extra curriculars and, take care of family, and how to balance these competing priorities while in school (Tuttle, McKinney & Rago, 2005). In addition, BL instruction offers instructors and students the ability to teach and learn in a variety of different modalities, potentially increasing the instructional effectiveness. Making BL instruction available in certain subjects in a college setting may offer the adult student the “best of both worlds”—flexibility of online education with the social and instructor support commonly associated with a face-to-face class: “Through blended learning, accreditation and high standards can be maintained while providing the additional flexibility that students require” (Dziuban, Moskal, & Hartman, 2005, p.4). My own teaching experiences with the blended Introduction to Literature course echo these researchers.

One type of student the blended Introduction to Literature course seemed to benefit was the introvert. The online portion was especially helpful to them. During the face-to-face portion students needed to respond to questions on the fly, but during the online portion, students had the opportunity to prepare what they wanted to say. Generally the co-teachers, from their teaching experiences, have found that introverted students tend to be reflective; really thinking through their ideas or answers to questions when it comes to learning. Also, they found that introverted students are usually good listeners who can better express themselves through their writing rather than verbally. Online, these students could take their time to construct their thoughts, craft a literary analysis using the elements of literature, and post it to the co-teachers via email.

Thus, BL courses can give introverted students a great sense of relief and validation. The researcher, being an introvert herself, can identify with such feelings. I have often felt the tension of a society, which educational institutions reflect, that champions extroverted characteristics such as assertiveness, dominance, spontaneity, and loudness. Many well-meaning teachers have viewed it as one of their missions to turn me into an extrovert, which sends a message that something is wrong with introverts. Instead society needs to understand that introvert is a normal personality type. Studies (e.g. Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998) have shown that one out of every two or three students is an introvert.

Placing a major emphasis on class discussion which often happens in face-to-face situations unfairly discriminates against introverts. Furthermore, leadership has become an educational buzzword. An expectation exists that everyone should be a leader, and

being a leader means having the qualities of an extrovert. Is this right? Or are critical thinking, creativeness, kindness, etc. more important traits? Take Gandhi for example. He was so shy that he ran home from school each day as soon as class was over because he did not want to talk to others. His leadership grew out of a sense of passion for his causes, not from being a natural leader, whatever that means. Maybe the lesson learned is that instead of changing introverts from who they are, cultivate them to make the most of their natural talents, so they learn the skills needed to flourish in schools and workplaces which reward extroversion. BL can give these students a more even playing field with extroverts. Online environments may allow introverted learners to feel more comfortable than traditional classroom settings (Bonk, 2009) by allowing them to tinker with their ideas.

Thus, during a co-teacher meeting, we decided not to grade on class participation. Even though any kind of assessment is subjective, this one seemed especially so. In our teaching careers, the co-teachers have noticed no clear correlation between how much a student speaks, including the quality of what he/she says, and performance in all other aspects of the course. Therefore, points would be given for attendance for the face-to-face class meetings instead.

In other words, BL gave both introverts and extroverts in the Introduction to Literature course a chance to showcase their talents. In the face-to-face situation, extroverts were often social and expressed themselves better verbally than through their writing. As a result, BL gave us a better feel as to what each of our students had learned and achieved from the course.

But in order to reach all students, introverts and extroverts alike, more work is required of the instructor. Generally, we could tell what the extroverts knew by just observing when they raised their hands. Introverts, on the other hand, commonly did not do this. Instead they sat in class with impassive faces, making it difficult for us to know if they were engaged or not. Therefore, we needed to look for other ways to measure engagement such as are the students taking notes in the face-to-face portion? Are they keeping up with assignments? What is the quality of the work? What are they contributing online? It may involve, too, finding one-on-one time with these students, figuring out their interests. This could be done during face-to-face time. We often did this before and after our face-to-face class sessions.

BL also seemed to benefit most our students who were tech savvy. We were surprised at the wide range of technology skills from students enrolled in the course. Some of them were socially proficient with the technology, but that is different than being academically proficient with it. Therefore, we had to be sensitive that not all the students had the same degree of technological expertise when they began college. Supports were required to assist those who were novice e-learners for the many facets of e-learning tasks such as emailing, uploading course materials, researching on the web, making hyperlinks, creating PowerPoints, etc. We also found it helped when we began the BL course we specifically outlined and modeled the technology that would be utilized, thereby decreasing the anxiety that may have occurred for the novice online learners. This further served as an orientation to where to find course materials. The BL experience provided us with a unique opportunity to introduce students to online

instruction methods while still maintaining a traditional classroom presence. More about learners and technology will be examined in greater detail later in the technology and learning support subsystems sections of this chapter.

A third type of student who benefitted from BL were self-motivated learners with effective time management skills. In BL, students are held responsible for not only the online aspect of the class, but also for fully interacting in the classroom meetings. This combination of pedagogical methods seeks to encourage an active, engaged learning environment where students potentially learn more than in a traditional on-campus classroom (Dziuban, Moskal, & Hartman, 2005). Thus, a change from the traditional lecture-oriented class to student-centered active learning can constitute a radical change for some students, especially students unaccustomed to taking responsibility for their own learning. However, it should be noted that a few students who struggled with not taking responsibility for their own learning and lacked time management skills, did improve with the online portion.

Furthermore, the online portion puts those students with good reading and writing skills at an advantage over others who struggle in these areas. Online work for a literature course required extensive reading and writing, as well as both strong time management and technological skills. Moreover, if students enrolled in a BL class were expecting a traditional class setting, they may have been disappointed and/or discouraged by the format.

The last learner insight gained through the action research was the level of student entitlement. Some students were into grade inflation, especially when it came to the final

project. Three students thought the grading was harsh. Interestingly, they were all females and conservative in their beliefs. I am not sure if connections exist between student perceptions of grading and their gender and political beliefs. This would be an area for further study. Nevertheless, the three students stated that effort equates to high grades. They claimed they spent many hours on the project, but failed to understand how not revising, not proofreading, not writing a minimal number of discussion questions; not making visuals for each slide; and not including historical context and hyperlinks will not result in an “A” grade. This happened in spite of modeled lessons from both the face-to-face and online lessons containing all these characteristics. In fact, this was an issue at the start of the course. So, to counteract this, the co-teachers gave students extra credit for exceptional effort and growth in how they completed the critique sheets. These could only be earned if all the sections were answered. This worked well. Word spread and a majority of the students improved in these areas. Unfortunately, for some reason, this did not carry over as much for the final project. The next section of this chapter looks at the action research data collected for the teacher subsystem of the CABLS model in studying the blended Introduction to Literature course.

### The Teacher

Teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course has provided me with the insight that an influential component in BL is the teacher. The teacher can make or break a BL course. My insights can be broken down into four areas: teacher identity, student engagement, course design, and co-teaching. These insights were gained from using



action research methods, student surveys, and viewing videos of myself teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course.

### Insights about New Identities

The insights I gained co-teaching centers upon the many identities I had teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course. These included: e-moderator, facilitator, cheerleader, advisor, promoter of learning, nurturer, lover of literature, and student. At the end of the second semester teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course, I reflected upon my different identities.

One of the childhood books I adored was *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*. In the story, the little boy Bartholomew tries repeatedly to remove his hat while in the presence of royalty. Unfortunately, each time he reaches up and removes one hat another appears to replace it. The same was true for me. I had many hats or identities. This list could be very lengthy, but I will limit it to the identities the students brought up in the surveys.

One identity is “e-moderator.” The term is used here to capture the wide variety of roles and skills I, the online instructor, needed. Goodyear et al. (2001) attempted to describe these roles. They are:

- **Process facilitator** - facilitating the range of online activities that are supportive of student learning
- **Adviser/counsellor** - working on an individual/private basis, offering advice to or counselling learners to help them get the most out of their engagement in a course

- **Assessor** - providing grades, feedback, validation of learners' work, etc.
- **Researcher** – engaging learners in production of new knowledge of relevance to the content areas being taught
- **Content facilitator** - facilitating the learners' growing understanding of course content
- **Technologist** - making or helping make technological choices that improve the environment available to learners
- **Designer** - designing worthwhile on-line learning tasks (both “pre-course” and “in-course”)
- **Manager/administrator** - working with issues of learner registration, security, record keeping, etc.

The second identity was “facilitator.” A facilitator is not “the sage on the stage” who single-handedly dispenses knowledge to students. Rather, I, as a facilitator, had to value collaboration and learner exploration. I guided and assisted students in learning for themselves by picking apart ideas about literature, helping them form their own thoughts about them, and own material through self-exploration and dialogue. In other words, my role as facilitator was to bring up subjects for discussion, encourage sharing of thoughts, and enable students to take responsibility for learning.

The third teacher identity was “cheerleader.” Give me a “R” ... give me an “E” ... give me a “A” ... give me an “D” ... what’s that spell? Now as literature teachers, we not only have the ability, but also the responsibility to help the students with their interpretive

reading skills. In fact, it falls upon us to root for the students, no matter how much they must learn in order to intelligently analyze the details contained within the elements of literature found in their reading, and to make sensible arguments about what these details mean. We shared continuously with students a vision of them succeeding as intelligent readers and accomplishing great things in life. It was stressed, too, that their thoughts about the literary works we were reading were important. Their interpretations had as much value as anyone else's, including those published by professional literary critics. (Even though I believed in honoring student literary interpretations, I experienced the tension that not all of their literary interpretations were equally valuable. More will be said about this later in this chapter.) Fortunately, cheerleading allowed me to look towards myself and point out that at one time I did not always know how to interpret literature (and still work hard at it today). Keeping in mind what Isaac Newton once said, "If I have seen further, it is only because I was standing on the shoulders of giants," I realized I did not have to be the visionary, but could accomplish the same goals by cheering the students to their potential as readers. They loved this. It translated to caring about learners and seeing them for all they can be as readers.

The fourth teacher identity was "advisor." The term "advisor" is by no means universal. In other contexts, they are called facilitators, counsellors, helpers, mentors, or consultants. Advisor is defined here as the process of assisting students in directing their own paths in order to become better, more autonomous learners in reading literature closely. It is useful to begin by defining what advising is not, before unpacking what advising in literature instruction IS. The surprising fact is that as a literature advisor, I

found it better when I did not give advice and stayed away from modals such as “You should...” “You must...” and “You have to....” This is because we wanted the students to be able to do this for themselves. Following are six examples of functions that I performed as an advisor (there are others) while teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course:

1. Raised awareness of the process of analyzing literature;
2. Helped learners to identify goals in understanding literature and succeeding in the blended Introduction to Literature course;
3. Suggested suitable materials and strategies by offering choices of how to interpret the literature using the transactional theory of reading (rather than prescribing);
4. Motivated, supported, and encouraged self-directed learners;
5. Aided students to self-evaluate and reflect; and
6. Listened actively to students.

I imagine that literature teachers reading this are thinking “Well, I do that.” Of course, many of the functions just listed are fulfilled by classroom teachers and so they should be! Yet, there are a number of differences between the role of a literature advisor and a teacher, and here are two:

- Voller (2004) notes that advising requires “an overlapping, but fundamentally different, set of skills from those employed in classroom teaching.”
- Kelly (1996) observes that the nature of the discourse employed by teachers and advisors is different. She describes advising as “a form of therapeutic dialogue

that enables an individual to manage a problem” (p.94), and this is quite different from discourse commonly employed by teachers.

Furthermore, a literature advisor tends to work outside the classroom and is available to work with individual students on their needs. These needs might not necessarily be the same as the aims of the blended Introduction to Literature course they enrolled in. In addition, the face-to-face portion of the Introduction to Literature course is compulsory, creating an environment where students discuss the literary works with each other and the co-teacher orally, whereas the online portion offers students the voluntary opportunity to orally discuss their learning outside of class with their peers. Doing so is strictly up to the learners (if not required as an assignment) if they want to have this experience during the online portion. This means that BL students take the responsibility for making such decisions, including the decision about seeking help in the first place.

The fifth identity was “promoter of learning.” This happened in the course of teaching students how to interpret literature based on the elements of literature. In teaching literature, I used Rosenblatt’s transactional theory as my basis. It explains that reading is a two-way transaction between a reader and the text during which meaning is created. Readers draw on prior experiences, and the stream of these images and ideas flows through their minds during reading. In response-centered teaching, teaching literature involves critical thought that is different from the kinds of thinking learners do in other academic subjects, where the focus is primarily on the acquisition of information. Reading of literature involves the consideration of various possibilities. The exploration of these possibilities requires a significantly different type of questioning by the teacher.

Questions need to invite multiple answers rather than one correct answer. Also, I needed to keep in mind that very few of the students in the Introduction to Literature course were or want to be English majors. The challenge then became to find a way or ways to teach students to read more analytically, while still valuing their lives, thoughts, and experiences. From their discussions, I found that by helping students to read more closely by examining the elements of literature, their lives and experiences grew richer as well. Such close reading was an interaction between the reader and the text (Fisher, 2012). Close reading allowed for insightful observations of a text and then interpretations of those observations (Kain, 1998). It involved rereading. Usually this meant rereading a short portion of a text one or more times to help a reader carry new ideas to the whole text (Beers & Probst, 2012). Instruction needed to evoke joy and engagement in reading, not diminish it, help students gain independence instead of dependence on my interpretation or prompting, and needed to be repeated over time to provide practice.

The sixth identity was “nurturer.” Never is that old saying, “They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care,” truer than in student-teacher relationships. Research confirms that instructors who convey genuine interest in students’ success cultivate more productive learners. Chickering and Gamson (1987) wrote:

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of class is a most important factor in student motivation and involvement. Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and plans. (p. 3)

I remembered how different teachers interacted with me. Those who were nurturing and saw me as having great potential were the ones I learned the most from. Their classes were the ones that encouraged me. I always shut down when scolded and/or humiliated.

I found many ways to create a nurturing environment, both in the face-to-face classroom and online. A few examples follow.

- I required the best from the students. I gave challenging, but not too difficult assignments. Mutual respect grew between the students and me when I expected what they are capable of achieving. When expectations were not met, then encouragement was the primary emotional currency I used. If a student was not completing his/her work, then I engaged the student positively and helped guide him/her toward explaining how to complete the basic steps that needed to be done to complete a given task. Once the student had successfully done this for successful learning, it hopefully boosted his/her sense of efficacy to help facilitate future learning attempts.
- I listened carefully when students made comments in class and cared about what they had to say.
- I asked when a student did poorly on an assignment or seemed to be struggling, how I could help. Although this may seem intrusive, the student almost always appreciated my concern. Also, replying promptly to student e-mails and making myself available to help often worked wonders.

In short, I tried to cater to the social, emotional, and educational needs of my students. However, I had to be prepared to add the identity of counselor to this role. It was not uncommon in class discussions and assignments that students sometimes shared very personal information. For example, several students shared information about living with alcoholic parents when the class read T. C. Boyles' *Balto*.

The seventh identity was "literature lover." A quote on a poster reads: "I am obsessed with fictional characters and worlds. Every single one is like a little part of me I have discovered, and I always have to read more books because I will never be whole." We know that loving something or someone involves knowing that thing or person very well: returning repeatedly to it, gazing at it for hours, considering each angle, every word, and thinking about its meaning. The same is true for reading, especially close reading. It needs to be a "love" story. If I was not in love with my subject, how could I expect my students to be? Furthermore, passion and enthusiasm can be contagious.

The eighth identity was "student." Teaching involves learning. Learning is a lifelong activity. At the end of this study, I reflected upon my journey teaching this blended course. I learned much. I still have more to learn. It was not so much the literature as it was the technology. I am not a computer expert. When I heard something like: "We just converted from NT to 2000 because the server wasn't responding to the XML metatags produced from our Flash MX, probably because we were only running on a 2.4 gigabyte fiber-optic with our 1040 RAM," I had no idea what that meant. Although this was an extreme example of some of the technical jargon I encountered and this level of detail is the domain of a network engineer, it reinforced the idea that it is always good



to be a learner. What a message for students! It was okay that I did not know, but that I was prepared to learn. Perhaps this is why teachers who are not computer experts might be the best ones to teach BL. Their fears and lack of skill might make them more human. They can teach by example that it is all right not to know everything, but be prepared to learn! Furthermore, no matter how many hours I sat in front of the computer, no matter how many pull-down windows I selected, no matter how many times I read *Computers for Dummies* or how-to-do-this-on-the-computer videos I viewed, many students still had a better grasp of the technology. So, I opened myself to learn from them.

In conclusion, I agree with the teacher identities students perceived in the surveys discussed in Chapter 4. My action research perspective as a teacher concurs with the student perceptions. However, my teacher perspective revealed two additional identities. These are the identities of “being who we are” and “being human.”

The first identity students missed was “who we are.” “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 1998, p.1). Being a big fan of Parker Palmer, I consider him an eloquent spokesman for the craft of teaching. His philosophy of teaching can spur teachers to ask questions about who we are within the profession. He states it is important to find one’s “teaching heart.”

I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the joy. When my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, when the pathway out of a thicket opens up before us, when our experience is illuminated by the lightning - life of the mind - then teaching is the finest work I know. (p. 1)

However, I am also familiar with the next scenario:

. . . at other moments, the classroom is so lifeless or painful or confused -- and I am so powerless to do anything about it -- that my claim to be a teacher seems a transparent sham. Then the enemy is everywhere; in those students from some alien planet, in that subject that I thought I knew, and in the personal pathology that keeps me earning my living this way. What a fool I was to imagine that I had mastered this occult art -- harder to divine than tea leaves and impossible for mortals to do even passably well!  
(p. 1)

In *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscapes of a Teacher's Life*, Palmer (1998) wrote that teachers struggle with three interwoven teaching complexities. One involves the subjects teachers teach. They are as big and complex as life, so our knowledge of them is always flawed and partial. Two, the students are even larger and more complex: "To see them more clearly and see them as a whole, and to respond to them wisely in the moment, requires a fusion of Solomon and Freud" (p.1). And three, not commonly addressed: knowing who we are and becoming more aware of our own identity and integrity. Parker claims that "Knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject" (p.1).

But how do teachers get to know themselves as teachers? It means striking a balance between thinking, feeling, and fulfilling one's "heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life. Good teaching stems from the identity and integrity of the instructor and in her or his ability to connect with students and to connect them to the subject" (Palmer, 1998, p. 1).

Palmer's first "scenario" reveals the power of the "shared moment"; one in which was reflected several times during the Introduction to Literature course as I, the teacher, became a student and the students peers, all working together to achieve greater understanding of a short story within a real-world context. But what happens when there

is no connectedness, no sharing, and no "wholeness"? From the weekly co-teaching meetings and watching each other teach, we have found the seminal point about teaching and about our teacher roles: when we shared with students our own heartfelt commitment to literature, we found that we could provoke others into creating meaningful literary self-understandings of their own. We not only had to expose our students to the content and knowledge of our discipline, we had to expose ourselves as humans -- our passions, our fears, our failures. That exposure was hard for me because teachers rarely reflect on their roles in this context, nor do we generally have the courage to be honestly and imperfectly human in front of our students.

This leads to the other identity students missed: "being human." Teachers are not perfect. They make mistakes. Sometimes they fail to plan perfectly, are not the most nurturing, or things simply do not go well. For example, it is tough to get assignment feedback to students in a timely matter. Look at the math. If a professor has two sections of Introduction to Literature, each having 25 students, and each student turns in two critiques twice a week, each two to three pages long, that makes 100-150 pages to read and grade weekly. This does not mention the time devoted to papers from other classes being taught, planning courses, committee work, research, etc., as well as family and other personal obligations. Several of the students did not realize this and expected us to be available 24-7 when the course went online. Also, we had one or two students each semester who never felt we were doing enough.

In summary, BL literature teachers probably wear many hats, taking on different identities every day, switching them on and off and often wearing more than one and

sometimes more than two. During this study, the students perceived their blended Introduction to Literature co-teachers with the following identities: e-moderator, facilitator, advisor, promoter of learning, cheerleader, literature lover, nurturer, and student. I concur with this perception, but added the identities of being who I am and being human. No matter the identity, the goal in BL, as in any other format, is to accept the students for who they are, and to help them to progress and to learn.

### Insights about Establishing Student Engagement

The second area of insights I gained about “the teacher” is the importance of establishing student engagement. I discovered a number of hints that effectively engaged my students. First, anticipate problems with technology and try to prepare for them. When it works, technology is awesome, but when it does not, the universe can feel as if it is collapsing. Always have a “plan B” for trouble. An example of this occurred when teaching Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man is Hard to Find.”

The lesson was going well. But that soon changed. For some reason, during the face-to-face session, I was not able to hyperlink to the website containing the audio recording of O’Connor reading her story. This was important because O’Connor was a Southerner, and I wanted the students to experience the rhythm of her words in which the Southern dialect plays a crucial role. My students, being Midwesterners, were not likely to pick this up. Furthermore, the recording would make the author real to them since the learners could actually hear her voice. Humor gave me “plan B”. I told my co-teacher:

You’re a Southerner. You’re always telling us how easy it is for you to switch accents between this locale and visiting your relatives down South. You also love the sound of your own voice. Now is your chance to show us your skill and listen to yourself. Would you mind reading the first few paragraphs of the story aloud?

The students chuckled. When the laughter diminished, my co-teacher read in a Southern accent. Perhaps it was not the same as O'Connor reading, but it did give the students a feel for the Southern accent and how that played into the rhythm of her words.

Next, avoid adding new activities or tools mid-stream. Part of teaching is always being on the lookout for new ways to excite learners and improve the course. However, to avoid student confusion, save the great idea for a future lesson or semester. Most of our students like routine. They tend to get themselves into a pattern. Perhaps this is why a couple of students, no matter the explanations given, wanted us to use Blackboard as the e-learning platform. They had other instructors who were using it, so, we should, too.

Third, I needed to remind myself as well as the students that technology should not be an obstacle. Tech support is available, perhaps not 24-7, but still there. Both the students and I were learners when it came to technology. The technology was constantly changing with innovations and improvements, therefore working with it demanded constant learning. The aim was to try to learn the technology like a pro. The more fluent everyone was with the tools, the smoother the course ran, and the easier it was for me to focus on teaching and the students on learning. Sometimes this was easier said than done. For example, it was challenging for me to learn and stay ahead of the technology. This meant I often found myself in the role of student. This was uncomfortable. It meant not having control and admitting vulnerability. It also meant dealing with fears. I had a fear of failure about not being up to par with the latest technology. A lot of pressure exists from administrators for teachers to be "tech goddesses/gods." Somehow, I needed to release my fears. I am thankful to have a co-teacher who treated with me with respect and

as an equal. He was nurturing in teaching me the technology. I felt we were a team playing a sport that aimed to have as many students as possible win at understanding literature. This meant I had to swallow my pride. Being a technology dinosaur, I had to let the students be the tech “goddesses and gods.” They taught the class and me. After all, as just mentioned, we were a team. The students, co-teacher, I, and to a certain extent, the institution, were all in this together. More about this will be discussed under the learning support and institution subsystem sections below.

Fourth, feedback is important. To have the most meaning for students, the feedback was swift, meaningful, and constructive. It was more powerful, as evident from the student surveys and their work, when we recognized the positive things in their work before identifying things that needed to be fixed or changed. Students were then more open to us giving tips as how they could continue to grow for the next assignment and beyond the course.

Last, be reflective. Reflection, or the deliberate and structured thinking about the choices and decisions I make as an educator, is an integral step in improving my teaching practice. The move to best practices came from my ability to reflect on what is and is not working and then to use this new understanding to do things differently than in the past. Creating journal entries, co-teacher discussions, meeting with a mentor, etc. helped me to see more clearly how the BL course was going. This process led me to no longer look at BL as simply a combination of “face-to-face instruction and computer-mediated instruction;” rather, I began to see it as adaptive and complex. As Lim (2002) notes, technology “may trigger changes in the activities, curriculum, and interpersonal

relationships in the learning environment, and is reciprocally affected by the very changes it causes” (p. 412). This required me to “paradigm shift” my thinking. BL was no longer a linear model, but rather a circular one. I began to see it as a series of subsystems consisting of the student, the teacher, the technology, the content, the learning support, and the institution. Each subsystem is critical. When any of these subsystems are missing, BL may fall apart or may not be as effective as its potential. In fact, each of these subsystems were so dependent on each other in the blended Introduction to Literature course that I had an extremely difficult time separating them from each other when examining the data for this study.

Furthermore, BL is not only complex, but adaptive. Both my students and I needed to learn how to adapt to our new BL environment in order to benefit. Content design and delivery were constantly being adapted to the new multimodal environment in order to promote student learning; technology was continuously developed and adapted to better reach learning goals; learning supports needed to respond to the needs of both learners and us as well as to the development of new improved technology to better aid learning and teaching; and the institution, informed by BL research and practice, constantly adjusted its strategies, policies, and support measures. Such a perspective promoted a more realistic, systematic, and holistic view of BL than what I had held before.

As a complex adaptive system, I realized that “no magic bullet” exists to design and implement a BL course. I discovered that each BL course will have its own unique agenda, characteristics, problems to be addressed, etc. The diverse subsystems and their

interactions to each other will vary from case to case. Thus, each BL course, or class for that matter, will be different. This is okay. For example, I used a 50-50 formula for face-to-face to online portions for the first half of the semester, because I was working primarily with first-year undergraduates. If I was working with more experienced college students, I might have implemented more online time or considered alternating every other class period between face-to-face and online instruction.

### Insights about Course Design

The next area of insights I gained about the teacher subsystem is course design. This meant sketching out a course that involved 102 students and 16 stories. This required lots of planning. Luckily, we, the co-teachers, had complete freedom in course design. We do not like “off the shelf” curriculum. As Means, Bakia, & Murphy (2014) have pointed out, we, like other higher learning instructors, entered our profession because we like the process of teaching and creating our “own course.”

Also, we perceived teaching in a BL format as less threatening than teaching a completely online course. BL approaches allowed us to harness some of the advantages of online learning without completely disrupting the normal course structure and our teaching roles. In BL, I did not have to completely revise the existing Introduction to Literature course. This would have been an overwhelming task. Furthermore, I imagine such a task would be a huge effort and one that most higher-level learning institutions would not be sufficiently motivated or resourced to take. Also, BL was in my “comfort zone”. BL allowed me to continue teaching as I had previously with a smaller adaption to the online and peripheral resources than if I went fully online. We could be creative and



remain the mediators between the curriculum and the students. We are close to both the students and the educational institution. We best understand the psychology of our learners, are aware of teaching methods and teaching strategies, and play the evaluator roles for the assessment of learning outcomes. In other words, we can play the respective roles needed for each step of curriculum development process. Therefore, it was beneficial for us to build BL content in-house. By having complete creative and academic control over course content, we had total customization during both the course construction and course maintenance processes.

According to Sands (2002), the “basic precept of course-planning [is]: What do [you] want students to be able to do at the end of the semester?” This helped us design a better course to help students understand literature. The course goals and objectives, rather than the technology, guided us in course design. In fact, Sands’ first principle for developing a BL course is to “work backward from the final course goal...to avoid a counterproductive focus on technology.” Aycock, Garnham, and Kaleta’s work (2002) concurs with this. Throughout the co-teacher meetings this was the approach we used. We accomplished this by focusing on a small chunk of our BL course at a time-- an individual story and its author which constituted a single lesson. Throughout this process, we kept looking for concepts that would need more explanation. We were constantly putting ourselves in the role of white, middle-class eighteen-year-olds fresh out of Midwestern high schools since this was the largest demographic of the students enrolled in the course. We soon found out that if we were not engaged and having fun with the lessons, neither would our learners.

### Insights about Co-Teaching

The last area of insights I gained about the teacher rubric is co-teaching. I enjoyed my co-teaching experience. It was fun! Co-teaching eased the burden of working with technology. My co-teacher was supportive, encouraging, and of like mind. He also happened to be the one I debriefed my action research. We both believe that to engage our students in reading, understanding, and interpreting literature, we must tap into their unique talents, abilities, and strengths. In other words, rather than focusing what students did not do well, we focused on areas they excelled in. This did not mean that we ignored their weaknesses or obstacles. It meant that we lead with their strengths. This is a lot like what cheerleaders do to encourage their sport teams. We told the students over and over that they were intelligent and to honor their interpretations of the short stories. It boiled down to the following four basic course principles:

- Giving relevance by connecting the literature to the students' lives.
- Creating joy by making class one students want to attend and gain satisfaction through becoming independent learners.
- Promoting originality and creativity by supporting students' natural talents while also providing tools in the form of the literary elements and reading strategies for academic success.
- Encouraging personal responsibility by being accountable for our own actions (including our mistakes) and having integrity.

Through the weekly co-teacher meetings, it was decided to implement these principles by enhancing factual knowledge and relating the new information to what the

students already knew, presenting it through a variety of media, supplying opportunities to use the knowledge in performing more complex tasks, and repeating the elements of literature. Skills in literary analysis were strengthened through this extended practice with immediate feedback. Motivational engagement was enhanced through explicit goals, materials and activities with elements of challenge and playfulness (including humor), opportunities which gave choices in learning, and feedback which supplied personal progress. All of these kinds of learning are important in education, BL or not.

This subsection presented the action research portion about teaching a blended Introduction to Literature course. The next subsection is about the content of the course.

### The Content

Much time was spent by my co-teacher and myself in developing the content for the blended Introduction to Literature course. The process was an enjoyable, creative learning experience. Creativity is something we value. However, we discovered that we needed to be careful when designing a blended Introduction to Literature course. As Dilbert cartoonist Scott Adams said, “Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Design is knowing which ones to keep.” Furthermore, “the real test of BL is the effective integration of the two main components (face-to-face and Internet technology) such that we are not just adding on to the existing dominant approach or method” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 97).

Since BL courses introduce so many variables related to mixing the onsite and online environments, and designing and teaching a BL course was new to us, it was desirable to follow a simple process. We decided upon the “backward” design. At first

coming up with content for a blended Introduction to Literature seemed daunting, but since my co-teacher was calm and creative, the design process ended up being fun! And adhering to the “backward” design that is learning centered, made designing the content for the course simple, efficient, and consistent. Also, focusing on a small chunk of the BL course at a time by designing a single lesson for each short story made iterative development easy—a process of producing a prototype that is meant to be revised in an ongoing fashion based on learning-centered evaluations.

Setting goals was the first step in setting up the BL course. The major goals of the Introduction to Literature class were to create a thought-provoking environment where students were encouraged to (a) negotiate their own meanings by exploring possibilities through the elements of literature, (b) consider understandings from multiple perspectives, (c) sharpen their own interpretations, and (d) learn about features of literary style and analysis through the insights of their own responses. These responses were based as much on readers' own personal and cultural experiences as on the particular text, its historical context, and its author. In short, the course was working towards creating a better understanding how to interact with literature.

The crucial factor in blending a course hinged upon selecting each mode, both online and onsite, to take advantage of its strengths and to obviate weaknesses. This is why we rethought everything we did in the traditional face-to-face classroom. We found that constructivist-driven activities tend to benefit from online delivery. Since my co-teacher and I prefer learning environments in which skills, knowledge, and complexity exist side by side, we wanted the Introduction to Literature course to be student directed

and to relate to how our students construct meaning and understanding about literature in relation to the real world. Our aim was not to teach a particular version of literature, but help our students to think like people who understand literature. This provided us the flexibility to move online our onsite learning activities such as the PowerPoints and the critique sheets.

We soon realized that both the onsite and online modes had certain advantages. The lessons onsite provided rich sensory and spontaneous real-time exchanges and hands-on opportunities. The onsite lessons also provided humanity and opportunities for elaboration, whereas online lessons provided the flexibility of time and space, reusability of information, controllability by users of pacing, and support of individualized practice. Online instruction requires a deliberate approach to design and facilitation. We varied the content through exploring various authors who each had a unique approach to manipulating literary elements in order to raise certain emotions and thoughts in their readers. All presentations for each new short story, with the exception of the final project, contained a critique sheet that gave learners a chance to apply their learning about the literary elements. Our decision to meet with students the first half of the semester face-to-face was a wise one, because as revealed from the student surveys and work, the onsite advantages carried over to the online portion as detailed below.

The online portion of the course appeared to have allowed students to explore short stories in greater depth and at their own pace outside the classroom. This resulted from a thorough understanding of the literary elements and learning the process of literary interpretation/analysis from the face-to-face sessions conducted during the first

half of the course. Thus, they could easily apply the knowledge and skills they gained from the face-to-face portion to the online portion the second half of the semester. As a result, they felt they were “getting more out of their contact hours”. Throughout our weekly co-teacher meetings, we discussed student progress.

At the end of the pilot course, the short stories were reevaluated. The students’ least favorites were Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener” and Mark Twain’s “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County.” Students complained about the slow pacing of “Bartleby’s” plot and the dialect in “Jumping Frog.” We asked, “Should we make the content of this course more engaging by incorporating stories that all went at a quick pace and used language similar to the current Midwestern dialect students are accustomed to?” The correct answer was debatable. In the end the decision was made to keep these selections, because we wanted to push students out of their comfort zones. Learning is not always easy. Besides, it was important to reflect America’s historical and literary diversity.

Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading was the lens for course design along with the TfU framework. Both seemed to work well in the BL format. Constantly, we pushed the idea of multiple literary interpretations throughout the course. Eventually, the learners understood. Around the third story, they started pondering and defending various interpretive possibilities that counted as evidence for literary thinking and knowing. They also began seeing the relationship between themselves and the short stories. They discovered that what they brought to analyzing literature is comparable to Pulitzer Prize winning author Annie Dillard's metaphor. She wrote, "The mind fits the

world and shapes it as a river fits and shapes its own banks" (2009, p. 15). The transactional theory of reading, as discussed in Chapter 2, proposes that the relationship between reader and text is similar to that between the river and its banks, each working its effects upon the other, each contributing to the shape of the story to a river and its banks. The epistemology here returns the responsibility for learning to the student. Furthermore, the transactional theory of reading heightened what we have found throughout our years of experience. We know that how one understands a work of literature is not something to be found nor is it something we can give to a student. Rather, it is something created by the individual through exchanges with texts and other readers.

This concept was new to several students in this study. When the Introduction to Literature course began, many of them wanted the co-teachers to tell them their interpretation to whatever short story was being read, and then they would regurgitate this information back to us. Several reported this was the common method used in their high schools. Perhaps this was a casualty from standardized testing. Teaching to the tests may have lead their instructors to treat the study of literature as a discipline with factual right answers rather than with possibilities to ponder and interpretations to develop, question, and defend. Some literature teachers may have viewed their content that way even if it was not actually tested that way. For example, No Child Left Behind did not require testing on literature. For whatever reason, as a result of this mindset, students first had a difficult time trusting us that we would accept the interpretations they created. It took, on average, three assignments before students believed we would really honor their meaning

of a text. But we were patient. We had to take our time building student trust before they felt comfortable and capable of coming up with literary analyses and believing in multiple interpretations. Accomplishing this meant we had to be very lenient grading the first two assignments. Often, during those first weeks of the course, students expressed how they never thought of themselves as literary critics. They based this perception on their high school history that their opinions in analyzing literature did not matter.

Moreover, we realized that the content in the Introduction to Literature course had to not only deal with the literature on the syllabus but our behavior, too. We needed to act as coaches and cheerleaders. Continuously, we reminded students that reading involved combining the worlds of the text, author, and reader. Building up students' confidence to think of themselves as literary critics was crucial. We often shared with them that literary critics do not agree on a single interpretation of a literary work. If there was only a single interpretation, then each important writer studied in college literature courses would only have a single title of literary criticism to his/her name. Obviously, this is not true. Anyone can go to a college library to prove this idea wrong.

As each assignment was graded, gentle questions were posed to help learners push a little deeper their thinking for the next assignment. This method, too, took into consideration the strategy of taking students where they were in terms of their reading, writing, and analytical skills. This was important since the students in this study began the course with various skills and abilities.

In other words, analyzing literature is a process. It required baby steps. To guide students toward discovering literature on their own, the steps of literary analysis were



simply introduced through repeated practice with the critique sheets which broke down the elements of literature. This proved a useful method, because all stories contain literary elements. When the learners were able to identify the elements of literature, the stories often became appreciated at a higher level, leading to a deeper examination of the text, and improving their analytical thinking. Furthermore, once students understood any given element, as Vari (2006) claimed, they could recall their understanding during any new reading. Many of the students even took Vari's claim a bit farther. They stated that not only would they use this approach with other literary works, but would apply it to movies, television programs, etc. A few of the students declared that this is a method they are going to pass on to their children to help them better understand literature. Key for the blended Introduction of Literature course was to continuously follow these strategies for both the online and face-to-face portions.

This is not to say that the transactional theory was tension free. For example, my co-teacher and I wanted to include short stories that have literary merit. But what is literary merit? Basically, this means a high quality of writing attributed to this literary format. Yet critics usually admit that literary merit is necessarily subjective, because aesthetic value is commonly determined by personal taste, and has been derided as a "relic of a scholarly elite" (Thaler, 2008, p. 68). However, in spite of such criticisms, some criteria have been suggested to determine literary merit such as standing the test of time, realistic characters, emotional complexity, originality, and concern with truth (pp. 69-70). In 1957, at the obscenity trial for "Howl" author Walter van Tilburg Clark was prodded into defining literary merit. His definition outlines some of the popular criteria:

The only final test, it seems to me, of literary merit, is the power to endure. Obviously, such a test cannot be applied to a new or recent work, and one cannot, I think, offer soundly an opinion on the probability of endurance save on a much wider acquaintance with the work or works of a writer than I have of Mr. Ginsberg's or perhaps even with a greater mass of production than Mr. Ginsberg's.... Aside from this test of durability, I think the test of literary merit must be, to my mind, first, the sincerity of the writer. I would be willing, I think, even to add the seriousness of purpose of the writer, if we do not by that leave out the fact that a writer can have a fundamental serious purpose and make a humorous approach to it. I would add also there are certain specific ways in which craftsmanship at least of a piece of work, if not in any sense the art, which to my mind involves more, may be tested. (People of the State of California, 1957)

So, take one of these characteristics, originality. Originality is often associated with artistry. This is a concept that is often not valued by the general reading public who just want to be entertained. They may not care that an author has taken some successful literary formula and advanced it in an innovative way. Other characteristics are emotional complexity and concern with the truth. Many of the short stories read in the Introduction to Literature course reflect the deep American affection for liberation. We, as a culture, have a fondness for stories in which tenacious underdogs face seemingly insurmountable obstacles. So, if the transactional theory of reading suggests a "reciprocal, mutually defining relationship" (Rosenblatt, 1986) between the reader and the literary text, the question then becomes: if we are selecting stories for literary merit are we merely reinforcing our views of literary merit? Are we designing this class as a reflection of who we are both as Americans living in 2017 and our personal experiences with literature? My conclusion is, that in designing and teaching a literature course it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to completely avoid our views of literary merit, our reflections of Americans living in 2017, and our personal experiences with literature.

As far as problems students encountered with the content of the course, other than technology, most of the other difficulties students faced were due to some having inadequate study skills, especially with listening and time management. These will be discussed in greater detail in the Learning Support subsection of this chapter. Again, it needs to be stressed that these students were in the minority.

In conclusion, using the literary elements as an aid to help students interpret literature, transformed them into literary critics. Like the critics, the students could define what a text meant and come up with interpretations that are debatable, complex, and insightful, but yet could be supported by textual evidence. They discovered that stories can have multiple interpretations. Students had moved from the lower levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Learning Domains (remember and understand) at the beginning of the semester, to higher levels (apply and analyze) at mid-term, to the highest levels (evaluate and create) with the completion of the final project at the end of the semester. An "aha moment" came from one of the students who said: "I feel like Shrek. Shrek believed in the onion concept and this can be applied to reading short stories." He discovered while reading the short stories that one layer of meaning is on the surface. This is the outermost, obvious meaning of the story that anyone who reads it will probably see and agree with. To get at deeper, and perhaps the more interesting meanings, the story needs to be peeled away. The other layer or layers beneath convey thoughts not fully articulated in the text, something a first-time reader will likely miss because it lies at the heart of the onion, not on its skin.

### The Technology

One of the CABLS subsystems is technology. Working with the technology reinforced the conclusions found in the literature review: the critical role technology plays in successfully implementing a BL course, and the need to constantly replace the older technology with newer technology. Within these conclusions, I found three technology sub themes: (a) my experiences with technology, (b) the need for technology support, and (c) the amount of time required. My insights emphasized the different identities the BL teacher has.

### My Experiences with Technology

I was surprised at how well I adapted to the technology when designing, implementing, and teaching the blended Introduction to Literature course. Before my blended teaching experience, I had viewed myself as open to change as long as the goal was to help students gain a greater understanding of the course content, but yet very nervous about the technology. Reflections and notes documenting this shift indicated the anxiety caused by negative memories of past technological experiences in education. Reasons listed in my journal included the perceived loss of student and teacher engagement and stress from a punishing environment to learn new technology.

A primary concern I had about going online for half of the Introduction to Literature course dealt with instructor-student relationships and student learning engagement. I did not want to lose seeing my students face-to-face; having frequent and meaningful class discussions; and promoting critical thinking, analysis, and the joy of reading literature. I remembered, too, some horrible incidents of administrators forcing

technology down teachers' throats. Most of these teachers, given time, would have welcomed the new technology, but the pedagogy of teaching new concepts was never applied to them, causing a great loss of student and teacher engagement. For example, the administrators of a particular school district immediately removed all the chalk boards and overhead projectors in the schools when they installed Promethean Boards. The teachers were also expected to know everything about the technology from a short in-service. If any mistakes were made with the technology, the principal would berate the teacher and write him/her up. Allowing no room for mistakes and no transition period for learning was a far cry from a nurturing environment. A safe, supportive, and healthy climate conducive to learning is fundamental for all students. (Steinberg, Allensworth, & Johnson, 2011). The key words here are "for all students." It does not matter if the students are adults and teachers. Besides, some of the best learning comes from mistakes. In the experience I described, everyone lost. So much stress was on the teachers that it filtered down to the students. This did not aid learning. Furthermore, when all the district's computers went down, the schools were at a standstill. Without the chalkboards, overheads, attendance books, etc. no alternatives were available. Memories of this situation still make me sick.

Rather than having our teaching souls sucked out through humiliation in trying to learn the technology, this could have been a joyful learning experience. From those bad times, I promised myself that I would do whatever possible so my students would not feel the same grief. Therefore, I was determined to engage both the hearts and minds of the learners in this new BL course format. Luckily, my co-teacher had the same mindset. We

deliberately designed and implemented the blended Introduction to Literature course with the intent that every student could master the knowledge and skills to use technology to help them analyze literature. We let our love for literature, our passion for teaching, and our caring about students show. We would make connections with them. We created engagement through learner interaction by having our students interact directly with us, their peers, and content materials. We provided plenty of student-teacher interaction. Some of this was one-to-one, as in office hours or in personal email exchanges (see Appendix XX: Action Research-Sample Teacher Correspondence to Students) and evaluations. Some of this was one-to-many, as when we interacted with a group of students in the classroom and through discussions. Peer interactions happened informally as in the face-to-face discussions, and formally, as in students teaching each other literature through the final project. Student-content interaction happened not only with the short stories read from the textbook, but also through the access of digital content in the form of videos, animations, audio recordings, etc., all accessible on the open Web.

When I evaluated the last assignment of the blended Introduction to Literature course, I realized that the technology went more smoothly than I anticipated. Even though the last half of the course was online, I still felt a deep personal connection with my students. It was as if we had become family. I will miss them. Perhaps these feelings resulted from my co-teacher and I spending so much effort on frequent student-teacher contact in and out of class. We believed this was critical for student motivation and involvement: “Faculty concern helps students get through rough times and keep on working. Knowing a few faculty members well enhances students’ intellectual

commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and plans” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 3).

At the end of this teaching experience, it appeared that our efforts had paid off. Practically all of the students expressed joy in reading and interpreting the literature. They saw the technology as an integral piece to making this happen. One of the students remarked, “I know how to do more with technology, and it will be used to help engage and promote creativity and critical thinking in my future students.” It seemed that students’ high levels of engagement resulted from opportunities for interaction between the student and instructor and well-designed content. Because personal relationships can develop more quickly in a face-to-face setting as compared to an online one, it followed that we preceded online interactions with onsite ones. Thus, our BL course did establish personal connections and a sense of community that fostered deep critical thinking and learning.

#### Need for Technology Support

A common misconception today is that college students are technology savvy. When I started teaching this class, I was worried I was a technology dinosaur. Learning technology is like learning a new foreign language. I thought my students would have no problems. After all, they were constantly being referred to as digital natives; technology is their native tongue. Wrong! In spite of their constant texting, tweeting, and viewing YouTube videos, their technology skills fell short. They could use technology well socially but not academically. Some had never hyperlinked or created a PowerPoint. Some were not familiar with Google Docs. Several had weak research skills using the

Internet. I wondered if the constant use of digital technology hampered students' attention spans and their ability to persevere in the face of challenging tasks. The research of Purcell et al. (2012) agrees with my conjecture. Many of my students' attention spans seemed small. Also, they wanted to write assignments like they text- as short and abbreviated as possible. This is tough for literary interpretations, because students needed to provide detailed examples to support their interpretations. Although the students I surveyed enthusiastically reported how much they preferred preparing a PowerPoint presentation to a written essay about a literary work, I fought a constant battle over their wanting to spend all their time and effort on the presentation vs. researching the subject. I did not want them to complete projects knowing very little about their subjects. Perhaps this explained why the historical context/background to the literary works they selected was the most likely item to be ignored in their projects. Participation and enthusiasm did not equate to learning. Also, some were so used to electronic texts, they did not know how to browse, highlight, or take notes on a text's literary elements in a paper copy. These are skills that make literary analysis easier. Finally, I took it for granted that all students would have basics such as Word and PowerPoint on their personal computers. They did not. To make the class more successful we had to teach technology. This was not foreseen. Content was sacrificed in order to teach technology skills it was assumed all students had.

But in spite of these disadvantages, the technology probably helped. It opened students' awareness to a fascinating world that is far more attractive than the read-test-repeat pattern endorsed by The System. My students carried access to more information



in the palm of their hands than all of the world's greatest leaders previously had access to in a lifetime. Communication tools (such as smartphones) and social networking sites (such as Facebook and Twitter) are ubiquitous in our culture. Technology is advancing at such a rapid pace, that in an effort to endure, some educators, like us, had to teach general computer skills in addition to course content (Johnson & Heritage Foundation, 2000). Thus, a great demand for technology supports exists.

Not only is technology support needed for students, it is needed for teachers as well. As mentioned previously, my past experiences with technology created anxiety, and due to my personal learning preference, it was crucial that my learning support was nurturing, involved individual coaching, private skill practice, and on-line tutoring as opposed to group instruction. Near midpoint of the first semester teaching the blended Introduction to Literature, I realized how thankful I was to my co-teacher who acted as my primary technology coach. He understood the importance of not humiliating students, and I was definitely in the role of a student. He does not tolerate bullies, and my memories of implementing technology used bully tactics. He knew that I am one of those students who needs time to write down step-by-step instructions or receive a handout with them on it. I am also the type who needs to practice independently. I do not need to do it over and over in front of others. Being yelled at or scolded never worked for me. Perhaps if the pedagogy for teaching our students could be applied to teaching us new skills such as technology, more teachers would be less scared of it. I realize the issue is to lower costs, but a higher price will be paid in the long run.

Also, good around-the-clock technology support is critical for BL teaching. Early in the second semester after the tech people did several updates (an example of how technology is constantly changing) on the university's computers, my co-teacher and I could not log on to the classroom computer. Stress built as so many of our lessons were linked to the technology. Even though we could teach the lesson without technology, much of its impact would be lost without it. Since the university was interested in exploring BL and wanted this study to succeed, my co-teacher had the private phone numbers of a couple of the tech people on speed dial. He could reach out for 24-7 help. The technician he called stayed on the line until we resolved the problem.

Our class was the first one scheduled in the room. It started at 8:00 A.M. Good thing we showed up shortly after 7:00. This habit began because other instructors who shared the classroom did not always leave the technology in the shape they found it. On numerous occasions, we found cables missing or wrongly plugged, speakers missing, Elmo left on, etc. However, if our classes had started later in the day and we had not had the luxury to spend 45 minutes trying to iron out the technology problems, what would we have done? Most of the instructors were in this situation. All they had was five to ten minutes between classes. The instructors' expectations are to turn on the technology and it will work. By not having tech support 24-7 as a security blanket or the guarantee that the technology will work, it is easy to understand why some faculty have a fear of and do not like technology.

Furthermore, technology learning support is important not only at the institution, but for instructors when working on BL courses in other locations. I discovered this when

my personal laptop was held for ransom one evening. I was evaluating an assignment from my students in the Introduction to Literature course when a message came across my screen that my computer had been infected, and the only thing I could do was call the tech support at the provided phone number. The message looked official. It appeared as if Microsoft had sent it. Furthermore, an annoying siren was heard when the computer was on. I was in a panic. Lots of important information was on my laptop. I could not afford to lose it. Also, I was under a time constraint to finish grading the student work. It was past midnight on a weekend. I could not call anyone at the university for tech support. What was I to do? Stupidly, I called the number. Even though I was suspicious of the person on the other end, I felt helpless. The person wanted a credit card number to fix the problem. Luckily, I decided to call the university's tech support Monday morning. They told me it was a scam. Because I called the phone number of the scammers, the university security and tech people ended up taking my computer away for three days to check out the situation.

What this incident illustrates is that when technology works it is wonderful, but when it does not it can be devastating. Being so dependent on technology for a BL course can put people in desperate situations when it does not work. For example, I could have easily had unnecessary credit card charges from a group of scammers. What if something like this happened to the students? Going three days without their personal computers could have been devastating. They might not have been able to do their assignments. They might have missed important messages. Having tech support around the clock might prove helpful in such incidents.

Another concern involves the continuously changing nature of technology. This is good and bad. Updates can provide faster and better ways to use technology, but this makes it tough to keep up. Case in point: in spite of all the advertisement exclaiming how wonderful Windows 10 is, it took me some time to get used to it. Moreover, my computer's touch screen is very sensitive. One wrong move can spell trouble. I do not have to completely touch the screen to select items, tap links, and complete functions. Too often I have accidentally selected a function such as delete and erased an email or document. I cannot adjust the sensitivity setting. Sometimes the updates come at inconvenient, stressful times such as midterms or finals. I have to admit, too, that my new Smart Phone is smarter than me. Next week will have an even "better" version. Therefore, as soon as I (and maybe the students) get comfortable learning and working the technology, the process of new learning begins all over again with the latest innovations. The implication here involves the future. Since technology, vision, and theory are inevitably bound and will evolve together through time, other possibilities will arise with respect to the ideal technology for BL. Therefore, the question is: How do institutions of higher learning best handle this for BL? Whatever, the answer, supporting conditions from the institution need to consider the learners and involve the instructors.

#### Amount of Time Required

I invested lots of time into the technology part of the BL course. The actual time spent gathering the technical knowledge needed included the following.

- Professional development hours to use the new technology: 5 hours. Instructor training processes included a half-day training course supplied by the university and an hour with the co-teacher.
- Time spent practicing and implementing the new skills: 4 hours.
- Observation of co-teacher using technology for BL: 6 hours.
- Course design time specific to the BL technology: 65 hours.
- Approximate total time invested: 80 hours.

This is probably a conservative figure, because I also spent several unrecorded hours of my own time advancing my technology knowledge by digging through YouTube videos. Since gathering technical knowledge is an individual process, affected by one's existing knowledge and background, as well as by his/her perceptions (Shulte, 2010) the time a teacher needs to make technological transitions will probably vary by individual. This could be more or less than my time recorded here.

### The Learning Support

Learning supports were an important factor for the blended Introduction to Literature course. It was one of the pieces that helped students change from passive to active learners. But in spite of the success of the blended Introduction to Literature course, a few students struggled. In my survey, students reported experiencing basic academic challenges while taking the course included 27% time management, 5% other study skills, 83% reading, 58% writing, and 2% collaboration. (These percentages are the percentage of total students reporting rather than percentage of total challenges.) Then add to this technology challenges. This calls forth a need for some reflection, especially

when the teaching aim is to help every student to succeed. Reflections lead to insights about learning supports for both the students and the instructors. These supports involve academics and technology. Was there enough support? How could it be improved? Because teacher supports will be dealt with in the institution section, this action research subsection will focus on students who may benefit from academic and/or technical learning supports.

### Academic Supports

Students varied in their academic skills when beginning the blended Introduction to Literature course. Some of them were dependent learners not prepared for academics at the college level. They needed academic supports for study skills, reading, and writing to help them succeed not only in this blended course specifically, but in college generally. Perhaps this resulted from a lack of soft skills. Soft skills are critical. For example, a study from the Stanford Research Institute and Carnegie Mellon Foundation (2015) determined that for long-term career success, only 25% percent depends on technical knowledge while 75% of long-term career success depends on soft skills such as reading comprehension, critical thinking, active learning, written expression, time management, organization, active listening, attention to detail, learning strategies, and independence. The vast majority of the students taking the blended Introduction to Literature course were “first-years”. Those enrolled during the fall semester were experiencing what it was like to be away from home for the first time and establishing a new life at college. They were hit with the realization that college is more academically demanding than high school. Perhaps this is why the students in the spring semester were somewhat stronger

academically than the fall semester. They already had a semester of college “under their belts.”

To clarify this subsection about academic supports, it will be further divided into the three biggest areas the students and myself perceived as the greatest areas needing academic support to help learners in the blended Introduction to Literature course: (a) reading, (b) writing and (c) study skills.

Reading. The biggest academic struggle the students perceived themselves as having was reading. This was especially evident at the semester’s start. By semester’s end, most of the students reported being transformed from surface reader to close reader and/or non-literary person to literary connoisseur. Reading obstacles reported by the students included a dislike for some of the short stories, vocabulary, and comprehension. Students who expressed a dislike for some of the stories either did not consider themselves readers and/or preferred to read only one genre such as mysteries, action stories, recently published romances, etc. Those with vocabulary challenges were generally not used to reading multisyllabic, difficult-to-pronounce words, dialect, or texts written in the 1800s or early 1900s. Comprehension problems meant not being able to find meaning in the text. A commonality among the students who expressed reading challenges was their lack of confidence in themselves as readers. They were not close readers.

Close reading was mentioned in some detail earlier in the teacher subsystem section. Studying a text closely can be meaningful, rigorous, and joyful both in college and later on. It involves looking for complexity and insight in a story. It leaves literary

analysis open to multiple interpretations. One approach to literary critique suggests that reading is an interaction between a particular reader and how that reader sees a text (Rosenblatt, 1994). In order to help students get even more meaning out of the text, we also examined author biographies and historical periods. Such an approach involved reading closely and centered upon the reader connecting deeply, passionately, and intellectually with the text in order to create meaning. This approach is promoted in English education and backed up by the NCTE (1998-2015).

However, this was a new experience for over 95% of the students. The first few weeks were devoted to retraining students how to look at literature and helping them to learn to trust that they could interpret literature. Furthermore, some students did not seem to have much interest in, exposure to, or understanding of a diversity of texts. They started the course desiring to read literature that followed what they knew, and thus, had constructed rules about what they liked. The problem was that this was a really restrictive reading palette. They wanted to read for easy pleasure rather than having a diversity of reading experiences that might result in a richer reading life. As literature teachers, my co-teacher and I worked hard to expand our students' reading horizons. They had trouble relating to historical events and cultures outside of their own experiences. For example, "The Lesson" by Toni Bade Bambara was difficult for them. They had a tough time relating to the story's social commentary about social injustice and economic inequality. The setting, Harlem 1960s, was as out of place for them as Sylvia, the story's main character, was at the F.A.O. Schwarz store with its \$480 paperweight and \$1,195 toy sailboat. The story seemed particularly foreign to students because of its use of the



Harlem dialect. Being basically young middle-class Midwestern white students in 2015-16, historical landmarks such as the Civil Rights movement had no meaning. The same was true for other literary techniques. Students began the semester with a fondness for stories that had plot structures containing no flashbacks and resolving with happy endings. Furthermore, students wanted us to give them our interpretation of a story which they then would then “spit” that interpretation back to us.

Additionally, two students wanted vocabulary lists of all the difficult words and their definitions. This task was not feasible for two reasons. One, students varied in their vocabulary knowledge, so what might be a good list for one student would not work for another. Two, we wanted the students to become active independent learners rather than passive dependent learners. They needed to get used to looking up their own definitions to new words; someone was not going to do this for them the rest of their lives.

To support all of this, it was critical to meet face-to-face with students the first half of the semester. We needed to build connections with our students. We had to earn their trust. This involved grading very leniently the first two or three assignments so that we could prove we did honor multiple literary interpretations. It also meant being a cheerleader in that we needed to lavish praise and encouragement for students becoming independent learners who can think critically and come up with their own plausible literary interpretations. Moreover, since we believed that all our students could be insightful, academic thinkers, we had to do much work in demystifying, breaking down, applying, and making the elements of literature engaging to help the students better comprehend literary works. This had to be accomplished in order to not only improve

student reading, but to make their learning more active and independent. By the end of the course, the students were able to take on the role of teacher by teaching their own literary lesson to a peer online. So, even though the students still varied in their reading skills, they had all improved and saw themselves as having new identities such as knowledge repeater to critical thinker, dependent learner to independent learner, surface reader to close reader, non-literary person to literary connoisseur, and student to teacher. Thus, my action research journal entries corroborate the student surveys discussed in Chapter 4.

Writing. Writing was the second biggest challenge students perceived themselves as having in the blended Introduction to Literature course. Writing is important because it is entangled with reading, thinking, talking, and collaborative peer work. The co-teachers had mixed feelings about how to incorporate writing into the course. Since the course focused on analyzing literary texts and we could cover only so much material in a semester, the decision was made to utilize writing through the critique sheets and the final project PowerPoints. Throughout the semester, we encouraged and prodded students to be more specific with details and examples from the text to support their arguments in how they interpreted a particular story. The mantra became: “Anyone who has not read the story should be able to pick up the critique sheet and have a very good idea what the story was about.” In addition, students eventually improved and became more aware of their writing skills by being exposed to some of the best examples of writing by American authors. Lastly, we did not want to discourage the joy of reading by having students write the traditional ten page-plus-paper. Thus, we went with the final project

where students created, with the help of PowerPoint, their own literary lesson over a story of their own choosing. Not only did we model such lessons for the students throughout the semester, we also created a PowerPoint (see Action Research-Appendix CCC: Hints for Final Project PowerPoint) explaining the process. As can be seen with the collected data from the student surveys presented in Chapter 4 and the student work presented in Chapter 5, the final project was a positive choice in students' minds. Nevertheless, we are still open to ways to incorporate more writing into this course. Hopefully, writing skills will be picked up in their other college courses.

If we could do this experience over again, we would encourage more in-class collaboration. Some think-pair-share was incorporated in the face-to-face sessions when dealing with some challenging or open discussion questions. This seemed to help students who were shy or not yet confident in their literary interpretations. It also opened them up to multiple literary interpretations. Collaboration was part of the final project, too. Each student had to teach a short story to his/her partner and vice versa. This involved evaluating each other's literary analysis. Collaborations built community and provided academic learning support by having another student to bounce ideas off and get a different perspective. Perhaps each student having, from Day One of class, a course buddy to ask questions of, encourage them, share literary interpretations with, and perhaps become friends with, would enhance the course even more.

Study skills. The third biggest area of academic support the learners in the blended Introduction to Literature course needed was study skills.

Actor/author/commentator Michael Knowles once stated: "Most of us only know how to

be taught, we haven't learned how to learn." Having good study skills is crucial to being a successful college student. An important study skill is time management.

Effective time management is crucial to sanity, success, and enjoyment in college. This became a big issue for some students when they switched from the face-to-face to the online portion of the course. Some felt as if there were not enough hours in the day to get everything done, and done correctly. And they were right. There are never enough hours in the day to get everything done, if they have not learned to study efficiently. Also, for some it was tough to plan weekly instead of weakly. For example, during the fall semester, several students used the "get-out-of -jail-free card" for the first online assignment. I was not sure if this was a fluke because it was Homecoming week or if students were ill prepared to manage time as independent learners. This was worrisome for my co-teacher and myself, because we were not sure what the rest of the semester would be like. The students had already used up their one free chance. Second semester was a bit better. Even though the percentage of students using the "get-out-of -jail-free card" was about the same as in the fall semester, students managed to spread the use of it throughout the semester. If this course had not been involved in a study which required me to keep the variables the same, I could have experimented with not using the "get-out-of -jail-free card" the second semester. It would have been interesting to see if students managed their time better without the "card."

Not only were some students struggling with time management, but with other study skills as well. Many of these struggling freshmen erroneously believed that academics could be handled by either "skating by" or studying a lot. Somewhere they

missed that the key is to study “smart”, not too little or too much. Some did not realize that in college, time is a rare commodity, course work is lengthy, competition is intense, and the level of expectation is higher than it was in high school. I remembered my mother’s advice to prepare me for college: “You have to be an independent learner now. Remember that for every hour spent in class, you will need to spend at least an additional two hours outside of class to complete reading assignments, writing papers, research, or group work.” My mother was a teacher. She knew about college. Perhaps no one was in these students’ lives to prepare them for the demands of college.

Three of the biggest study skills problems we ran into other than time management were listening, following directions, and settling for minimum standards. Over 80% of the emails dealing with student problems with assignments resulted from students not listening and following directions. The biggest example of this was telling students several times verbally and in writing to send their work as a Word document through their university account. In spite of this, a small percentage did not do this. Hard as we tried to give a rationale, a few students tuned out. Other instances occurred with not understanding why Blackboard was not used as the e-learning system or why, due to copyright laws, stories not in the public domain could not be posted on Google Docs. Additionally, during the last semester, three students did not purchase the textbook. Instead they found pirated versions of the story, many inferior in quality, posted on the Internet. Lastly, a few students wanted maximum points for work not meeting minimum standards. Too often these students took shortcuts by not proofreading, revising, or editing their work. Also, some, even when given the chance, did not go “the extra mile.”

Lots of times we advised students to earn extra credit as grade insurance or find ways to make assignments special, since not doing so sent out negative character messages such as “this student is lazy” or “lacks a good work ethic.”

Surprisingly, I noticed the underprepared college students came from families across all income levels, not just the lower ones. To check if this was true for colleges in general, I read a report by Barry and Dannenberg (2016) titled *Out of Pocket: The High Cost of Inadequate High Schools and High School Student Achievement on College Affordability*. It stated that one in four students entering college after high school needed remediation and, of those students, 45% came from families making at least \$48,000 a year. In addition, underprepared students from families in the top income quintile who attended private, nonprofit four-year colleges spent on average more than \$12,000 to study content they should have learned in high school.

Being fully aware of the importance of study skills and having taught study skills courses myself to at risk students, I felt the tension of how much class time should be devoted to study skills. The problem being: should content suffer to teach the study skills students should have mastered before entering college?

### Technology Supports

Not only did some of the students need academic learning supports, they needed technology supports, too. When starting this class, I believed my students would be light years ahead of me with technology skills. I was not nervous about the course content, but working with the technology. Technology to me was similar to learning a foreign language, but to my students, it would be their native tongue. I soon discovered I was

wrong. As stated earlier, in spite of the students' constant texting on their cell phones and watching YouTube videos, some of them had troubles using technology for academic purposes. Using technology for personal social reasons did not carry over to using the technology for school. More about this subject was covered in the technology subsystem section. So as to avoid unnecessary repetition, I will next consider another topic that needs technology learning support: the digital divide.

The digital divide is defined here as the gap between those students who do not have access to computers and the Internet and those who do (van Dijk, 2006). College students who fit into category without access tend to be older, from low income families, reside in rural areas, or be African-American or Latino/Hispanic American (Pernin & Duggan, 2015). Students who fit two or more of these categories tend to have an even larger gap (2015). The lack of money, computer anxiety, and technophobia are factors that may influence access to the BL technology (Rockwell & Singleton, 2002). For victims of the digital divide, most of their Internet usage, apart from emailing, is passive (Lenhart et al., 2003).

In the blended Introduction to Literature course, two students suffering from the digital divide stood out. Both students were several years older than their peers and had families of their own. One was a minority from a low socio-economic background. She did not own a computer. Both had very little in the way of technology skills. Returning to school later in life, these two adult learners soon realized technology was heavily embedded in the learning environment. Learning both course content and technology in unison was daunting. Feeling intimidated by technology, they felt anxiety. Since our

online assignments used fillable forms, students saw no need to handwrite assignments and scan them into pdfs. Thus, turning assignments in online made handwritten homework outdated. Such uses of technology lead to a decrease in face-to-face interaction with faculty and peers, which puts many adult learners in an unfamiliar learning environment (Czaja, 1998; Robinson & Birren, 1984; Stems & Patchett, 1984). Additionally, both students stated they “spent more time figuring out the course management system” than learning course content. They experienced stress learning an unfamiliar medium. Many, many hours were spent by us as well as by the instructional technology people trying to teach both of them basic computer skills. However, they did not feel as comfortable with the tech people since they were usually undergraduate students younger than their own children.

One of the most frustrating things about this situation was when my co-teacher was not allowed to give a student, who did not own a computer, his old laptop. He was told that if an accident occurred, such as the computer starting on fire at her residence, the university could be held responsible. This made me sad. Furthermore, many of the digital divide students, for whatever reason, are not able to tap into a student loan which would enable them to buy a new home computer for a reasonable price. I felt that if the institution partnered with instructors to uncover ways not only to dispel their computer anxiety, but also better help students attain computers, software, and greater computer self-efficacy, these students would have been more supported in a BL setting.

Finally, the challenges of leaving home after graduating from high school may require academic and technology learning supports to help students adjust to college life.



For many of our students, they left all that was familiar to them: home, family, friends, etc. They were experiencing mixed feelings. They were nervous, yet thrilled by the prospect of their new-found independence. They needed to understand that asking for help from appropriate sources does not mean that they are no longer independent, and it does not mean failure. From my perspective, too, many of my students hesitated or delayed too long in asking for help. This may have been due to various reasons. Some may have felt the need to prove themselves – either to themselves or to family and friends. Some may have felt that needing help admits failure. Some did not recognize that they needed help. Some did not know how to go about asking for the help they needed. Still others may not have been aware of all of the support available on campus. Therefore, we decided to frequently mention campus resources such as the writing center, the instructional technology center, the library reference desk, and ourselves. It was also explained how these resources could help. For example, the instructional technology center could install, at no cost, Word and PowerPoint on student computers, and teach how to use them. However, students did not seem to take full advantage of the supports.

#### The Institution

I gained several insights about the institution subsystem. Even though the role the institution played in implementing and supporting the blended Introduction to Literature course was not recognized by the students, it was certainly recognized by the instructors. Part of our success was due to the institution. The university's English department had experienced problems working with students with busy schedules due to demands from

their jobs and extra-curricular duties. So, the department and the university encouraged staff to try BL since it appears to be “the wave of the future.” I felt lucky to have the freedom to design, implement, and study a blended Introduction to Literature general education course for undergraduates. Having this freedom increased my passion for both literature and teaching. The creative juices flowed and, hopefully, were passed on to the students. Moreover, the control allowed us flexibility after the pilot to adjust the course design to better serve our students. Each course section had its own personality and needs, making it important that those closest to the learners, the instructors, were able to adjust to fit what each section required for understanding the subject being taught. As the university moves forward with BL, it will need to think carefully about its policies, resources, and strategies. These played a huge role in determining the success of this BL course, and will be discussed individually below.

### Policies

The first of these major institutional categories is policies. Most traditional institutions of higher learning offer some form/s of technology-mediated education to selected populations of students. Typically, these are based on individual faculty interest, as it was in our case. The university where I co-taught the blended Introduction to Literature course is interested in BL and the design, implementation, and study of this course was thereby encouraged. Since this study marks the beginning of BL for this particular institution, policies have not yet been explored to a great extent. Thus, being the institution’s pioneers, my co-teacher and I had the luxury to manage ourselves without administrative policy.

Due to the success in implementing the blended Introduction to Literature course and being conscious that BL is likely to become more popular in the future, I can see a need to employ a formal approach to the development of policies and operations needed to support BL courses. My university, as well as many others, will have to make decisions such as why and how BL is to be used, at what level decisions regarding blended delivery should be made, and if BL should be implemented for individual courses or entire programs, etc. Specific areas of BL policy will need to include items such as course and program approval, resources, and instructor responsibilities and workload. Also, the work involved in policy updating connected with changing learning environments is important because it brings to the surface, and opens for review, existing, often taken-for-granted institutional values, norms, and protocols. More about BL policy will be discussed in the final chapter.

### Resources

Another major institutional concern for BL is resources. Resources required to implement and sustain effective BL courses can be categorized as financial, human, and technical.

Financial resources. Although no financial resources were given to design and implement the blended Introduction to Literature course, financial resources were necessary to initiate and support BL on a larger scale. Financial resources helped to provide support for both students and instructors. As mentioned earlier under the learning support sub-section, money was used to help pay for a dedicated student service support center to help students with technology access, which included not only access to

computers with the necessary software and Internet connections, but also support to help with the skills necessary to succeed in a BL environment. Perhaps most traditional universities currently have adequate support services for their students' technology, but more could be done for the instructors. Please refer back to the technology and learning support subsections of this chapter for more information.

Having "seed money" as Heterick and Twigg (2003) recommend is nice, but funding needs to come from somewhere to make BL effective and efficient long term. Implementing BL courses on a larger scale requires sustained incentives to purchase computers and release time to train, design, and develop BL. I spent countless hours designing, implementing, and evaluating the blended Introduction Literature. Throughout the process, I often wondered: How does someone who is teaching a full load accomplish this without letting something suffer? Furthermore, administrators must consider associated costs. These costs might include course redesign time, release time from some courses during pilot semester, time/travel to see instructors modeling BL, and training for instructors to develop BL courses or paying for possible course redesigners such as instructional designers, instructional technologists, and information technology. Other costs involve facilities. This may include costs associated with buildings--remodeling and furniture for administrative and instructional purposes--as well as for housing needed equipment. And how about costs associated with materials and supplies? This would include items such as online curricula or learning management systems, textbooks, and other physical goods or processes such as costs associated with printing and copying. Also, there would be infrastructure costs for computer labs, wi-fi, software, hardware,

help desk, and developing or purchasing online resources, as well as maintenance to keep the infrastructure in working order. Granted, although the infrastructure costs involved in this study were taken care of by my university, the finances would still need to be revved up on a larger scale if the institution decides to expand BL on campus.

Much of the literature claims BL can decrease costs to students, instructors, and institutions. For example, research by the Center for Academic Transformation and the Pew Foundation supports the possibilities of improving quality while reducing costs (Twigg, 2004). They report that students and instructors can benefit from transportation savings, less travel time, and fewer parking expenses. From an institutional perspective, I saw how the use of physical campus resources can be reduced. The blended Introduction to Literature course did cut the onsite time in half, which may provide significant resource savings to institutions challenged with maximizing physical classroom space. Moreover, if my class, that followed a Tuesday/Thursday schedule, met online on Thursdays, it would open up that day and time for another blended course, essentially doubling the classroom's scheduling capacity.

On the other hand, in these troubling economic times, it is worrisome how institutions of higher learning may decide to "cut corners." One way is by redesigning the courses to use technology and teaching assistants in place of the more highly paid faculty for some portion of the course's contact hours. This can be perplexing for two reasons. One is the reduction of the human factor. More technology could lead to the homogenization of the content taught in introductory classes such as this, which could eventually lead to further undermining the diversity of thinking in such classes and the

quality of intellectual life. This was done decades ago using computerized learning. And today we have MOOCs. More technology could, too, limit the human support and nurturing needed by young undergraduates as they typically break away to a whole new world, away from their family, town, friends-everything that was familiar to them. These were all qualities, as expressed in surveys and interviews that my students appreciated. The other perplexing reason is sometimes when people pay the high costs of tuition, they want to get their money's worth by having their classes taught by faculty who have received their terminal degree. Often, teaching assistants are perceived by undergraduates as more uncertain, hesitant, and nervous than the higher paid faculty who have earned their doctorate degrees (Kendall & Schussler, 2013).

While the number of students registered for a class could be greatly increased, this might sacrifice quality. From my point of view, the course seemed more ideal when the number of students enrolled were in the 18-20 range. This was desirable for a number of reasons. First, we met face-to-face in a physical space that was very cramped. This did not allow for group work, for instructors to move within the classroom, etc. Second, the sections with the larger class size reduced the amount of time the students could actively engage with each other during the face-to-face portion. Third, the larger sections had more side conversations when we met face-to-face, which was disruptive to learning. Fourth, the larger sections reduced the amount of time given to each student to actively engage in discussion during the onsite part. Fifth, even though it did not happen to us, larger sections can reduce the amount of material the instructor can cover for both the online and face-to-face portions. Sixth, the larger sections reduced the amount of time I

had to work with each individual student for both the online and face-to-face portions, making it more difficult for me to know and bond with them. Seventh the larger sections, made the type of assessments I needed, those that are open-ended and involve writing, difficult to do. Teaching online and face-to-face with more than 20 students enrolled in the course is painful if there is much open-ended work. Eighth, the larger sections reduced opportunities for the social and affective experiences which often happen in face-to-face learning that are important for developing life-long intellectual interests and learning habits (Bauman, 1997).

In summary, BL can be more or less cost effective than traditional classroom-based education. Costs can vary greatly depending on the implementation model, the number of students served, and the size of the investment in software development or subscription fees. But in order to make BL truly successful, saving money should not be obtained at the learners' expense.

Human resources. Another institutional resource concern for BL is human. Providing support for both students and instructors is essential to the development and delivery of BL courses. Working with those who have the technological, instructional design, and curriculum development skills is an important piece in supporting faculty new to BL. As stated earlier in this chapter, this needs to be done in a nurturing fashion. After all, the instructors are now students, because they are learning something new. They deserve the same respect as students. Mistakes could be learning experiences. Too often I have encountered administrators who forgot this. All teachers make mistakes, every class period every day. The point is to recognize the mistakes and work to correct

them so they do not become larger problems. I know that I did not learn from success. I rather have learned vicariously from other people's failures, but it gets much more firmly seared in when the mistakes are my own. Mistakes have made me a stronger teacher. Following are a few examples. I thought it easier to lecture to a sea of faces than to get through to thirty individuals. I thought it seemed simpler to make students volunteer the answer than to spark voluntary interest. I thought it less work to assess student work a few times throughout the course than to do this throughout the semester. But in the long run, it was not. I found out that those "shortcuts" led to shallow learning outcomes and more work on my plate for the future. Furthermore, learning new concepts takes time.

Technical concerns. The final institutional resource concern for BL is technical. Technical resources that are dependable and transparent are required to ensure that the technology can enhance the learning process rather than obstruct it. Another issue is academic freedom. One of the reasons I entered my profession is because I like the process of teaching and creating my "own course." I am not a big fan of mandated curriculum. Furthermore, most commercial online learning and instructional resources are so finished that I dislike using them since I cannot make them my own or adjust them to the needs of my students, or these products so open-ended I end up feeling I will have to put in too much time, effort, and work into setting it up for my students. Lastly, I need good course management tools in place that have the capability of meeting learning needs, are up-to-date, reliable, and simple to use.

Strategies. Not only does the institution need to focus on policies and resources for BL, but it must consider strategies. "Strategies" here is being used as a synonym for



planning. Two essential levels of planning are required to develop and sustain BL: strategic and operational. Strategic planning deals with the identification of needs, goals, and objectives; potential costs; and available resources. Operational plans realize the goals and objectives by creating an action plan. With respect to BL, operational planning involves attending to the non-instructional components such as promotional and advertising strategies, creating relationships for shared resources (for example, registration or fees), managing technology, and creating an effective assessment process. These are future steps this university will need to take if they want to expand BL.

#### Summary

Before institutions of higher learning can better understand how to best use strategies, they need to explore the CABLS framework. Since this is such a new concept, they will need to be educated on this. Currently, BL is not being looked at as a complex adaptive system with six essential subsystems--the learner, the teacher, the content, the technology, learning support, and the institution--that relate to and interact upon one another. Successful BL needs all these subsystems.

The use of reflective journaling and the weekly discussions with my co-teacher provided useful instructional BL insights. My stress levels decreased as student engagement increased. Also, I discovered the process of writing and reflection proved useful in adapting the Introduction to Literature content to a blended format.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This mixed methods study examined how one Midwestern university used the BL format within an undergraduate Introduction to Literature course. The study is based on student and teacher perceptions and student achievement. The study agrees with the literature (Amaral & Shank, 2010; Dziuban, Hartman & Moskal, 2005; López-Pérez, Pérez-López, & Rodríguez-Ariza, 2011; Vaughan, 2010) in finding a connection between the use of BL and improved learning outcomes. However, Wang et al. (2015) study using a complex adaptive system framework (CABLS) took my thoughts about BL in new directions. I now regard BL as consisting of six essential subsystems, and all the subsystems relate to and interact with one another. This is significant. The literature I had read up to this point used linear, fragmented (focusing on just one or a few aspects) descriptions of BL. These studies had not taken a holistic view of BL nor saw its complex nature. For these reasons, the CABLS perspective was invaluable in helping to explain and interpret the data I collected in my study. Lastly, it will guide my BL teaching practice in the future.

This chapter contains a discussion of the study's results. It is divided into discussion themes: (a) BL is a complex adaptive system; (b) BL may help learners gain new identities; (c) BL may give a more accurate assessment of learners; (d) BL may not be for everyone; (e) BL requires multiple teacher identities to be effective; (f) BL, in spite

of all its advantages has challenges; (g) BL requires plenty of supports; and (h) BL may not be cost saving.

As explained in Chapter 3, themes emerged from multiple readings of the data. Cutting and sorting was part of the process. I identified all text passages from the collected data that related to a major theme, cut them out, and sorted them into sub-thematic categories. Even though some qualitative researchers believe in theoretical saturation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I do not. Instead, the best that can be achieved in this study is a fallible model that extends understanding and insight about BL, but will never saturate this topic. My study awaits the next investigation, where this research will be tested, refined, and judged once more.

Implications and/or recommendations are included within each of the discussion themes. The chapter concludes with limitations, future studies, and concluding remarks. Following is the first theme.

#### Blended Learning Is a Complex Adaptive System

For more than fifteen years the term BL has been used in tertiary education. BL is being used more often in higher education (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Graham, 2006; Murphy et al., 2014; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Shea, 2007). The literature further suggests that BL is not only an acceptable pedagogical approach, but it also has the potential to transform higher education (Bransford et al., 2006; Garrison & Kanuka, 2004). BL has been identified among the top trends to emerge in the knowledge delivery industry (Rooney, 2003; Young, 2002). The premise of such an approach is that it brings together the best of two types of instruction:

online and face-to-face (Graham, 2006; King & Arnold, 2012). This study concurs with these findings.

However, the literature shows that most of the BL empirical studies focus on just one or two of its aspects (Wang et al., 2015). What these studies missed was viewing BL as a complex adaptive system. It has been noted that, “Unlike analytic science, complexity science is defined more in terms of its objects of study than its modes of investigation” (Davis, 2004, p. 150). Not surprisingly, these “objects of study” are identified as complex and have traits and behaviors that in some ways exceed the aggregate of the components. This concept represents the Aristotelian adage from his *Metaphysics* that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” In other words, we cannot possibly understand the whole by merely understanding its components. Such a perspective entails viewing BL holistically. Since the earlier BL studies from the literature were not holistic, many critical issues remain unexplored (Wang et al., 2015). Owston (2013, p.1) highlights this point: “There is a need for research investigating why BL, despite its many inherent advantages, has not been scaled up successfully in very many institutions” (p. 1).

So, as promising as BL may seem, it requires more than simply a combination of face-to-face instruction and computer-mediated instruction. I have found, through my experience as described in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, it is important to recognize BL’s complexity. The following passage illustrates my point:

Occam’s razor states that simpler explanations are to be preferred over more complex ones, so long as they account for the data. But the razor is in fact a double-edged sword, since in practice there may be a ‘conspiracy’ effect between the explanation and the data. The ‘simplest explanation that accounts for the data’

is applied to data that have been extracted from complex processes because of prior assumptions about their (the data's) significance. Thus, the data encourages the "simplest explanation" and "prior assumptions" to become identical. As a result, research runs the danger of becoming locked into a reductionism from which it may be hard to break away (van Lier, 2000, p. 248).

In other words, van Lier is presenting a challenge to "build in" complexity rather than reduce it. Such a lens has given me a complete view of what makes BL and how its different components work together over time to create an integrated whole. The union between technology-mediated instruction with campus-based instruction has resulted in a process more complex than ever before. As Wang et al. (2015) had stated: "It has been difficult to see the whole picture of BL because each element, in isolation, only offers part of its landscape without interconnection" (p. 381). Furthermore, such complexity may account for the variances in why BL has or has not been scaled up successfully in institutions of higher learning.

The results of this study agree with Wang et al.'s (2015) conclusions about BL's complexity. The complexity lies not only in the materialization of new elements of learning and teaching, but, also, in the changes brought about given the interaction among these new elements. For example, Lim (2002) notes that technology "may trigger changes in the activities, curriculum, and interpersonal relationships in the learning environment, and is reciprocally affected by the very changes it causes" (p. 412). Thus, a complex systems approach is required to accurately address such complexity and its reciprocal changes. Doing so leads to a better understanding of BL. By its very nature, BL is dynamic and open, and has the innate ability to self-organize, adapt to, and evolve with its environment.

By viewing BL in such a way, the possibilities for institutions of higher learning to comprehend and do BL well may be increased. This requires a paradigm jump in thinking of BL not as a linear model, but rather as a circular one. Just as in face-to-face instruction, the learner remains the center or focus of the BL course. BL can be broken into a series of subsystems consisting of the student, the teacher, the technology, the content, the learning support, and the institution (Wang et al., 2015). Each subsystem is critical. When any of these subsystems are missing, BL may fall apart or may not be as effective as it could be potentially. In fact, each of these subsystems were so dependent on each other in the blended Introduction to Literature course that it was very difficult for me to separate them from each other when examining the data for this study.

For the vast majority of the students and both co-teachers, the BL approach used for the Introduction to Literature course in this study was positive. This was due largely to each of the CABLS subsystems playing a vital role in the course's development and implementation. Both my co-teacher and I had to go beyond the generally held perspective that BL is a simple combination or mishmash of face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated learning. Rather, we needed to think of BL as a complex system that seamlessly fuses the face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated instruction. Doing otherwise would have been a grave injustice for two reasons.

One, BL needs to be adaptive. Both my co-teacher and I as well as our students needed to learn to adapt to our new BL environment in order to benefit. Also, content design and delivery were constantly being adapted to the new multimodal environment in order to promote student learning, and technology was continuously developed and

adapted to better reach learning goals. Furthermore, learning supports needed to respond to the needs of both learners and teachers as well as to the development of new improved technology to better aid learning and teaching, and the institution, informed by BL research and practice, needed to constantly adjust their strategies, policies, and support measures.

The second reason we needed to think of BL as a complex system that seamlessly fuses the face-to-face instruction with technology-mediated instruction is due to BL co-evolving. This study concurs with Wang et al. (2015) that “through constant and dynamic self-organization and adaptation, BL evolves with its multimodal environment to produce learners with new learning behaviors [See Chapter 4.], teachers with fresh skills and identities [See Chapter 6.], and enhanced learning outcomes” (p. 11) [See Chapter 5.].

Taking the CABLS perspective not only provides a better understanding of the nature, quality, and magnitude of BL, but also exposes the gaps in research and practice as to how the roles of the teacher, the learning support, and the institution interplay with each other and other subsystems within a BL course. Such a perspective has three implications for instructors and institutions wanting to implement BL:

1. The CABLS framework promotes a realistic, systematic, and holistic view of BL. By using the circular CABLS perspective, hopefully a more accurate understanding of BL’s adaptive and co-evolving nature is gained so that researchers and educators may be better equipped to meet the challenges that BL presents in institutions of higher learning.

2. The CABLS framework, as this study discovered in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, demonstrates the ways in which the learner, the teacher, the technology, the content, the learning support, and the institution interact with, and impact upon, each other to form a successful or unsuccessful BL situation. As Wang et al. (2015) have noted, this “may have practical implications for BL practice because it will compel researchers to investigate the feedback loop between the subsystems to avoid one-way interpretation of causality” (p. 390).
3. Since BL is a complex adaptive system, “no magic bullet” exists on how to design and implement a BL course. Each BL course will have its own unique agenda, characteristics, problems to be addressed, etc. The diverse subsystems and their interactions with each other will vary from case to case. Thus, each BL course, or class for that matter, will be different. This is okay. For example, I used a 50-50 ratio face-to-face to online portions, with doing the face-to face portion for the first half of the semester, because I was working primarily with first year undergraduates. If I was working with more experienced college students, I might have more online time or consider alternating every other class period between face-to-face and online instruction.

My experience of viewing BL as a complex adaptive system has been so powerful that it has colored how I look at the world. It is a complex adaptive system. Education is a



learning adaptive system. Learning itself is now a complex adaptive system. The list goes on and on.

This section discussed the theme of BL as a complex adaptive system. Taking such a perspective could enhance BL design and implementation. As a complex system, both the learners and the teachers co-evolve with other subsystems, acquiring new identities. The next section will focus on the new learner identities students perceive themselves as after taking the blended Introduction to Literature course.

#### Blended Learning May Help Learners Gain New Identities

Since the mid-nineties, the literature has debated whether delivery media alone influences learning outcomes (e.g. Morgan, 1995). Most of the online research focuses on its effectiveness in comparison with the traditional face-to-face classroom learning. According to multiple studies, a “no difference effect” is found in performance between learners enrolled in the two settings (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). However, another body of research, including my data, acknowledges that differences in media used can make a difference in learning outcomes (Goldberg & McKhann, 2000). The student perceptions presented in Chapters 4 and 5 as well as the student achievement presented in Chapter 5 revealed that the learners in the blended Introduction to Literature course achieved more understanding and experienced more joy interpreting literature than if they had taken the traditional completely face-to-face version of the course. Generally, they perceived themselves as being transformed from passive to active learners. Concurring with Forsey, Low, and Glance (2013), the students felt “more accountable regarding the ideas and theories explored in class” (p. 481), agreeing with the McLaughlin et al. (2013, p. 196)

conclusion that BL “promoted student empowerment, development, and engagement” (p. 196). Lastly, the students in this study fit those observations of Hsu and Hsieh in their 2014 study. According to them, BL promotes “metacognitive ability in comprehension, argumentation, reasoning and various forms of higher order thinking” (p. 233). The students’ achievement in this study was marked by their analytical skills generally advancing with each subsequent short story studied. Eventually, all of the students in the study were able to advance their thinking to the highest level of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy. This is being able to create (Airasia et al., 2001). All of the students did this with the final project. They were able to design their own teaching lesson over a short story of their choice from the text.

Practically all the students involved in this study saw themselves differently, having acquired new active learner identities by the end of the semester. This contrasts with the start of the semester where they saw themselves as passive learners. Almost all of the students reported the blended Introduction to Literature course transformed them from knowledge repeaters to critical thinkers, dependent learners to independent learners, surface readers to close readers, non-literary people to literary connoisseurs, and students to teachers. Overall, the students claimed that the more dynamic methods of the blended Introduction to Literature course, as opposed to the traditional face-to-face lecture-based content delivery typical in higher education, allowed them to take a more active role in the learning process.

Contrary to such results, other researchers have reported negative effects of online learning (e.g. Rivera & McAlister, 2001). The practical significance of an effect is

determined by its relative benefits and costs (Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981). Due to BL being a complex adaptive system, the effects are difficult to quantify because of the number of subsystems or variables involved and the way they interrelate to each other. Within BL courses, the learner co-evolves with other subsystems such as the teacher, the content, the technology, the learning support, and the institution. Thus, according to the CABLS theory (Wang et al., 2015), making a change in any of BL's subsystems could influence how students learn. Therefore, it is practically impossible to conclude whether the new positive learner identities students saw themselves as having acquired, from being transformed from passive to active learners, could be attributed to BL, the transactional theory of reading, or both.

Because of the complex nature of the blended Introduction to Literature course, I have subdivided this section into two subthemes: "BL New Identities" and "Transactional Theory of Reading New Identities." Within these subthemes, I discuss how they were important in understanding and describing the blended Introduction to Literature course. Keep in mind that complex adaptive systems such as BL are nested. In other words, they are interconnected with other bigger macro-systems or smaller subsystems (Folke & Folke, 1992). These different subsystems are themselves dynamic and are in constant interaction with each other. For example, both the BL aspects and the transactional theory of reading are subsystems within the content subsystem which is a subsystem for the blended Introduction course, which in turn is a subsystem for the institution, which in turn is a subsystem of the state or national educational system. Therefore, the following two subthemes are fully interconnected.

### Blended Learning New Identities

Most of the Introduction to Literature students involved in this study were drawn to the BL format used for the course design. Students claimed that the BL format used in the Introduction to Literature course helped transform them from passive to active learners. They, along with the co-teachers, saw themselves change from knowledge repeaters to critical thinkers, dependent learners to independent learners, and students to teachers. This was demonstrated in the student work, too. From the students' perceptions and their achievement, three key subthemes to the subtheme of "BL new identities" emerged:

1. A majority of the students have many responsibilities throughout their undergraduate years, so they seek flexibility and convenience when continuing their education. Courses offering online instruction allow students to fit their courses around their family, work, and extra-curricular responsibilities so they may study anywhere at any time. The majority of the students enrolled in the Introduction to Literature course used in this study were no different. This is based upon their comments in the surveys and interviews. BL helped them to schedule and better fit the extra demands of their time from family, work, and extra-curriculars along with their schooling.
2. Learners value the self-direction, independence, and control online instruction offers them. The most popular factors that drew students in this study to online learning were to have "the ability to study when and where

I want” and “the ability to study at my own pace.” These agree with the Aslanian and Clinefelter (2012) research.

3. As reported in the surveys presented in Chapter 4, the learners valued meeting face-to-face the first half of the semester. This helped students establish personal relationships with their peers and the co-teachers as well as having support. A couple of students reported in personal interviews (Chapter 5) that not being physically separated may have aided them to feel less alienated and isolated, especially since they had recently graduated from high school. This concurs with Brown’s (1996) research. Furthermore, during the face-to-face portion, learners had their teachers, classmates, learning centers on campus, etc. to help and support them with their various learning needs. These resources guided them, clarified and reinforced the course material, and assisted students in the success of their independent online learning. Such a support community may lead to greater retention by providing learners with a community where they can engage, interact, and support each other may lead to less frustration and confusion, thereby encouraging them to persist in school and complete their degrees (Hara & Kling, 2000).

This subsection discussed three BL themes within the “BL new identities” subtheme. Recommendations drawn from this part of the discussion are: BL might possibly aid busy learners in scheduling and fitting in the demands of school, family, work, and extra-curricular activities; the online portion of BL offers learners self-

direction, independence, and control of their learning; and it is valuable for undergraduates, especially in their first year of college, to meet face-to-face the first half of the course to help prepare them to become independent learners. As previously mentioned, the positive transformations students had with the Introduction to Literature course was due not only to the blended format, but also due to the transactional theory of reading. Both of these factors were interconnected and played off of each other. The next subsystem discusses the new identities gained from using the transactional theory of reading and the subthemes within this subtheme as well as the conclusions for this section.

#### Transactional Theory of Reading New Identities

Almost all of the students involved in the blended Introduction to Literature course used in this study had positive reactions to and good results in terms of achievement from the transactional theory to reading approach. A positive quality these students experienced was being transformed from passive to active learners. Students, as evidenced in Chapters 4 and 5, credited this to both the BL format and the transactional theory of reading. Both of these factors interacted well with each other in the blended Introduction to Literature course. Students claimed both factors helped them to establish new positive identities. They reported that the BL format transformed them from knowledge repeaters to critical thinkers, dependent learners to independent learners, and students to teachers. The transactional theory of reading, students said, helped them change by the end of the semester from surface readers to close readers; non-literary

people to literary connoisseurs; and as with the BL format, from knowledge repeaters to critical thinkers, dependent to independent learners, and from students to teachers.

From the students' perceptions and their achievements as described in Chapters 4 and 5, four key themes emerged within the "transactional theory of reading new identities" subtheme.

1. Although most of the students had not experienced the transactional theory to reading before participating in this course, they felt empowered by the approach. They held positive feelings toward the literature, and their analytical reading skills were enhanced because of this. The students liked that their individuality as readers was respected. They appreciated that their feelings, backgrounds, memories, and associations called forth by the reading assignments were not only relevant, but that they were the foundations upon which understanding of a text is built. Such a positive experience enabled the students by the end of the semester to perceive themselves going through a metamorphosis from passive to active learners. Being thus empowered with their new analytical skills enabled them to view themselves as being transformed from knowledge repeaters to critical thinkers, dependent learners to independent learners, surface readers to close readers, non-literary people to literary connoisseurs, and students to teachers.
2. Students preferred the transactional approach to reading literature to the approach currently used in many of their high schools. Students remarked

that several of their experiences with reading literature prior to this course had been nothing more than the act of asking and answering questions about a text. Based upon my own teaching experience as outlined in my action research presented in Chapter 6, and the students' histories expressed within the survey data presented in Chapter 5, they were expected to interpret literature to suit standardized testing and/or to come up with the one definitive interpretation. The problem with standardized testing is that it consists of a series of separate questions about short passages on random topics. Rarely do the questions examine how the learners interrelate parts of the text nor do they require justifications to support the interpretations. In other words, instead of encouraging reflective interpretation, the goal is to do a quick-find answer. Students in this study felt the transactional theory of reading enhanced their interpretive skills and made reading pleasurable. They understood literary stories may have multiple interpretations.

3. As in teaching any face-to-face, online, or BL course, the transactional approach to reading is more effective if students perceive themselves as having positive relationships with their teachers. This is another factor aiding students in gaining the positive active learner identities previously mentioned. Students desire that their teachers care about them and are passionate about what they teach. Often the students in this study mentioned the importance of these teacher qualities throughout the



surveys and interviews. They felt that the new identities they gained were promoted by caring and passionate teaching. This agrees with the research by Palmer, O’Cane, & Owens (2009) which reveals the likelihood of remaining at university was higher for students who developed a sense of belonging to the university, and as in their study, satisfaction was increased through connectedness. Developing a feeling of belonging is of particular importance in the first year of study in institutions of higher learning, as most decisions to drop out are made during this year (Christie, Munro, & Fisher, 2004). Also, positive relationships with university teachers facilitate other factors, such as commitment (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004), effort (Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004), motivation (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009; Zepke & Leach, 2010), satisfaction (Calvo, Markauskaite, & Trigwell, 2010; Dobransky & Frymier 2004; Trigwell, 2005), engagement (Zepke & Leach, 2010), deep-learning approaches (Trigwell, 2005), achievement, and intellectual development (e.g., critical thinking, learning fundamental principles; Halawah, 2006).

4. The study skills required to master a BL course in addition to the epistemology at the root of the transactional theory of reading gave the responsibility for learning to the student. Successful BL courses in general, and transactional theory literatures courses specifically, are learner centered. A learner-centered approach acknowledges what students bring to a BL and/or transactional theory-based literature course- their

experiences, needs, and interests-and what they take away as important, relevant, and meaningful outcomes. Therefore, an effective BL and/or literature teacher who practices transactional theory is someone who “who is open to giving up control of the learning process” (Palloff & Pratt, 2013, p. 24) by helping students to become active participants in the learning process. More about this will be discussed later in this chapter under the “BL requires multiple teacher identities to be effective” theme.

In summary, the transactional theory of reading was a positive experience for students in the blended Introduction to Literature course. As presented in Chapters 4 and 5, learners’ enjoyment and their analytical skills in interpreting literature increased when they felt that their feelings, backgrounds, memories, and associations were respected. Also, the transactional theory of reading allowed learners to take a more active role in the learning process. Such positive experiences helped students gain new identities by the end of the semester. These were: critical thinkers, independent learners, close readers, literary connoisseurs, and teachers.

Having this experience designing, teaching, and researching a blended Introduction to Literature course gave me valuable insights. Teachers of undergraduate blended Introduction to Literature courses are advised to meet face-to-face the first half of the course. The other primary insights or recommendations for teaching the transactional theory of reading in a BL course are the same as those for a fully face-to-face course. Good pedagogy is good pedagogy, no matter the format. These recommendations include:

- Based upon the joy and academic success students experienced in this study, the pedagogy of teaching literature using transactional theory needs to be promoted further in English education for literature teachers of all grade levels and in institutions of higher learning.
- Transactional theory suggests that the literary work and student interact, created in the act of reading rather than in the text. Thus, any literary work is changeable, varies for each reader, and differs even for an individual reader from one reading to the next. Therefore, teachers of introductory literature courses are encouraged to be facilitators. They need not lead learners to a foreseen analysis of the stories. Instead they face the challenging but uniqueness of each student and each reading, accepting the differences, and crafting out of that content significant thoughts and insights about the complexity of the literature.
- Learners need to be encouraged to respect and examine their emotions, ideas, experiences, and associations in their responses. Doing so will create their understanding of the text. Teachers can promote this by encouraging learners to articulate responses, probe their origins in the text and in other experiences, reflect upon them, and interpret them in the light of other readings (those of their peers and critics) and other information about the literature. This requires a cooperative environment. Instead of debating, literary discussion using a transactional theory approach to reading encourages learners not to win, but to clarify and refine.

- Keep in mind the transactional theory of reading may expand other types of knowledge other than literary. Not only does it encourage the ability to read intelligently; to observe features of language; to draw inferences about writers, texts, and genres; to express critical judgments; and to achieve all the other goals a traditional literature course has, transactional theory also suggests that literature may lead to sharpened understanding of ourselves and our society. As Rosenblatt (1984) has stated: "The literary transaction in itself may become a self-liberating process, and the sharing of our responses may be an even greater means of overcoming our limitations of personality and experience" (p. 3). This response came up in the survey data presented in Chapter 4.
- The transactional theory of reading does not deny the validity of other approaches to literature. My co-teacher and I supplemented with biographical, historical, and cultural perspectives to help provide insight into the literature, especially when the stories seemed difficult to relate to due to dialect, location, time period, etc. However, the theory does assert that the fundamental literary experience is the encounter of a reader, a unique individual, with a text. Jauss (1982) noted that "...even the critic who judges a new work, the writer who conceives of his work in light of positive or negative norms of an earlier work, and the literary historian who classifies a work in its tradition and explains it historically are first

simply readers" (p. 19). Students came to this conclusion as shown in Chapter 4.

This section discussed the theme of “new student identities from using the BL format” as well as the “transactional theory of reading” framework. These two factors interrelated and played off of each other in this study involving a blended Introduction to Literature course. The next section discusses the theme that “BL may give a more accurate assessment of learners.”

#### Blended Learning May Give a More Accurate Assessment of Learners

In some ways, BL may give a more accurate assessment of student learning than fully face-to-face or all online courses. The action research, learners’ perceptions, and student work for the study’s blended Introduction to Literature course seem to support this statement. The BL approach used here had almost “something for everyone.” Extroverts and those who had high verbal skills seemed able to showcase their knowledge during the face-to-face portion since it was easier for them to jump right in the discussions, while the introverts and those who had strong reading and writing skills were able to showcase their talents during the online portion. By “offering something for everyone,” BL courses such as this Introduction to Literature might be considered a better option than the traditional face-to-face classroom or a fully online setting because instructors and institutions may get a truer assessment of what the students really understand.

Since students during the online portion can take more time to think about the literature assignments and/or not be the direct center of attention as in a face-to-face

classroom, an effectively designed BL course can provide more opportunities for those who tend to prefer reflection, synthesis, and introspection to show off what they have learned. As reported in the action research presented in Chapter 6, during the online portion, I witnessed how the introverted students during the online portion came up with wonderful insights about the stories we read. When asked, they told me the online portion allowed them to form and refine their ideas/responses before sharing. Being this type of person myself, I know thoughtful responses and creative ideas often take time to formulate. These students may be striving toward perfection before allowing their ideas to be shared, because their standards may be high. This raises the issue of how such students are treated in the face-to-face portion.

Given this reality, it is recommended that both instructors and students may need to become more fully aware how introverts are perceived. To such students, the classroom environment can be highly unnatural, especially to an introverted student who likes to work intensely on projects he/she cares about, and to hang out with one or two friends instead of a group. Support for the introverted students would include not thinking of introversion as something that needs to be “cured,” and keeping groups limited to two or three for collaborative assignments such as the final project. Educators might ponder, too, what learning looks like for introverts in BL courses. Often, they are perceived in a negative light, commonly referred to as passive learners. Putting labels aside, the questions we need to ask are: How does one encourage the quiet student to engage at appropriate times? How can meaningful exchanges be fostered for deeper learning? Some examples of how I tried to do this included: learn student names as soon as possible

so they would feel recognized as individuals; begin discussions with some easy questions that have no wrong answers; give time to process information; keep in mind students can demonstrate learning in other ways rather than talking (e.g. written work); and encourage participation with positive and specific feedback. Such teacher behavior sets examples of inclusiveness.

Also, the students in this study declared that they were more engaged due to the variety of content types. Several students reported liking visuals, and BL can make the most out of visuals. The caution here is that the visuals need to add to the understanding of the course material. The visuals should not be something “tacked on” to the lessons. Keeping this in mind, the visuals could work much the same way illustrated books do for young kids. Young children are not likely to read pages and pages filled with words, but might instead be attracted to illustrated books for two reasons. One, by taking into account the comprehension level of the learner, the illustrations may make the material easier to understand. Two, the illustrations are generally a sound way to help the learner assimilate the information faster. The visual technology used in BL can accomplish the same goals. BL, done well, is the complementary approach to enhancing the traditional educational model. It can utilize a plethora of different material types: video, audio, visually enhanced presentations, etc. These could aid in keeping students engaged and reinforcing the course content for understanding. The surveys in Chapter 4 found that those students who like visuals and/or are tech savvy believed the blended Introduction to Literature course encouraged them to learn.

In fact, the tools for creative expression are amplified on the Web. Audio or video format can be used alongside text. Technology offers a world of abundant course resources with its rich array of video, animations, text, and audio options. Those students who have more skill, passion, or interest in nontextual spaces, may excel in an academic space rich in video or pictorial resources. These various digital formats are a playground for the visually artistic students who are tech savvy. To encourage such creative expression, the implication here is that there needs to be more encouragement for both instructors and students to be creatively expressive. This may require more technical and artistic support. The issue of such support will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

This section discussed the theme and the implications that BL may be able to provide a better assessment of student learning than fully face-to-face or fully online courses. The next section contains the discussion and implications for the theme that “BL may not be for everyone”.

#### Blended Learning May Not Be for Everyone

The overall findings of this study point to improved learning outcomes and behaviors, and an overall positive reception to BL by students as compared to a fully online or face-to-face course. Overwhelmingly, the students in this study claimed that they worked more autonomously and that the use of BL made them more responsible for their own learning. Both the students’ course work and their survey comments supported the view that BL helped them to think critically about using the literary elements to understand and analyze short stories. They felt empowered. This concurs with what



researchers such as López-Pérez, Pérez-López, and Rodríguez-Ariza (2011), Osguthorpe and Graham (2003), and Singh (2010) have noted. They found that BL increases student autonomy and responsibility.

However, in spite of such strong support for Introduction to Literature courses to be taught in a blended format, BL may not be for all students. Three types of students struggled with the BL format.

One group included those learners who were challenged by taking more responsibility for their own learning, especially during the online portion. This was true for about 10% of the students involved in this study. They were not always on task. They often missed assignment deadlines. When asked about this they all replied that they had poor time management and study skills. They may have had problems with motivation as well. Two of them added that the face-to-face portion was easier, because the learning was more structured. The online portion was “out of sight, out of mind.” Learning skills such as time management and study skills are important. Good time management, study skills, and motivation are important to learn, but the question is whose duty is it to teach these?

It should be noted that students who took the Introduction to Literature course in the spring were academically stronger overall than those who took it in the fall. When asked, students replied they were not yet used to studying at a college level their first semester. For most of the fall semester students this was their first semester at college. For most of the spring semester students, it was their second semester. Also, office visits from students seemed to stop for both the fall and spring semesters after the online

portion began. Only four office visits total from students happened during the online portion of this study. Even the few who were asked to come to the office to receive remedial help, for the most part did not take up the offer. When asked about this, they said that emails seemed to take care of the situation. They were in the online mode and, thus, emailing was more convenient.

The recommendation here is, that for students such as those just described, more student support is required, especially for their first semester of college. They require assistance in the form of both study skills and training in digital literacy (including artistic support) in the context of technology-rich environments. This job should not fall on the shoulders of the BL instructor, but on someone(s) else. The co-teachers of this course devoted lots of time dealing with such issues. We had not originally planned on this. Instead, we hoped to utilize our time teaching how to analyze literature. More will be said about this topic later in this chapter.

A second group who struggled with BL were the victims of the digital divide. They had to face challenges of economic and social inequality with regard to accessing and using information technologies when they participated in the study's blended Introduction to Literature course. For them, the digital divide was more than an access issue. Not only were there problems in gaining access to the technology, but there were problems in knowing how to make use of the information and communication these technological tools provided. This agrees with the findings of Mun-cho and Jong-Kil (2001) found.

The “digital divide” students had one or more of the following characteristics: older, lower income, rural, African-American or Latino/Hispanic. For students who fell into two or more of these categories, the gap was even greater. Generally, students who came from families who did not have access to current technology had a difficult time catching up to their peers. Furthermore, they experienced computer anxiety and technophobia. It seemed as if those students who came from higher income and/or more highly educated families had the best access to technology and those with the best access to technology could use the technology better in the blended Introduction to Literature course.

The recommendation is that even though the literature reports that the digital divide is closing, educators still need to be sensitive to this issue. Some further considerations include:

- Find ways to purchase and loan laptops to students. While digital literacy is key, free or inexpensive computers would remove another significant barrier. Doing so might provide incentive for students to learn digital literacy and maintain skills.
- Try to remove financial barriers for students while they are in high school. Internet providers generally require security deposits and a credit check before handing out equipment such as modems and routers, thereby making it more difficult for low-income persons to get service. Perhaps partnering with nonprofits to come up with solutions can help to pay for those upfront expenses.

- Advocate for legislation that narrows the digital divide by providing free Internet hotspots in all low-income communities.

The third group who struggled a bit were extremely social and did not prefer visual learning. These students enjoyed being around others and jumping in on oral discussions over working independently and using a written format. This echoes the literature that students vary in the manner in which they absorb, process, and recall what they are taught (Bradford, 2004). According to Bradford (2004), learners can have three preferences. Verbal learners constitute about 30% of the general population. They prefer to learn by hearing. They benefit from class lectures and discussions of class materials in study groups or in oral presentations, but chafe at written assignments. The second preference is kinesthetic. These students make up about 5% of the population. They prefer to learn by doing and touching, clinical work, and role-playing exercises. Those who prefer the visual mode of learning are the remaining 65% of the population. They like to see what they are learning, and while they have difficulty following oral lectures they perform well at written assignments and readily recall material they have read. The implications of variance in learning preferences are particularly significant for educators. Empirical research supports the conclusion that when students are matched with teaching methods that complement their learning preferences, their absorption and retention is significantly enhanced (Bradford, 2004).

In summary, BL may not be suitable for all learners. As true for all modalities, determining how to engage all students in meaningful learning activities will require further research and exploration. If the goal of higher education is to meet the ever-

changing needs of students, BL is an option to consider. Although fully online coursework may work well for some students, it is not the best option for all. This same statement may be true of the traditional classroom setting, suggesting that BL instruction options may appeal to those not interested in purely classroom or Internet courses. However, it is important to remember that there are, too, some students who may not function well in a BL situation. Perhaps the best thing institutions of higher learning can do is to offer choices between fully online, fully face-to-face, and BL. This may help to give the most students the best education possible.

This section discussed the theme that BL may not be for all students. The next section discusses the theme of new identities teachers acquire in implementing BL and the implications of this.

#### Blended Learning that Is Effective Requires Multiple Teacher Identities

Teacher identity aids in understanding why instructors do what they do while teaching. The context in which instructors teach plays a fundamental role in shaping their practice. To elucidate, Johnson (2006) states: “Teachers’ prior experiences, the interpretations of the activities they engage in, and most important, the contexts within which they work are extremely influential in shaping how and why teachers do what they do” (p. 236). The blended Introduction to Literature course created an impact on teacher identity in different ways:

- It required the co-teachers to use technology, then produce course materials using that technology and train students to use it.

- It transformed the way co-teachers design and conduct Introduction to Literature by including a considerable number of online resources and ways of interacting with learners.
- It required the co-teachers to tailor lessons and activities for specific learner needs in an asynchronous way.
- It allowed the co-teachers to work at different sequences and rhythms since time and space changed.
- It demanded that the co-teachers to be constantly learning about technology as it changed and advanced.
- Its use of the transactional theory guided decisions not only for the face-to-face and online portions of the course, but also for the teacher roles.

In order to successfully teach a BL course, the co-teachers were required to: (a) learn new ways of communicating with learners in a virtual environment; (b) learn how to use technology for educational purposes; (c) promote student autonomy; (d) find ways to give students feedback online; (e) continuously explore the web to find new teaching resources; (f) create a network of support with each other to share resources and solve questions; (g) discover a balance for students to practice reading, writing and thinking face-to-face and online; and (h) develop a critical awareness of teaching students to use technology with a purpose in mind and in a meaningful way. Change was a key concept. The implication here is that teachers who are passive will not be prepared to meet the challenge of BL. Change is the result of incorporating new knowledge, reflecting on the new conditions, using the resources available and taking action. BL instructors need to be

active, creative, flexible and constantly learning. Evidence of such behavior can be found in Chapter 6 where I described various ways I had to adapt and think about blending the Introduction to Literature course to help my students learn. If I experienced an issue with one of the CABLS subsystems (the learner, the teacher, the content, the technology, the learning support, or the institution), another subsystem had to compensate. For example, so many of my fall students (“learner” subsystem) were starting their college careers with relatively high levels of uncertainty and anxiety (e.g., Gibney, Moore, Murphy, & O’Sullivan, 2011; Hazel, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008). Thus, I had to adapt myself (“teacher” subsystem) by becoming more nurturing to help them with their new environment (“institution” subsystem).

In another example, thanks to the CABLS framework, I (“teacher” subsystem) had to change my thinking about how to use technology in BL. BL involved more than taking half of the face-to-face course and putting it online. I constantly had to adapt and think about all the other CABLS subsystems if I wanted my students to succeed in this blended Introduction to Literature course. Quoting Saffo (1997): “Technology does not drive change. Technology merely enables changes. It creates options and opportunities that as individuals and as communities and as entire cultures we choose to exploit.” Technology is a powerful tool, but it does not guarantee learning. No matter how many online resources an instructor has, if those resources are not easily handled and meaningful to the learners they will just be accessories whose potential is lost. Failure to realize this would not have resulted in the positive attitudes or high achievement, as described in Chapters 4 and 5, my students experienced.

Furthermore, teaching BL effectively requires instructors to take on many identities. As Wang et al. (2015) proposed through CABLS, in BL environments teachers co-evolve with other subsystems, particularly with learners, to become a generation of instructors with new identities and multi-disciplined professional skills. Salmon (2004) reported that instructors often acquire new roles which describe this generation of teachers, these including e-moderators, facilitators, “guides on the side,” and advisors. Introductory literature teachers using the BL format must not only shift into these new roles, but must also perform the roles of effective literature teachers. Among these are: cheerleaders, advisors, promoters of learning, nurturers, lovers of literature, and students. Most of these identities can be seen as passionate, caring, and encouraging the growth and development of learners. So, rather than being information givers, the co-instructors often found themselves acting as listeners, responders, and helpers to the Introduction to Literature students. We had to aid students in moving beyond their initial impressions of the short stories, to be involved in scaffolding their ideas, and to guide them in ways to better hear each other—to discuss and think critically.

The students involved in this study often expressed in the surveys and on the university’s assessment of teachers how passionate, enthusiastic, and caring their co-teachers were about their subject and to them as students. In fact, they claimed that these teacher qualities are what led to their positive perceptions and achievement in this BL course. It is crucial for BL teachers to find ways to be passionate, enthusiastic, and nurturing. Meaningful student-teacher interaction is critical to quality online education. However, this is often a missing ingredient in most online instruction. It is not easy. But



taking the time to build relationships with and between students to build confidence, to foster engagement, and to ensure students that support was always available is worth the extra effort.

Most of these relationships happened on a regularly occurring personal level. Meeting the first half of the semester face-to-face was invaluable. Things such as small talk before and after class and nonverbal body language could help connect students and would carry over to the online portion. Trying to get to know a bit of the students' personal backgrounds helped to show interest in them. Such actions conveyed our personalities and the impression that we cared about students' progress. We found that the BL teacher needs to be aware and nurturing to all sorts of students—the extrovert, the introvert, the tech savvy, the not-so tech savvy, the gifted readers, the ones struggling to read, etc. Based upon student comments for this study, I found this helped create a sense of belonging for them. Agreeing with the literature (Fitzmaurice, 2008; Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010), this study reinforces the belief that a sense of belonging, developed through connectedness and social presence, boosts the students' emotional engagement. As a result of the rise in emotional engagement, behavioral and cognitive engagement is enhanced because students feel comfortable enough to ask for help when they need it. By meeting face-to-face the first half of the semester, we were able to set the groundwork for a nurturing atmosphere that would carry over in the online portion.

The conclusion here is that a nurturing environment is crucial for both the face-to-face and online BL portions. It is recommended throughout the course to require the

best from the students by giving challenging, but not too difficult assignments. Mutual respect grew between the students and us when we expected from them what they were capable of achieving. When expectations were not met, then encouragement was the primary emotional currency used by the co-teachers. We had to be the encouragers because sometimes we were able to realize the students' potential to analyze literature better than they were. If a student was not completing his/her work, then we needed to engage the student positively and help guide him/her by explaining how to complete the basic steps needed to be do a given assignment or task. Once the student had successfully accomplished these steps towards understanding of the literature, it usually boosted his/her sense of efficacy and helped facilitate future learning attempts in interpreting the short stories.

On a related note, several of the students commented at the end of the semester survey that they enjoyed the blended Introduction to Literature course because the instructors made learning fun. Thus, neither BL or literature courses have to be one-sided totally serious endeavors. Adding humor or entertainment to both the face-to-face and online portions increased our student engagement. This does not mean that learning should be set aside, but combining it with humor and entertaining elements makes learning more enjoyable and students happy. And when students are happy and enjoying themselves, they have a positive attitude towards the class, thereby looking forward to the Introduction to Literature. Joy in learning is good. Neuroimaging studies have revealed that students' comfort levels can influence information transmission and storage in the brain (Thanos et al., 1999). When learners are engaged, motivated, and feel minimal

stress, the information flows freely through the affective filter in the amygdala and they achieve higher levels of cognition, making connections, and experiencing “aha” moments.

As evidenced in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I found scaffolding important. Learning factual knowledge can be heightened by helping learners relate the new knowledge to what they already know, demonstrating it in a mixture of media, by asking students to use the information in more complex tasks, and by repetition. The acquisition of skills is improved through extended practice with prompt feedback, by observing models of skilled literary interpretation, and through opportunities to engage as a member of a community which uses the elements of literature in analyzing stories over an extended period of time. Motivational engagement is promoted by having clear and specific goals; lessons with elements of playfulness, surprise, and challenge; chances to make decisions about learning tasks and content; records of personal progress, and connections to long term goals. Both the face-to-face instruction and online learning portions in a blended introductory literature course can play important roles in putting these supporting conditions in place to aid students in gaining new identities beyond being passive learners.

Such learning comes not from directed lectures, but from courses with an atmosphere of exuberant discovery (Kohn, 2004). The research of Chugani (1998) and Pawlak, Magarinos, Melchor, McEwen, and Strickland (2003) suggests effective learning takes place when education is enjoyable and relevant to students' lives, interests, and experiences. Moreover, education theorists (Dulay & Burt, 1977; Krashen, 1982) have

proposed that learners retain what they learn when the learning is associated with strong positive emotion. Cognitive psychology studies provide clinical evidence that stress, boredom, confusion, low motivation, and anxiety can individually, and more profoundly, in combination, interfere with learning (Christianson, 1992).

The conclusion here is that both the online and face-to-face portions of a successful BL course not only allow the students to have access to information from anywhere, effectively empowering them to take learning into their own hands, create their own schedule, and let them enjoy the process by doing something interesting. Taking on multiple teacher roles such as cheerleaders, advisors, promoters of learning, nurturers, lovers of literature, and students helped us show our students we care about them and the subject we teach. This may be even more important to them than the instructional design.

The teacher roles just mentioned came from the students' perspectives. Based upon my action research, I discovered two more roles/identities that helped me to implement BL. These are: "being who I am" and "being human." The additional identities come out of the teacher's perspective. Learners may not recognize these identities, but they are important to have when aiming to successfully implement a BL course.

The first of these identities from the teacher's perspective is being who I am. No matter the content area or format, it is critical that the instructor knows oneself and has integrity. Reviewing a memorable passage from *The Courage to Teach* illustrates a fundamental problem with much of the discussion around educational reform:

The question we most commonly ask is the “what” question – what subjects shall we teach? When the conversation goes a bit deeper, we ask the “how” question – what methods and techniques are required to teach well? Occasionally, when it goes deeper still, we ask the “why” question – for what purposes and to what ends do we teach?

But seldom, if ever, do we ask the “who” question – who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form – or deform – the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world? How can educational institutions sustain and deepen the selfhood from which good teaching comes? (Palmer, 1998, p. 4)

The conclusion here is that education cannot be reformed if “the human heart that is the source of good teaching” (Palmer, 1998, p. 3) is not cherished and challenged. Good teaching is more than technique. It comes from the “identity and integrity of the teacher” (Palmer, 2000, p. 11). In other words, instructors need to be connected, to be able to be in touch with their subject area, their students, and with themselves. Again and again on the surveys and the university’s assessment the students commented throughout this study how passionate the instructors were about teaching literature and their students. This seemed to make the greatest impression on students, even more so than course design. My co-teacher advised me: “Make the Introduction to Literature course not only for the students but for yourself, too. Be creative. Have fun. Reveal your love of literature. Be yourself. This is as important as the teaching pedagogy the college taught you.” He was right. I was enthusiastic designing and teaching the course. And enthusiasm is contagious. It promotes a positive perspective. It spreads from the instructors to the students.

However, this is tough. Today administrators, evaluators, and the public target what is wrong with education rather than what is good. Teaching tests and scripted curriculum are common approaches to teaching, causing the instructors to be like robots:

their souls, their creativity, their joy, their identity and integrity often removed. Education has become so fear based that it has become difficult in many cases to be true to oneself.

In the following passage Palmer draws out further implications of his argument for instructors attending to and knowing themselves:

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together.... When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life – and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself, I cannot know my subject – not at the deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. (Palmer, 1998, p. 2)

Therefore, if instructors do not know who they are, they cannot then know those they work with, nor the subjects they teach and explore. Educators can work on this through things like keeping personal journals, exploring their feelings and experiences in supervision, talking with colleagues and friends, contemplation, etc. Instructors need to consider why they are teaching a particular subject, then explain to their students why what they do is important to them. This goes beyond explaining why something is important to the discipline.

The other identity I added to the students' list of teacher identities is being human. This is critical since teaching a BL course such as the Introduction to Literature can have its rough spots. The "being human" identity allows the teacher to seek forgiveness and peace for being imperfect. From the data, the students expected their teachers to be perfect. However, as much as teachers want to be perfect, they will still make mistakes. There are times when they fail to plan perfectly, are not the most nurturing, or

things do not go just right. For example, it is tough to get feedback to students on their assignments in a timely matter. Look at the math. If a professor has two sections of Introduction to Literature, each having 25 students, and each student turns in two critiques that are two to three pages long, that makes 100 pages to read and grade in a week. This is not to mention the time that needs to be devoted to other papers from other classes being taught, planning courses, committee work, research, etc. as well as family and other personal obligations. Several of the students did not realize this and expected the co-teachers to be available 24-7 when the course went online. And there are usually one or two students each semester who feel their instructors will never do enough no matter what.

Therefore, the main recommendation here is that when teaching a BL course, the instructor needs to be prepared to wear many hats. Colleges can help prepare their teachers for such varied roles, and how to keep these multiple identities consistent for both the face-to-face and online portions. Furthermore, keep in mind that the identities or hats mentioned here are probably just a few the BL instructor will end up wearing.

This section stated that in BL environments teachers co-evolve with other subsystems, particularly with learners, to become a generation of instructors with new identities and multi-disciplined professional skills. This means that BL instructors will often experience several roles. Among these labels are e-moderators, facilitators, cheerleaders, advisors, promoters of learning, nurturers, lovers of literature, students, being who one is, and being human. The next section will discuss that in spite of all of its advantages, BL has challenges, too.

### Blended Learning, in Spite of All its Advantages, Has Challenges

The students in this study perceived BL positively in terms of both their attitudes and in their achievement. Echoing the introductory chapter of this study, BL has currently become more prominent and typically combines the “best of both worlds” by combining the advantages of both digital and in-person pedagogy, keeping the face-to-face interaction desired for effective teaching and learning that is found in traditional teaching while eliminating the significant time commitment required by onsite instruction by using Internet resources (Graham, 2006; King & Arnold, 2012). However, in spite of all of its advantages, BL has challenges, too. Here are some of them.

First, according to what I found in the literature, BL can be challenging for humanities and other loosely structured content areas. Before this study, practically all of the BL examples in the literature came from subject areas such as computer programming, mathematics, business, science, and statistics. These are usually the type of courses where competence is commonly assessed by assigning work where performance is either right or wrong. Such subject areas tend to lend themselves to task decomposition, practice, and feedback, the three things that digital learning environments have mastered. The humanities and other loosely structured content areas such as literature, on the other hand, were neglected. But, this does not have to be the case. My co-teacher and I were able to find online resources to incorporate into the course. As with any other subject matter, online or face-to-face, effective BL courses depend upon good practices. Students perceived, as shown in Chapter 5, that the Introduction to Literature course was an active, vibrant learning environment that enhanced their learning. This



agrees with what Friedman and Deek (2002) found. They reported a well-designed course must be based on sound pedagogical principles. Because learning often involves two types of interaction, interaction with content and interpersonal interaction, we made special efforts to facilitate both types of interaction throughout the blended Introduction to Literature course. We used the Web as a source of knowledge exploration and gave exploratory problems to guide our students to think and explore the stories. Research has revealed that educational outcomes improve when learners take a deep approach to learning in which the emphasis is on understanding subject material rather than rote learning (Biggs, 1993). With help from the Web, our students explored literary topics beyond the boundaries of given material, thus supporting the proactive and exploratory nature of learning that allows learners to become self-reliant (Pahl, 2002). Design interface can also have a great influence on how motivating a blended course is (Bontempi, 2003). My experience accords with these statements.

However, as evidenced in the action research presented in Chapter 6, the problem for such courses is immediate feedback. The same is true whether the course is face-to-face or fully online. By having learners record progress toward their goals, the motivation to become an independent learner can be enhanced (Pintrich, 2006). In this sense, formative self-assessment with automated marking and immediate feedback can have an important impact on student motivation. The use of immediate feedback, making learners aware of what they do not know, could increase understanding of the material (Kashy, Thoennessen, Tsai, David, & Wolfe, 1998). But this cannot be the case when working with literary interpretations. I did the best I could. It was stressful to get meaningful

feedback to a large number of students in a timely manner. My goal was to get the feedback back to them from one story before the due date of the next. As shown in the surveys in Chapter 4, most students were comfortable with this. They thought the time I took to respond was speedy for the nature of the course even though it took a toll on me in terms of time and stress. The crucial parts to the feedback, echoed by students in the surveys presented in Chapter 5, was to be specific, caring, compliment the good, and show how to improve work for the next time.

Second, time is often a problem in the face-to-face sessions. Getting all the information in a 90-minute block, especially when facilitating for understanding, does not always work. The online portions of BL allow students to assimilate and work on the information at their own pace without the pressure of keeping up with the rest of the class. Even though meeting face-to-face the first half of the semester gave the co-instructors the opportunity to educate their students in a physical classroom setting so that students could take that learning to work independently during the online portion, it sometimes felt as if the literature was short changed. Not only did the co-instructors have to perform expected duties such as to teach about literature as well as having to facilitate contact with students, answer questions, address concerns, and make sure that students' issues are being resolved, but they also had to teach study and technology skills.

Some of the students' study skills were not at the college level, because they did not know how to manage their time, how to read assignments, how to work with teachers, etc. It was difficult for them to transfer from high school to college. Among this group of students were some high school honor students. But perhaps this is not surprising

considering that two-thirds of state-funded merit scholarships are lost due to ineligible grades earned during the students' first year of college (Kruger, 2013). Even though this is, perhaps, an issue less about BL, per se, and more about where this course falls in the student sequence, the recommendation here is that if institutions of higher learning want to use BL as a format with their general education courses such as Introduction to Literature, this matter needs to be studied and addressed so that BL teachers can utilize their time to teach course content.

Equally time consuming, if not more so, was having to teach technical remedial skills to some of the students. In spite of their constant texting, twittering, and viewing YouTube, some students' technology skills fell short. They were tech savvy socially, but not academically. Even though today's college students are commonly referred to as "digital natives," some of them in the blended Introduction to Literature course had never hyperlinked or created a PowerPoint. Some were not familiar with Google docs. Several demonstrated weak research skills using the Internet. Some had extremely short attention spans. Few students took it upon themselves to reread, proofread, edit, and revise their work. Perhaps their constant use of digital technology hampered their attention spans and their ability to persevere in the face of challenging tasks. For example, texting is a world that does not worry about correct spelling, complete sentences, proper capitalization and punctuation, etc. Some students had a tendency to write their assignments like they text: short and abbreviated. This does not work well for literary interpretations, because learners need to provide detailed examples and support to back up their interpretation.

Furthermore, although the students had enthusiastically stated in surveys how much they prefer preparing a PowerPoint instead of a writing an essay about a literary work, the co-instructors had to constantly encourage them to spend part of their time researching their subjects instead of devoting all of it to the appearance of their presentations. Doing otherwise meant the students could complete their projects with very little knowledge about their subjects. Some did not understand that participation and enthusiasm did not equate to learning. Perhaps this explains why the historical context/background to the literary works they selected was the most likely item to be ignored in their final projects. Furthermore, some were so used to reading electronic texts, they did not know how to browse, highlight, or take notes about the literary elements from a hard copy text. They reported in interviews that when reading electronically, they simply read the text once and “were good”. Lastly, not all students had basics such as Word and PowerPoint on their personal computers in spite of the fact they could get these from the university.

Having a certain level of academic and technological skill makes literary analysis in a BL course easier for learners. Thus, more academic and technical supports are needed for some students. However, in an effort to endure, as the Johnson and Heritage Foundation reported (2000), instructors have to teach computer skills in addition to course content. The same is true for study skills. So, the question is: Should content be sacrificed in order to teach the technology and study skills it is assumed all students have when entering college? If the answer is no, then institutions of higher learning will need to explore ways to provide academic and technology support to students outside of the

course. This could be a topic for future study. More about this will be covered in a later section in this chapter.

The third challenge, and perhaps the most disappointing thing about BL teaching, is the lack of control I had over when students completed their assignments online and the amount of time they spent on them. This can happen in face-to-face, too. Some students took too many short cuts. They did not do multiple readings for clearer understanding. They ignored the extra online helps. Some may have completed the work at inappropriate times when they were overtired or in places with lots of outside distractions. Some started their assignments too close to the deadline and did not develop their work to their best abilities. A few submitted multiple assignments early making it impossible to send feedback to improve the next assignment, or did not read the stories and went directly to Internet sources such as Spark Notes for analysis. In fact, some students declared in the surveys presented in Chapter 5 that the course was easy and did not take much time, when in reality, it should have been much more time consuming. The co-teachers do not have the answers yet to handle this dilemma. In spite of the constant communication, scaffolds, and reminders, some students short changed themselves. This was more noticeable during the online portion. When asked, these students answered they liked the idea of being able to control when and where they could do the course work so much, they preferred to sacrifice quality by working through the lessons of the blended Introduction to Literature course quickly in order to have more time for their face-to-face courses. The recommendations here are that institutions of higher learning need to put

pressure on high schools to better prepare students for college work, and as mentioned earlier, examine how to improve academic support for learners.

A fourth challenge for BL instructors is overwork. Designing a BL course demands time. The time it takes to research available materials, learn how to use them, and figure out how to design the BL course that will make the best use of teaching and learning strategies to support curriculum objectives effectively and to integrate them into a course was daunting. This does not mention the time spent in grading and emailing messages to students. With the online portion, many of our students unrealistically expected us to be available 24-7. However, even though the co-instructor/ researcher felt the BL gave her more work in the beginning with planning and learning the technology, she also felt more relaxed later. As time went on, the planning became easier, and she expected that teaching the same course again would be easier. The co-instructor/researcher noticed in her action research that she was feeding off the students' engagement. For her, BL was a method which infused new engagement opportunities into an established course as well as providing an opportunity to transition opportunity between completely face-to-face and completely online instruction.

The recommendation here is that the institutions of higher learning recognize a lot of extra work is involved for teachers creating BL courses. Many instructors have to make a paradigm shift when moving from face-to-face to online learning. That is not easy. Furthermore, a BL instructor must come up with the best syllabus, figure out the best ratio between face-to-face and online learning, and the best way to present the content. No universal recipe exists for these ingredients. To help recognize the extra work

involved, perhaps institutions could offer incentives for their teachers to try BL; increase their technical training and support; and allow teachers to prepare classes and teach together to not only help reduce workload, but to gain confidence. The co-teaching experience in this study worked well, and perhaps needs to be considered as a viable option for BL. But a note of caution needs to be added here: the teachers were well matched in terms of teaching styles and compatibility.

A fifth challenge came when students tried to evaluate their peers' work on the final project. This challenge is probably not limited to the BL format. In this study, little evidence existed that learners suggested to their classmates how they could improve their work. This might be due to a lack of maturity, knowledge, and skills because of their age. It could also be that students are afraid of hurting their peers' feelings. My speculations concur with a meta-analysis of research on group learning activities as reported in 32 studies published in *Teaching of Psychology* between 1974 and 2011. It states: "Our hypothesis of better learning outcomes with peer assessment was not supported. In fact, the data suggest that the opposite pattern may exist" (Tomcho & Foeis, 2012, p. 164). Gielen et al. (2010) argued that students need training to give appropriate feedback and that peer feedback cannot replace the feedback of an expert, usually the instructor. This needs to be a topic of future study in the pedagogy of teaching any content course.

A sixth BL challenge, which is true of non-BL courses, too, is dealing with some students' sense of entitlement. Since many students who are now earning undergraduate degrees are arriving with perspectives and egos that have been shaped by overindulgent parents, social media, the Internet, technology, and disposable income (Rhee, Sanders, &

Simpson, 2010), several experts contend that these students feel entitled to instructors providing them with certain treatments, services, and benefits (Howe & Strauss, 2000), because they see themselves as customers of the university (Fullerton, 2013). According to Fullerton's study, most of the students "expect to get quality in service" due to the "high price" they pay for college. Furthermore, some students do not relate their actual performance responsibilities for a course to grades (Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, & Reinhardt, 2010).

The primary example of entitlement I experienced in this study was that some students felt the grading was tough. Through the informal interviews, students generally responded with agreement to one learner's comment, "Effort is hard to assess. A student could put forth much effort, but may not have even a basic understanding of course material." But in an interesting contrast, when it came to their own work, effort should play a major role in assigning grades. This was evident in some emails the instructor received from a few students who did not receive an "A" on their final project. They stated that they spent many hours on the project, but failed to understand how missing information such as not discussing the historical context or literary elements (which were on a checklist as requirements for the project) hurt the peers they were teaching in understanding the story. These same students, too, were unable to articulate how the instructors would assess their efforts.

The conclusion here for BL, like for other course formats, is to keep in mind that college students expect not only to have a voice but also a significant amount of control over the college experience (Singleton-Jackson, Jackson, & Reinhardt, 2010) since they



view themselves as customers who are paying for a common product. So, perhaps rather than objecting to this metaphor, it would be helpful to embrace it in ways that help instructors to develop strategies for working with entitled students. Efforts to personalize the course experience for learners, demonstrating concern for their well-being, and supplying grading rationale may help. Also, encouraging students new to college to do extra work whenever there is a chance, not only helps with the final grade, but reflects positively on their own character and work ethic when it comes to getting recommendations from professors for scholarships or jobs. Such strategies might assist in changing learners' attitudes about their instructors' engagement and the quality of learning these students are experiencing. For the other side, perhaps teacher assessments need rethinking. The instructors may feel extreme pressure to inflate grades, because they may be judged by how popular they are with students. I know I did. I have witnessed in my teaching career that higher student grades often equate with teacher evaluations. Lackey and Lackey (2006) found the same thing.

The seventh challenge is the digital divide. In spite of the misconception that this is no longer a problem, the digital divide is actually growing rather than shrinking (Gee, 2009; Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014). Students with more computer literacy skills and greater access to technology supports for learning are obtaining bigger learning benefits not available to people of limited means. Students hurt by the digital divide are likely to come from older, lower income, rural, African-American or Latino/Hispanic American backgrounds. Some of these students have no access to the Internet or to a computer. Even though public libraries and computer labs in institutions of higher learning may aid

students somewhat, this is still not as effective as having home access 24-7. Students have to find transportation to access this technology in these public places and face time restrictions in using the computers. Moreover, learners from less-privileged backgrounds may have a difficult time with the technology due to their limited reading and writing skills and their lack of access to mentoring and technical support. Furthermore, students who are on the wrong side of the digital divide tend to use their technological devices and Internet access for game playing and/or searching for celebrity sites, which may undermine instead of enhance educational attainment (Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014). To make matters worse, with home access to computers and the Internet slowly but steadily increasing, policy makers may also believe that youth will learn whatever they need to know about technology in home environments, under the myth that all youth are digital native who can effortlessly absorb advanced media skills on their own or from friends, thus making public computer labs redundant (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010, p. 218). Such beliefs, Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010) point out, are naïve.

In addition, even though technology could provide accessibility and easier scheduling of classes, nontraditional adult learners returning to school later in life might find earning a degree daunting because technology is so heavily embedded in the learning environment of higher learning institutions. Learning both course content and technology in unison can be an overwhelming task for students who feel intimidated by technology. Even though only 2% of my students fit into this category, I spent more time working with them than the other 98%. More research work investigating how long it will take

these students to master the technology may give institutions of higher learning a direction as to how to help these students fulfill their learning goals.

Besides addressing the digital divide, another implication for institutes of higher learning who want to promote BL is the necessity of providing supports. Every student deserves the best education possible. In order to make college a more successful and meaningful experience for victims of the digital divide, these students need to see a purpose behind the computer usage, and be oriented to the benefits of knowing how to use computers in an efficient manner. Knowing the benefits and purpose of learning computer basics may lessen their computer anxiety and frustration. Also, increased technology supports may help these students from wasting time trying figuring out the technology at the expense of course content. The goal is to convince these learners that they do not need to be computer experts to do online course work, or complete and turn in assignments.

Expanding technological supports to have a support system for students and instructors in the form of a dedicated go-to person or staff member is critical for three reasons. One, online learning enables, but also demands, more self-determination and autonomy from learners. Two, further skills need to be developed and supported for learning in an online environment: skills in handling new media and the targeted search for and evaluation of information and knowledge (media literacy and knowledge management). And three, online education heavily depends on the faculty, who need advice and support for the pedagogical and technical challenges of on-line learning because of the complexity of media projects. Providing suitable institutional conditions

and organizational structures to support online teaching is in itself an element of support, because only in this way can faculty be enabled to make effective use of the new technologies in order to support their students.

Furthermore, although many BL instructors are happy to spend additional one-on-one time with students in need of technological assistance, they have other obligations and time constraints. Due to financial restraints, several institutions offer learning support through Web tutorials. However, this might be frustrating to students with computer anxiety. Perhaps a better method to aid the students, when the instructor is not available or other methods (i.e., Web-based tutorials) are not effective, is to hire and train fellow students to supervise computer labs. This has two possible advantages. One, it allows adult learners to work with peers, thereby creating a comfort zone for them to ask questions. But if the fellow students are a lot younger, this may make older students feel uncomfortable. My older students expressed this when I worked with them. Two, this strategy allows student workers to be mentors and teachers to adult learners, giving them a positive feeling while providing a great learning experience. Students in this study expressed such positive feelings when they taught a literary story to their peers. I imagine these same positive feelings would carry over to other subjects such as technology. In summary, much work still needs to be done to reduce the disparities in technology access. Unless more is done in terms of giving all students computers and technology, and providing the extra time, finances, and learning supports, BL could be seen as making the digital divide even greater. More about technological student support will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The last challenge is that many students are not aware of BL. Even though 95% of the students surveyed at the end of the course claimed they would take another BL course, only three of them knew what BL was when they began the semester. I am not sure if this percentage is due to the fact that most of the students involved in this study were freshmen or for some other reason. However, all of them said they knew about purely online classes at the start of semester. In fact, 48% of the students had enrolled previously in such a course. Thus, for this Midwestern university, the concept of BL is new. The implication here is that institutions of higher learning may want to do more to educate not only the faculty, but the students, too, about BL. I recommend that student advisors and handbooks explain to students what BL is and the purpose and objective of using this approach. Also, BL instructors will need to familiarize learners with the course website, the assignments and due dates, the study and resource materials available, and the class schedule, because this will be the first BL experience for many of them.

This section discussed the theme of BL challenges and its implications. The next section discusses the theme and implications that more supports are needed for BL.

#### Blended Learning Requires Plenty of Supports

The CABLS framework is different than other BL models in that it pushes learning support from the background to the foreground. CABLS promotes the idea that the learner has control over his/her own learning, a central tenet in the learner-centered approach. Learning supports help learners to gain better control over learning. The need for two types of support cropped up in this study: academic and technical. Academic supports focus on helping learners to develop effective learning strategies, such as time

management, study skills, reading, writing, collaboration, etc., while technical supports focus on helping students to improve their knowledge of technical tools and the fluency with which they use these tools to complete specific learning tasks (such as creating the major project). Both kinds of support are especially important for BL courses early in a student's college career when s/he is being introduced to a particular content area of study such as literature. Students who may benefit the most are some millennials, individuals born between 1982 and 2004 (Strauss and Howe, 1991), and digital divide victims: those students mentioned in the previous theme who face challenges with regard to accessing and using information technologies because of economic and social inequality challenges (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2004). These students might find the pressures of their general education courses and the first year of college taxing.

For example, millennial learners often come from highly structured hometown school systems that may place a higher value on conformity and high stakes testing rather than critical thinking and decision-making skills. This may be a result of what Strauss and Howe (1991) labeled as the "standards" movement which arose out of the federal mandate for outcomes-based education. Standards, by themselves, may be very supportive of quality education. However, this was not the case. Standardized tests are linked to everything from grade promotion and graduation to school funding. By degrees, standardized testing commonly became the measure of academic quality that counted in some school systems. With students' promotions and their own jobs on the line, instructors taught to the tests and reallocated class time to help students with test-taking

skills (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 158). Howe and Strauss (2000) wrote on this topic sixteen years ago at the start of No Child Left Behind. As these students have grown up, colleges are now feeling the effects of these teaching methods.

Such teaching methods may or may not prepare these students for college. Surveys confirm that millennials do not mind a more structured curriculum, more order, and more stress on basics. They prefer those subjects that measure their objective progress. They claim to like math and science more than the humanities, arts, and history because, perhaps, the latter subjects lack clear-cut answers (Howe & Strauss, 2000). To help digital divide and millennial learners, or for anyone else who needs it, learning supports can be established. Such institutional commitment can result in higher retention and greater academic achievement (Gardner & Siegel, 2001). Development of these learning supports would be informed by the needs of the learner, effectuated by the expertise of the instructor, necessitated by the constant advances in technology, and ensured by institutional support.

Furthermore, learning support for BL can be supplied in terms of academic and technical supports not only for the students, but for the teachers, too. Mastering BL often requires them to make a significant pedagogical shift. They will need to take on the role of learners themselves in how to implement BL. This requires risk taking. By supporting BL instructors, they may gain the confidence to take these risks and to push themselves and their learners to succeed in personalized learning environments. Thus, they, too, could use learning supports. The first part of this section is devoted to teacher technical support. The second part is devoted to student learning supports.

### Teacher Technological Support

Technology plays a crucial and complex role in BL. Some institutes of higher learning value experimentation and support such initiatives as BL. However, many instructors, like the researcher/co-teacher, feel as if they are “technological dinosaurs.” For instructors of a certain generation, technology is like learning a foreign language. They are not digital natives. Therefore, online teaching could be scary. There is a lot to learn about both BL pedagogy and use of technology. And often it seems like even before the technology gets mastered, newer forms of it appear. Therefore, instructors need nurturing support. Without it, instructors are likely to find that learning how to teach in a BL course is both difficult and frustrating.

Moving a course online, even for only a portion of time such as in BL, can be a chance to use a more learner-centered, research-based pedagogy. Because online teaching is new to many instructors, institutions need to ensure that there is no shame in seeking help with how to do this. For some instructors, as it was for the researcher and her co-teacher, working in course design or redesign can be a professionally rewarding experience. Other instructors, on the other hand, may simply attempt to adopt what they do in class to online setting or meet the online requirements with the least amount of effort (Jaggers, 2011). Several instructional design guides (Graesser, 2009; Kali & Linn, 2010; Koedinger, Corbett, & Perfetti, 2012) are available to help BL teachers. However, a full discussion of all this guidance is beyond the scope of this study.

The recommendation here is that by addressing the factors contributing to teacher fear of technology, institutions may help promote BL. Remembering to set up trainings



and ongoing support with instructional strategies that nurture teachers might make instructors feel comfortable. If the teachers have never used technology tools such as blogs or social media beyond social interaction and entertainment in their free time, the tools will seem strange. Implementing new technology can be frightening. Whether it's a fear of letting go of control or a sense that one does not possess the right skills or a concern about digital footprint, privacy, or cyber-bullying, many instructors are basically scared. Therefore, professional development that addresses skills and motivation may aid teachers to see that technology can be a positive thing. Usually, instructors are motivated and somewhat skilled. What they often lack is a belief in their own ability to create tech-integrated lessons.

It is crucial that institutions of higher learning find a way to provide a positive nurturing learning environment not only for students, but for teachers as well. My experience teaching at my university has given rise to the following suggestions. If BL gains in popularity, my institution will need to continue and expand such measures. More support staff will be needed. It was helpful having a computer lab where workshops are held on a regular basis on different aspects of using and teaching with technology—a method that will go a long way in helping instructors become acclimated to using computers. Also, problems will occur when working with technology. It is crucial that instructors have experts they can turn to whenever (24-7) they need technical help. Often times I worked on my BL course on weekends, late at night, or in the wee morning hours. Good technical support goes a long way in fostering feelings of comfort and confidence when teaching in a BL environment. It is especially easy for teachers to be humiliated.

Whether or not instructors would be open to such help is a major question. Many of them are already strapped for time. In addition, because BL is a complex adaptive system, the technological support needs to consider not only the students, but the teachers, too. The support needs to promote the innovations and expectations of the instructors. This can bring joy, as it did for me. Refer back to the action research presented in Chapter 6. I know the positive feelings I experienced were passed on to the blended Introduction to Literature students. This was revealed in their attitudes and work as outlined in Chapters 4 and 5.

Above all, it is critical for institutions to realize that making mistakes will be a part of the process of learning how to teach online. One of the teacher identities was “being human.” Change requires patience. Redesigning a course for BL is an evolving process. Instructors should not expect too much at first. It helps to view the BL course as a “work in progress.” Moreover, since many instructors are from the humanities areas and prefer the face-to-face format, they deserve special encouragement to teach BL courses. They are likely to relate easily to the challenges the students will face in BL.

As a final note on this topic, institutions demonstrating a commitment to instructors via incentives, rewards, or support for designing and preparing to teach in the BL mode may begin improving this situation. For instance, release time, stipends, or a reduced teaching load during the design and development phases would further promote BL. In summary, the literature contains plenty of information about BL pedagogy for teachers, but research needs to explore a new pedagogy for students in BL courses, too. The second part of this discussion is about this topic.

### Student Academic and Technological Support

This study indicates that some students need academic supports chiefly for time management, study skills, reading, writing, and collaboration to help them succeed for not only a BL course specifically, but in college generally. The vast majority of the students taking the blended Introduction to Literature course involved in the study were freshmen. Those in the fall semester were experiencing what it was like to be away from home for the first time and establishing a new life at college. They were hit with the realization that college is more demanding academically than high school.

The surveys in Chapter 4, the student work in Chapter 5, and my observations in the action research in Chapter 6 of this study concur with the literature (McGill, Beetham, & Gray, 2016) by flagging four categories of student characteristics that may account for some students' struggles with online learning and college. These are:

- weak academic preparation,
- competing workplace and family priorities,
- lack of technology skills and needed technology infrastructure, and
- underdeveloped skills for learning independently.

In spite of the co-instructors promoting on numerous occasions the use of support resources available on campus such as the college library's reference desk, student technical support, the writing center, and other academic supports, few students took advantage of them.

When I informally asked the students about their hesitation or delay in getting such help, they gave various reasons. One was they felt the need to prove themselves.

This could be to themselves, family, and/or friends. They felt ashamed or that a stigma was attached to needing help and would mark them as being stupid or a failure. Some did not recognize or want to admit they needed help. Some did not know how to advocate for themselves or to go about asking for the help that they needed. And for others, the concept of academic support on campus and it is okay to use it is so new, they were not aware of all the help and support available.

These resources are only helpful if students take advantage of them. So, how can students be encouraged to locate and use all of the support that colleges have to offer? Are these supports enough? No simple answers yet exist. Perhaps the only thing that can be done right now is to keep exploring options and building as many safeguards as possible to help students such as those in the BL Introduction to Literature course.

The hope is to come up with strategies that increase BL success. Perhaps limits can be placed on enrollment in classes having an online component to students with good prospects for success or to design BL courses with associated learning support systems to foster student behaviors that lead to successful learning. This would require setting prerequisites for taking BL courses, improvements to the pedagogy of BL courses, and improvements to the learning support systems. These strategies are based upon the recommendations from Means, Bakia, and Murphy (2014). These tie into my findings as being possible solutions for those students who had a difficult time with BL.

Some possible ways to set prerequisites for taking BL courses would be to administer an assessment of “readiness for online learning,” to restrict enrollment in BL to students with a qualifying grade point average, and/or to require successful completion

of an online and study skills orientation prior to course enrollment. However, potential problems exist with each prerequisite. Generally, assessment of “readiness for online learning” are self-assessments. Although such assessments may prove useful in setting up course expectations, their validity is not well established. A problem associated with them is that they are usually inventories and that the answer indicative of readiness to do online learning is obvious, and students wanting to take classes that incorporate online learning such as BL may supply the “correct” replies regardless of their true state of readiness (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014). Furthermore, the use of such instruments to restrict enrollment goes against the inclusion philosophy. The same is true on using grade point averages. The problem here is that “a grade is an inadequate report of an inaccurate judgment by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown proportion of an indefinite amount of material” (Dressel, 1989). This is especially true with today’s grade inflation trend.

An alternative to trying to limit access to courses with online components would be to encourage students to attend and pass an online and study skills orientation prior to course enrollment. Wojciechowski and Palmer’s (2005) findings indicated that a face-to-face orientation does predict success in a subsequent course that is partially or wholly online, but this conclusion relates to a voluntary orientation and making it mandatory might reduce its predictive power. Currently, such orientation courses are usually brief (only an hour or two) and lack opportunities to practice the online and study skills necessary to succeed in such a course (Means, Bakia, & Murphy, 2014). For example,

learning to manage time properly requires the skill being exercised over time. A course in learning how to learn online might be a better option. The potential problem with this is that requiring such a course before the students attempt any online courses is that these courses may extend the amount of time needed to finish their degree program. More research needs to be done in this area.

Nevertheless, students in BL courses deserve better support. At the bare minimum, institutions of higher learning can:

- Evaluate how learning supports need to be expanded on campus.
- Counsel students individually to clarify course expectations and set up needed arrangements before the course starts.
- Provide mentors for students.
- Institute “early alert” systems based on learner analytics and course progress measures.

This section dealt with the discussion and recommendations about academic and technological support for students in BL courses and technological support for instructors teaching BL courses. The next section deals with the “BL may not be cost saving” discussion theme and its recommendations.

### Blended Learning May Not Be Cost Saving

As mentioned in Chapter 2, several institutions of higher learning look at BL as a means to cut costs in education. However, the question of whether online learning is more or less cost effective than other alternatives does not lend itself to a simple yes or no answer. BL costs involve a lot of factors, including the operating budget, the students

served, the subject domain, scale, and design factors such as the amount of blending between online and face-to-face components, and the role of the instructor. Furthermore, it is probable that various models of online learning used, as well as different implementation details, will impact cost and outcomes.

Although specific costs will vary by program, the categories of costs that would need to be considered for BL include:

- Personnel costs which would include program development, program delivery, training/professional development, administration/management, and staffing for technical support. This will also include the time of teachers, teaching assistants, and anyone else involved in creating or running the BL courses.
- Facilities costs would include classrooms, computer labs, buildings, remodeling, and furniture for instructional and administrative purposes as well as for housing needed equipment.
- Equipment/infrastructure costs for equipment purchases, band width, leases, upgrades, hardware, software, network, installation, maintenance, and support.
- Materials and supplies costs such as purchased curriculum if it is required to go this route, physical course materials, and office, printing, and copying supplies.
- Other costs to ensure the legal and successful operation of BL that are not already mentioned such as evaluation and student and teacher support services.

Factoring in such costs, BL may be more or less cost effective than the traditional classroom-based education. Costs can vary greatly depending on the implementation

model, the number of students served, and the size of the investment in software development or subscription fees.

Perhaps like anything else, what an institution will get out of its BL courses depends upon what it is willing to put into it financially. Besides the basic costs just bulleted, there are some other serious points to consider. These are the same concerns as those for fully online courses. First, BL courses could be redesigned to use teaching assistants and technology to replace higher paid faculty for some or all of the course contact hours. Second, to defray costs, BL courses could increase the number of students enrolled in a particular course by increasing the student-teacher ratio. Would these truly be good things? Should financial concerns outweigh best pedagogical practices? For example, in subject domains, such as literature courses, where discussion is important, where qualitative judgements and decisions have to be made by students and instructors, where knowledge needs to be developed and structured, and where the learning requires more than the transmission and repetition of information, it is critical that students be able to interact with a teacher who has a deep understanding of the subject area.

Class size, too, can influence the effectiveness of a course. Currently, massive open online courses (MOOCs) are gaining popularity. These are defined as personalized online courses that allow thousands of students to participate at any one time. Right or wrong, MOOCs give the impression that it possible to scale up even credit-based online learning for less expense. However, just as it is with large face-to-face classes, the pedagogy for large online or BL courses will resort more to information transmission than the higher level critical thinking that literary analysis demands. In my many years of



experience, courses such as the Introduction to Literature require small class sizes (20-25 students) for best student achievement.

Another point to be considered is that it is critical for institutions to ensure that all students have both access to computers at any time and instruction in technology. More work yet needs to be done to narrow the digital divide until it is gone completely. The recommendation here is that for a start, institutions need to furnish each classroom, office, teacher workroom, and library/media center with affordable, high speed, seamless, and equal Internet access. To put it simply: funding is needed to support BL teaching pedagogy and the best of online education to provide effective and accountable learning for all students. In order to make BL truly successful, everyone involved in BL needs to make the learners the top priority. They must ensure that saving money will not be obtained at learners' expense.

Lastly, if BL gains in popularity, more staff will be needed for support. See the support section of this chapter for more information.

This section presented a discussion and recommendations about the idea that BL may not be cost saving. Overall, the answer is--it depends. Much depends upon different factors such as the operating budget, the students served, the subject domain, scale, design factors such as the amount of blending between online and face-to-face components, and the role of the instructor. It is impossible to place a single price tag on online learning, of which BL is one form. The choices, the trade-offs, quality considerations, and timeliness, vary a lot. Perhaps whether or not BL is cost saving is not really the question to ask. Is the main reason to adopt BL because of its costs or rather for

learners' benefits? Ultimately, the goal is to promote a system that is student-centric, one that seeks the best possible learning effectively and efficiently. And just as “no-one-size -fits-all” recipe exists for educating all learners, perhaps there is “no-one-size -fits-all” recipe to implement BL. The next section is about the limitations of this study.

### Limitations

Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that all research has limitations; there is no perfect design. There may also be delimitations. Limitations include factors the researcher cannot control, while delimitations are boundaries the researcher intentionally sets. As in most studies, this dissertation encountered a few limitations and delimitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

One limitation concerns time. A study, such as this, conducted over a certain interval of time is a snapshot dependent on conditions occurring during that time. The underlying premise of CABLS is that BL is always in a state of transformation. What is happening is dependent on what is going on with its various subsystems and how they interrelate to each other at a particular moment in time. As such, a successful approach as this one for the blended Introduction to Literature course must be flexible and subject to transformation in the future.

A second potential limitation concerns the lack of cultural diversity. The students were primarily Caucasian Midwesterners under the age of twenty. Results may be different in blended Introduction to Literature courses made up of more nontraditional students, of different ethnic backgrounds, and of those who spoke English as a second language.

A third limitation and delimitation concerns attitude. The students knew that one of the co-teachers was using the data from the Introduction to Literature courses for her dissertation. This awareness in itself could have resulted in the Hawthorne effect since the student participants were a part of the study and knew what was at stake for the researcher; the participants may have been more engaged in the course than they otherwise would have been. Likewise, utilizing action research could have had a similar effect on the researcher's teaching. Teaching can easily become routine and automatic when one simply "goes through the motions" of teaching without examining the effectiveness of that teaching. Action research requires teacher educators to place his/her teaching "under a microscope each week," which may help prevent teaching from becoming rote.

Another delimitation concerns the researcher's subjectivity. In using action research, the "researcher's degree of involvement" with participants is an unavoidable implication, as one is both the researcher and the teacher of the class that one is researching. Being both the "researcher" and the "researched" can be viewed as a limitation; however, proponents of action research (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Good & Brophy, 2003; Gruhler, 2004) consider the dual role an asset rather than a limitation to a study.

Fifth, this study focused on undergraduate students in a research II Midwestern university enrolled in a blended Introduction to Literature course. Though the results are valid as to how the students perceived and achieved in the blended Introduction to Literature course at this university, these may not be generalized to all other institutions.

The data collected here may reflect this institution's characteristics. Differences in college experiences, perceptions, and gains in learning may vary from one institution to the next. This may depend on such factors as the background, and characteristics of the students as well as the teachers' philosophies and personalities, to the institution's policies, practices, learning supports, and technology. If BL is truly a complex adaptive system, then each BL course will have its unique way in which its different subsystems consisting of the learner, the teacher, the content, the technology, the support systems, and the institution all fit together.

A final delimitation involves the transactional theory of reading. If Rosenblatt (1984) believed comprehension resulted from the transaction between the reader and the written word, then it follows that to apply transactional theory in education, teachers must show students how to use what they read and what they know to build meaning. While working on this study, I have applied the transactional theory to the data. As expected of all qualitative work, results of this study are based upon what I have known and experienced. Someone else with a different knowledge base and experience may have different qualitative results.

This section focused on the limitations of the study. The next section contains recommendations for future study that have emerged from this study.

#### Future Studies

Although this research represents one method of using BL to teach a particular course (Introduction to Literature), this study reveals untapped potential and important issues to be explored in future research, such as the necessity of providing learning

support, promoting institutional involvement as well as the other nonlinear relationships of the learner, the teacher, the content, and the technology. Even though my study combined factors such as the transactional theory of reading, the next step logically for BL specifically is to study the implementation of other interventionist projects not only for introductory literary courses, but other general education courses in various content areas to discover the effects of applying the CABLS framework for BL in higher education institutions. As for using the transactional theory of reading in a BL course with the CABLS perspective, it would be interesting to see how my results compare to other institutions with different learners and teachers.

Furthermore, as BL gains popularity in institutions of higher learning, there will be a real need for them to employ a formal approach to the development of policies to support BL courses. Wang et al. (2015) made it clear that there is an inadequate number of studies about the institution as a subsystem in BL. This supports the statement made by Porter, Graham, Spring, and Welch (2014): “while a number of scholars have conducted course-level investigations of BL’s effectiveness, very few have provided guidance for BL adoption at the institutional level” (p. 185). This entails that BL will clearly need to be defined. This definition needs to be broad enough to maximize the opportunity for innovation. The worst policies would contain a definition that confines BL in a tight, prescribed box that limit its possibilities. Keeping this in mind, this study will end with some concluding remarks.

### Concluding Remarks

This study was about one Midwestern university's approach to improve the Introduction to Literature course using a BL format. In this study, BL appears to be a promising format to use for introductory literature courses. The approach used here garnered success in terms of student perceptions and achievement. The vast majority of students liked the experience and expressed no hesitation to take another BL course in the future. But in spite of this conclusion, BL may not be for everyone. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the development, implementation, and future research for such courses consider both the pedagogy of new online instruction and learning innovations. Before CABLS, BL effectiveness studies have generally failed to specify the main features of the learning experience design, and treated the online course aspects or other learning experience as if they were self-contained, ignoring the broader context in which learning takes place and the relationship between online and face-to-face learning activities.

BL is a broad, complex, adaptive, and dynamic system that will self-organize and co-evolve. It is made up of at least six various subsystems: the learner, the instructor, the technology, the content, the learning support, and the institution. Each of these BL subsystems act within themselves and upon one another in a dynamic and non-linear fashion. Bringing all six of these dimensions together in the CABLS framework (Wang et al., 2015) can help other instructors in institutions of higher learning to understand, design, and implement blended Introduction to Literature courses.

CABLS suggests that successful BL such as this Introduction to Literature course, arise out of several subsystems (the learner, the instructor, the technology, the content, the learning support, and the institution) interrelating and working together. According to CABLS, the synergistic whole of BL is greater than the sum of its parts and inseparable from them. When the CABLS lens is applied to thinking, several opportunities arise for reflection about how BL courses can best be designed to support student learning. Hopefully, this will also encourage further experimentation with BL courses.

Perhaps the point is not to find an answer, or even many answers about designing and implementing a blended Introduction to Literature course. The underlying reality of complex adaptive systems such as CABLS is that they are always in a state of transformation. As such, successful course designs for BL must be flexible and subject to transformation. The challenge of such an adventure beckons those who dream of BL as a joyous format for learning, but yet are willing to put forth the time and effort to face the somewhat difficult, sometimes exasperating, creative, exhilarating process of bringing forth such BL courses as the Introduction to Literature course described in this study.

Lastly, viewing a detailed description of BL designs such as this one may offer other instructors of Introduction to Literature courses ideas and insights that might improve similar higher level general education classes. It is also important to reflect on their own course designs, teaching, and experiences –both as learners and as instructors. Such reflective practices are likely to stimulate innovative thinking, as instructors combine personal experiences from the past, current practices used today, and new approaches encountered in future research into unique blends that fit their literature

students, their content, and themselves as instructors. This journey needs to be flexible.

BL, as all of education, will continue to change and evolve through the upcoming years.



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APPENDIX A: PAPER-BASED MATERIALS-SYLLABUS FOR FACE-TO-FACE PORTION

**Introduction to Literature Syllabus**



Introduction to Literature: Classics of the Short Story  
ENGLISH 1120. Fall 2014. Room: Lang 8

Dr. Jeffrey S. Copeland, Bartlett 2048. Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX  
E-mail = Jeffrey.Copeland@uni.edu AND english0003@uni.edu  
Office Hours: 1:30-3:00 T-Th -- and by appointment

Julie L. Klein, Bartlett 2048. Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX  
E-mail = jk218100@uni.edu  
Office Hours: 1:30-3:00 T-Th -- and by appointment

SCHEDULE  
(first part of course)

(NOTE: All stories in our text unless noted below.)

Aug. 26: Orientation, assignments given, course features/policies explained

Aug. 28: Lecture: Elements of the Short Story & Establishing a Model for Critique.  
First short story, and related homework, assigned.

Sept. 2: The Cask of Amontillado, Edgar Allan Poe

Sept. 4: Bartleby the Scrivener, Herman Melville

Sept. 9: The Interlopers, Saki (H.H. Munro -- from internet site)

Sept. 11: A Good Man is Hard to Find, Flannery O'Connor

Sept. 16: The Lottery, Shirley Jackson

Sept. 18: Sonny's Blues, James Baldwin

Sept. 23: Where are You Going, Where Have You Been? Joyce Carol Oats

Sept. 25: Balto, T.C. Boyle

Sept. 30: Two Kinds, Amy Tan

Oct. 2: The Lesson, Toni Cade Bambara

Oct. 7: A Moment of Grace, Jeffrey S. Copeland (from internet site)

Oct. 9: Mid-Term Exam -- and assignments given for the "on-line/independent" portion of the course. DO NOT MISS THIS CLASS!!!!

Oct. 14: Beginning of the "independent" portion of the course. Content and assignments for this portion of the course will have already been explained. The independent study portion of your work now begins!!!

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**Syllabus Part II (provided later):** This will cover both the "face-to-face" classes we will continue to have and the "independent" portion of the course that starts Oct. 14.

\*\*\*\*\*ATTENDANCE POLICY: WE have always treated our students like, well, mature college students -- and we understand there will be times when you must miss class. If that happens, it will be YOUR responsibility to make up any missed work -- and turn it in as soon as you can. Also, because the first half of the course is "face-to-face" and the second half is mostly "independent/on-line" work, it logically stands to reason that you must attend as many of the classes as possible during the first half of the course. Therefore, we are going to have a limit of "no more than three" absences (for any reason) during the first half of the course. For three absences, you may still turn in your work late. However, starting with the fourth absence, the maximum points you can receive for late work will be 50% of the points for the assignments.

TEXTBOOK: You will have just one textbook for this class. This book is as follows: *40 Short Stories: A Portable Anthology* (fourth edition), by Beverly Lawn.

The text is available from the UNI bookstore or various on-line booksellers.

For the "internet site" short stories (those not in our book), please type into your search box (Google is easiest) "Full Text" after the title of the story; this will take you to sites that have the story in its entirety. I will also be providing you with internet links as well.

\*\*\*\*\*COURSE POLICIES:

\*We don't mind if you eat snacks and such during class. After all, most of you will probably be missing breakfast to get to this class. However, please do not bring "stinky" or "loud" food that will distract others.

\*Some of you are in charge of child-care. If you need to bring your children to class, that will be just fine (on a limited basis...).

\*Keeping in line with general University wishes, unless otherwise announced, electronic devices (like laptops, I-Pads, and other similar items) are not allowed in class. Students have actually asked for this because the devices are too darn disruptive in class!

\*Please put your cell phones on silent or vibrate as soon as you enter the room. I'll keep my cell phone on just in case we all get one of the emergency messages from the University. If, on a given day, you feel you should be allowed to keep your cell phone on, please clear it with me first so that I don't jump when it rings.

\*Do all of your own work. In short, UNI has what some would describe as a "brutal" plagiarism policy, one which could actually result in you being thrown out of school if you get caught (I'll explain this in class). If you get caught in a plagiarism issue, I'm required by University rule to report it, so I can't "give you a break" in this area without potentially getting you into even more trouble down the road. So, don't do it!

To: All Students in our "Introduction to Literature" class  
 From: Professor Copeland and Professor Klein  
 Subject: **Syllabus, Part II** (for "on-line/independent" portion of the course, which begins October 13)

During the first section of this course we conducted a very intense examination of classics of the American short story. In this part of the course we looked at many approaches to literature study, examined the lives of the writers, looked at how different writers use the range of the elements of literature to craft their stories, and even added elements of "historical context" to help us better understand what each writer was doing. With this background and experience under your belts, you are now ready to tackle the "Learning Pods" phase of the course. During this next phase, we will combine your independent work with face-to-face class meetings to achieve what we believe will be an excellent educational experience, one which will enrich your reading experiences both now and well into your future lives as readers. At the same time, we will be learning much from your experiences that will help shape the course for future students.

In terms of overall structure for the work to be completed for each Learning Pod, please consider the following as a model. We realize each of you will have a different style of working on the stories, but we believe it will help everyone if we start with this schedule as a "standard" for the work:

\*\*\*By the Tuesday of each week, you will watch/read the lecture related to the story assigned for that period of examination (PowerPoint presentation on Google Drive site).  
 \*\*\*Then, after watching/reading the lecture (PowerPoint presentation), you will read the assigned story, answer (in writing) the questions at the end of the lecture, and complete the critique sheet (close examination of the literary style elements) by the Friday of each week.  
 \*\*\*Finally, you will send to both of us, at our UNI e-mail addresses, your responses to the lecture questions AND the completed critique sheets -- as Word Documents (**NOTE: Do NOT send through Google Drive because we can't open those!**). Please plan to send us these items by midnight of the Friday of that week.

**NOTE: You will receive \*one\* "get-out-of-jail-free" card to play during the independent portion of the class. That is, we will allow you to be late turning on ONE of the assignments (later than Friday midnight) without penalty. However, all other late work will be marked down in points accordingly, at the rate of a minimum of 2 points per day.**

The specific schedule for the Learning Pods and our continued face-to-face class meetings is listed below. Please mark all dates on your calendars so there will be no confusion of "where and when" work is to be completed.

**Learning Pod 1:**

October 13: Watch/read the lecture for "The Ransom of Red Chief," by O. Henry (story on our class Google Drive site).

October 15: Answer (in writing) the questions from the lecture/PowerPoint and complete your critique sheets related to the story.

October 16: Send to both of us your completed work (both parts) by midnight on this date.

### **Learning Pod 2:**

October 20: Watch/read the lecture/PowerPoint for, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," by Mark Twain.

October 22: Answer (in writing) the questions from the lecture/PowerPoint and complete your critique sheet related to the story.

October 23: Send us your completed work by midnight on this date.

October 27: NOTE: We will all come back together in Lang 8 for face-to-face class on this date. We will review work completed for first two Learning Pods. We will also discuss "author style elements" that will be in the upcoming stories.

October 29: NOTE: Back together in Lang 8 for face-to-face class on this date.

\*\*\*Additional note: You will choose your partner for the "Major Project" assignment during this week as well while we are meeting as a group.

### **Learning Pod 3:**

November 3: Watch/read the lecture/PowerPoint for "To Build a Fire," by Jack London.

November 5: Answer (in writing) the questions from the lecture/PowerPoint and complete your critique sheets related to the story.

November 6: Send to both of us your completed work by midnight on this date.

### **NOTE: BEGINNING OF MAJOR PROJECT WORK HERE:**

### **Learning Pod 4:**

Major Project Work Schedule:

November 10: Read a story OF YOUR CHOICE from our text and begin preparing your research for your presentation related to this story. Continue with your research into the story and the life of the author the rest of this week. On the Friday of this week (November 13), please send to both of us a very short description of the work you have completed this week. You do NOT have to have the work completed, but you DO need to send us a few sentences to let us know two things:

1. Which story you chose to work on for your independent project (any other story of your choice from the textbook). NOTE: Please check with your partner to make sure you are doing different stories!

2. And, just give us a couple of sentences to let us know what work you have done to this point on your project. For example, have you started working on the "biography" of the writer section? Have you read the story yet? Anything else you've done to this point? Basically, this is just a "check in" time so that we can see if anyone needs help. We do

NOT want people waiting until the last minute to work on this project, so please keep yourself on schedule. If you need help, ask for it early for a \*practical\* reason: We have a very large number of students in the two sections, and if you wait until the last minute to ask for help, the odds wouldn't be good we could get back to you on time. Again, ask early for help if you need it!

### **Learning Pod 5 -- Work Continued:**

November 17-20

NOTE: The work this week will be devoted to the completion of the major projects.

### **November 23 - 27 -- Thanksgiving Break -- enjoy!**

December 1: Your completed project is due!!!! This should be sent electronically to BOTH of us -- AND to your partner on this date.

After your partner sends you her/his project, you will then read the story and complete the critique sheet - and answer the questions at the end of the project/ powerpoint.

December 8: Send your completed critique sheet and answers to the questions at the end of the project PowerPoint to BOTH of us by midnight on this date. At the same time, send a copy to your partner so he/she can see the work you completed! The partner will then send you her/his comments about your work as well!

December 10: We will meet as a class again in Lang 8. We will discuss your work on the major project. We will also go over your Final Exam at this time, so please do not miss this class. The Final Exam will be completed electronically and sent to both of us.

December 15: Completed Final Exam due electronically to both of us by midnight on this date.

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**Special Note:** While you are working on the Learning Pods, we will be just an e-mail or telephone call away if you'd like assistance with your work. During the Learning Pods portion, our office hours routine will change to allow us additional time for consultation if you wish to do so. We plan to be out working with you in the technology centers, library -- and even the union or other campus location if that would turn out to be most appropriate. Therefore, please contact us by e-mail or phone at your earliest convenience to make an appointment for us to consult.

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### **FORMAL DIRECTIONS FOR YOUR MAJOR PROJECT:**

Your major project to complete during the independent portion: You are to use the PowerPoint outline (on our class Google Drive site) to create a PowerPoint presentation for \*one\* additional story (any other story of your choice from our text). Use the PowerPoints we've viewed in class (and during your independent work) as the model for your work. We will be providing additional directions soon.

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Our contact information for the periods involving the Learning Pods:

Professor Copeland:

e-mail = jeffrey.copeland@uni.edu (Note: I have several university e-mail accounts, so you may get a response from one of the following as well: english.conference@uni.edu OR english0003@uni.edu All three are routed to my regular in-box.

Cell Phone: (314) 960-9836 (feel free to call any time before 10:00 p.m. at night.)

Professor Klein:

e-mail = jk218100@uni.edu

Cell Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

We believe you will very much enjoy this opportunity to demonstrate what you have learned/are learning. Enjoy!

NOTE: We would like to mention this again: **All** independent study (on-line/electronic) work will be due no later than December 10, which is, technically, the last day of the class before the week of final examinations. You will NOT have a traditional final examination in this course. Rather, you will have a "take-home" essay/writing assignment, which will be described to you at a later date. The Final Exam will be due on December 15.

## Drums by D.C. Elder

I'm like in eighth grade and I got this teacher and she's short and plays the piano and us kids are supposed to be a choir, but that's some joke. Anyway, Christmas is coming and she says to me, "Do you play the drums?" And I say, "No, but I will if you want." I said that because I always knew how to handle the teachers, especially the older, funny-looking ones. Anyway, I say, "Sure." So, she gives me this coffee can with part of a tire stretched over the top to make a kind of ratty-looking drum and she says, "You just keep the rhythm going and help us, will you please?" I just smile and beat that crummy drum but all the while I know I'm the one that gets the drum because I don't sing good and she wants to be Paul Schaeffer or the conductor of the Boston Pops or somebody doing miracles with the junior high choir and she don't want me to mess it up.

So, I beat that crummy drum. Everybody's singing and I'm not and I ask her about it one time after class and she says, "Some people just don't sing good and you're some people."

Well, me, I want to cry but I do it later when she don't see and she don't never know how mean she is, but from then on any time I'm alone I sing. I sing in the shower. I sing walking down the street. All the time I sing. I learn all the words to all the songs on the radio and I got all my sister's cd's by heart. I figure there ain't nobody gonna tell me I can't sing, 'cause I do.

I guess I'd like to have that music teacher be a soldier in an army where I'm the general. I'd tell her, "You can't shoot that rifle, stupid." And "Go peel potatoes 'cause that's all you're good for." Or maybe she could be a grocery bagger in a market where I'm the manager and I'd say, "Watch how I put this quart of milk in this bag and see if you can do it right, but I know you can't so you're fired!" Or maybe someday when all this singing I'm doing pays off and I'm a famous singer with a famous band, then I'll come back to this lousy school and tell everybody the music teacher and me are gonna do a duet. I'll be famous and all the kids and their folks and maybe the whole town will come. Then I'll find that stupid woman and she'll be all excited and she'll ask me, "What are we gonna sing?" Me, I'll just put this real serious look on my face and I'll ask her, "Do you play the drums?"

\*\*\*\*\*

In this writing, how does the writer develop this character so strongly? Which methods are used – and which are not? Five methods a writer can use to reveal and develop character:

- 1). What they say,
- 2). What they do,
- 3). What others say about them
- 4). Their physical characteristics
- 5). Their "motives" (what makes them tick)

#### APPENDIX D: PAPER-BASED MATERIALS- ELEMENTS OF LITERATURE



## Brief Descriptions of the Elements of the Short Story:

(To be used when using the rubric)

### SETTING:

In works of narrative (especially fictional), the **setting** includes the historical moment in time and geographic location in which a story takes place, and helps initiate the main backdrop and mood for a story. Elements of setting may include culture, historical period, geography, and hour. Along with plot, character, theme, and style, setting is considered one of the fundamental components of fiction

### CHARACTERIZATION:

#### *Direct or explicit characterization*

The author literally tells the audience what a character is like. This may be done via the narrator, another character or by the character him- or herself.

#### *Indirect or implicit characterization*

The audience must infer for themselves what the character is like through the character's thoughts, actions, speech (choice of words, way of talking), looks and interaction with other characters, including other characters' reactions to that particular person.

A well-developed character acts according to past instances provided by its visible traits unless more information about the character is provided. The better the audience knows the character, the better the character development.

However, characters whose behavior is completely predictable can seem **underdeveloped** - flat, shallow or stereotypical; a greater sense of realism occurs if the characterization makes the characters seem well-rounded and complex.

Within the Direct and Indirect areas, there are 5 primary methods an author can use to reveal character:

- \*What they SAY
- \*What they DO
- \*What others SAY ABOUT THEM
- \*Their PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS
- \*Their MOTIVES (what makes them tick)

### POINT OF VIEW:

### **First-person view**

In a **first-person narrative** the story is relayed by a narrator who is also a character within the story, so that the narrator reveals the plot by referring to this viewpoint character as "I" (or, when plural, "we"). Oftentimes, the first-person narrative is used as a way to directly convey the deeply internal, otherwise unspoken thoughts of the narrator. Frequently, the narrator's story revolves around him-/herself as the protagonist and allows this protagonist/narrator character's inner thoughts to be conveyed openly to the audience, even if not to any of the other characters

### **Second-person view**

The rarest mode in literature (though quite common in song lyrics) is the **second-person narrative mode**, in which the narrator refers to the reader as "you", therefore making the audience member feel as if he or she is a character within the story. Examples of this are the "Choose your own adventure" and "Fighting Fantasy" series of books which were popular in the 1980s

### **Third-person view**

Third-person narration provides the greatest flexibility to the author and thus is the most commonly used narrative mode in literature. In the **third-person narrative mode**, each and every character is referred to by the narrator as "he", "she", "it", or "they", but never as "I" or "we" (first-person), or "you" (second-person). In third-person narrative, it is obvious that the narrator is merely an unspecified entity or uninvolved person that conveys the story and is not a character of any kind within the story being told.

### **Alternating person view**

While the general rule is for novels to adopt a single approach to point of view throughout, there are exceptions. Many stories, especially in literature, alternate between the first and third person. In this case, an author will move back and forth between a more omniscient third-person narrator to a more personal first-person narrator. The Harry Potter series is told in third person limited for much of the seven novels, but deviates to omniscient in that it switches the limited view to other characters from time to time, rather than only the protagonist

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### **THEME:**

In contemporary literary studies, a **theme** is the central topic, subject, or concept the author is trying to point out, not to be confused with whatever message, moral, or commentary it may send or be interpreted as sending regarding said concept (i.e., its inferred "thesis"). While the term "theme" was for a period used to reference "message" or "moral", literary critics now rarely employ it in this fashion, namely due to the confusion it causes regarding the common denotation of theme.

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## **PLOT STRUCTURE:**

**Plot** is a literary term defined as the events that make up a story, particularly as they relate to one another in a pattern, in a sequence, through cause and effect, how the reader views the story, or simply by coincidence. One is generally interested in how well this pattern of events accomplishes some artistic or emotional effect.

A basic structure for the way plot unfolds would be as follows:

### **1). Exposition**

The exposition introduces all of the main characters in the story. It shows how they relate to one another, what their goals and motivations are, and the kind of person they are. The audience may have questions about any of these things, which get settled, but if they do have them they are specific and well-focused questions. Most importantly, in the exposition, the audience gets to know the main character (protagonist), and the protagonist gets to know his or her main goal and what is at stake if he or she fails to attain this goal.

This phase ends, and the next begins, with the introduction of conflict.

### **2). Rising action**

Rising action is the second phase and starts with a major event and/or a conflict.

Generally, in this phase the protagonist understands his or her goal and begins to work toward it. Smaller problems thwart their initial success, and in this phase their progress is directed primarily against these secondary obstacles. This phase shows us how he or she overcomes these obstacles.

### **3). Climax**

The point of climax is the turning point of the story, where the main character makes the single big decision that defines the outcome of their story and who they are as a person.

The beginning of this phase is sometimes marked by the protagonist finally having cleared away the preliminary barriers.

The climax often contains much of the action in a story, for example, a defining battle or interaction between/among characters.

### **4). Falling action**

In this phase, the "loose ends" are being tied up after the climactic moment(s).

### **5). Resolution**

In the final phase, the author is most typically dealing with why events in the story happened, what it all means, and what any long-term consequences might be for the

characters.

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**AUTHOR'S STYLE:**

The author's style could be humorous, serious, casual, formal, etc. An author might write in short choppy sentences or lengthy ones. Authors might use formal language as if they were writing to very important people or may use casual language as if they intend their audience to be a friend.

Source: *Language Arts Teacher...*

SHORT STORY CRITIQUE & DISCUSSION RATING GUIDE (Rubric)

TITLE OF STORY:

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Your Name:

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Rating Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
				(avg.)			(outstanding)
	(low)						

Setting

Characterization

Point of View

Theme

Plot Structure

Author Style

Author Biography

Tie-In...

(if appropriate)

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Overall Reader Response: (Your evaluation, summary comments and thoughts about the story, using the scale above as a reference for your thoughts...)

**Your \*new\* thoughts about the story AFTER the class discussion: (please continue on back as needed).**

APPENDIX F: COURSE LESSONS-DETAILS FOR POWERPOINT PROJECT

## Introduction to Literature

### **Project Directions:**

- 1). View again one of the PowerPoint presentations you worked on in the Independent portion of the course. Study \*HOW\* the PowerPoint is put together (the parts and how they are combined).
- 2). Next, look through the "PowerPoint Outline" included at our class Google Docs site. Study its format carefully.
- 3). Look through the textbook and choose a short story we have NOT read. Read it, and if you like the story, choose it for your project. NOTE: You may have to read several to find one you'd like to use for the project. Also, make sure your partner is not doing the same story.
- 4). Once you've chosen your story and have read it carefully, please move to the next step.
- 5). On the Internet (and other sources as well), find information about the story that you feel would help other students understand the story in the future. NOTE: Type the name of the story into a search engine and look through the "results" that follow to find appropriate sources of information about the story. You could also do the same thing in the library.
- 6). On the Internet (and other sources as well), find information about the author that you feel would help students understand the story in the future. NOTE: Type the name of the author into a search engine and look through the "results" that follow to find appropriate sources of information about that author. You could also do the same thing in the library.
- 7). Go to Google Images (and other sources as well) to find images of the author, story, and the time period and/or the background related to the story and its subject/theme. Select several of these for use in your PowerPoint.
- 8). After securing all this information, begin working on the "PowerPoint Outline" to create your project!
- 9). Finally, don't forget to create 6-8 questions to add to the end of your PowerPoint presentation!
- 10). NOTE: You do not have to do formal "citations" related to where you got your pictures and information about the author. However, this is probably **the ONLY time in your life** you won't have to do full citations for material you use! Please keep this in mind and do NOT do work like this without giving citations in your other classes or later in your lives.

However, even though you don't have to do formal citations, we would appreciate it if you would just let us know where you found your information; in specific, please list the URL information for the material you use (and this can be put at the end of your work in list form). This will help us learn which sites are most popular with our students for projects like this.

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Specific Timeline:

\*November 11: Select the story you will use for your project.

\*November 14: (by midnight on this date), sent us the "check-in" e-mail to tell us which story you have chosen -- and let us know if you have started any of the work yet.

November 18-21: Work independently as you put together your project. Feel free to e-mail us during this time if you have any questions.

December 2: Your completed project is due!!!! This should be sent electronically to **BOTH of us -- AND to your partner** on this date.

After your partner sends you the project, you will then read the story and complete the critique sheet - and answer the questions at the end of the project PowerPoint.

December 9: Send your completed critique sheet and answers to the questions at the end of the project PowerPoint to **BOTH** of us by midnight on this date. At the same time, send a copy to your partner so he/she can see the work you completed! The partner will then send you her/his comments about your work as well!

December 11: We will meet as a class again in Lang 8. We will discuss your work on the major project. We will also go over your Final Exam at this time, so please do not miss this class. The Final Exam will be completed electronically and sent to both of us.

December 16: Completed Final Exam due to **both** of us by midnight on this date.

APPENDIX G: COURSE LESSONS-MIDTERM SURVEY

Introduction to Literature, ENGLISH 1120, Fall 2015

### Mid-Term Exam, Part 1

*Students: The purpose of this first part of the mid-term exam is to allow you an opportunity to share your thoughts about the “structure” of this experimental section of the course. Please answer each of the following in as much detail as you can – to help us better plan for future classes of this type.*

- 1). In this first half of the course, you have been asked to read a very large number of pieces of literature, rather than having you read one or two selections in great depth. For YOUR own particular learning style, which would you prefer – reading many stories, as we have – or would you prefer reading fewer in greater depth?
  
- 2). This experimental section makes use of “visual PowerPoint” presentations each class to supplement discussion of the stories being read. Do you like the PowerPoints – or would you rather receive the information in traditional lectures? Please explain your answer.
  
- 3). Great emphasis has been given to “author biography” to give special context to the evaluation of the stories being read and discussed. Do you feel this information has helped you in your evaluation of the stories? Please explain in detail.
  
- 4). For each story, you have been asked to complete a “critique sheet” that demonstrates your understanding of the stories. In your judgment, has this experience been valuable to you?
  
- 4B). Related to the above, for YOUR learning style, which would you prefer – doing the critique sheets for each story OR doing the more traditional research papers?
  
- 5). Based upon your experiences in class so far, would you prefer more information about each story, less information about each story – or would you say the blend of discussion and information has been about right for YOUR learning style?
  
- 6). This class had made use of Google Docs. How has your experience been with this – good, neutral, or not-so-good? Please be specific, and please list which “platform” you use most (PC or Mac).



7). If you could make one or two suggestions for improvement for this first half of the course to help future students in this same course, what would they be?

### **Mid-Term Exam, Part 2**

*Students: The purpose of this second part of the mid-term exam is to allow you an opportunity to share what you have learned in the first part of the course. I expect each of you to share a minimum of one typed page (single or double-spaced, depending upon how much you have to say) that would cover items such as the following (Note: You do not have to write about each of these; these are here to help you get started assembling your thoughts).*

1) In your own words, what have you learned in this first half of the course -- about both the short story AND the elements of literature?

2). What else have you learned in the course?

3). In terms of the stories we have read/studied, what have some of them had in common? How are they related? How have they been different?

4). Thinking of all the stories taken together, what have you learned about the influence of "author biography" on the interpretation of stories?

5). Open-ended: What are your general thoughts about the literature we have studied?

Thank you for your responses!

Your Name and Student Number:

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## FINAL EXAM

ENGLISH 1120: Introduction to Literature

**This Final Exam Questionnaire is due no later than midnight on December 15\*\*\*\*\* We \*MUST\* have our grades turned in at the end of the next day, so please do not be late sending this to us. NOTE: Please answer each of the following questions, and return this electronically to \*BOTH\* of us by midnight on December 15.**

Also, please send this work to us as a regular Word document and **do NOT sent your work to us through Google Drive, DropBox, MailDrop -- or any other method of delivery.**

### **PART 1: QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE INDEPENDENT LEARNING PODS:**

- 1). When you worked on the "Independent Learning Pods," did you have any difficulty understanding the stories after reading/viewing the lecture/PowerPoint presentations that went with each story? In other words, did the lecture/PowerPoint presentations help you understand the stories? Please explain your answers.
  
- 2). How helpful were the questions at the end of the lecture/PowerPoint presentations? Did they help you better understand the stories?
  
- 3). For the "Independent Learning Pods," were there any times you had difficulty completing either the critique sheet or the questions provided at the end of the lecture/PowerPoint material? If so, please explain.
  
- 4). For the "Independent Learning Pods," was the information in the lecture/PowerPoint easy to understand? If not, what would have made them more useful to you as a reader?
  
- 5). Did you enjoy the experience of working independently on the stories? If so, why did you enjoy the independent portion of the class? If not, please explain why.
  
- 6). Did you have any difficulty sending your work electronically to the professors by the established deadlines? If you did, please explain -- because we are trying to establish the best way to have material sent between professors and students.

6-B). At the same time, did you have any difficulty using the Google Drive site we established for the class -- where we stored the class materials? If you did not have problems with the Google Drive site, what did you like most, and least, about using the Google Drive site? If you DID have any problems using the Google Drive site, what were they?

6-C). What advice would you give to future students about using the Google Drive site established for this course?

7). The work during the independent portion of the class was always due by midnight on the respective Friday nights. Was this a problem in any way? Your comments?

8). Were the responses sent back to you from the professors about your work on the critique sheets and questions appropriate/adequate? Please explain your answer.

9). Did you enjoy having the independent "learning pods" in a course like this -- or would you rather skip the independent learning and have all instruction "in class, in person"? Please explain your answer.

10). Have you enjoyed the opportunity/experience of the independent "learning pods" for this class?

10-B). Would you prefer to have more, fewer, or the same amount of independent "learning pods" built into the class structure? (Note: Please feel free to answer both of these together if you wish to do so.)

11). We've given everyone \*one\* "get out of jail free" card to play if work needed to be turned in later. Many did use this card at one point or another. In your opinion, should we keep this "card" for future classes? Why or why not?

11-B). ONLY if you'd like to share this information, we'd be interested to know "why" the cards were used -- so that we can better understand the needs of our students. In other words, why did you use your "get-out-of-jail-free" card?

12). What has been the "easiest" part of the independent work? The most difficult?

13). Related to #12 above, what, if anything, in your opinion, could be added to the independent learning portion to help you, as a learner, with the stories?

14). What has been your overall perception of the independent work each week? After all the work together as a class, has the experience of doing the work independently been fulfilling for you? Did you enjoy the independent work? Please explain. Would you rather have met face-to-face as a class group each time?

15). If anything needed to be improved to make the independent portion of the course better, what would it be?

16). Note: Please feel free to skip this question if it is not appropriate for your circumstances: For those of you with jobs, athletic events, music events, speech and debate events (and so on), how much has the independent portion of the course helped you with your schedules? Please be specific as this is one of the prime reasons for this type of "hybrid" class in the first place.

17). Anyone NOT like the independent portion? If so, why so -- please tell us here!

18). Do you have Word on your personal computer? Are you a Mac or PC user?

18B). Did you have PowerPoint installed on your computer at the beginning of the class - or did you have to add it later on?

18C). Do you have a personal computer or did you use the UNI computer labs to do your work? Or did you use a smartphone, tablet, or other device to access class information and complete your work for the course? If you used another type of device, what was it?

19.) We tried to send weekly reminders to our students for the independent portion. These were sent on Thursdays. Do you think we should continue sending weekly reminders for the independent portion? Why or why not? Should we send them out another day other than Thursdays? Please explain.

20.) How did the independent portion change you, if in any way, both as a student and as a reader? Please explain.

21.) Did you have problems working independently and meeting deadlines? If so, please explain.

22). If you could make any recommendations/suggestions for FUTURE STUDENTS of this class for the face-to-face portion of the class (in terms of doing the work, making a schedule for the work, etc.), what would they be?

22B). If you could make any recommendations/suggestions for FUTURE STUDENTS of this class for the independent portion of the class (in terms of doing the work, making a schedule for the work, etc.), what would they be?

23). VERY important question: For the Independent work, can you think of anything else that could have been provided to you to help you better understand the story you were reading? More information about the author? More background to the story itself? Anything else you can think of? Or do you feel all was fine the way it was? Please be specific as your answer will help with the re-design of the course for future students.

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## **PART 2: QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CLASS PROJECTS:**

**NOTE: The next questions are about your Major Project (PowerPoint) you completed for the short story of your choice from the book.**

- 24). Did you have any difficulty putting together your Major Project? If so, please explain.**
- 25). As you completed the work for your Major Project, what, if anything, would have helped you better understand the story and/or author of the story you worked on?**
- 26). Did you enjoy doing your Major Project -- as opposed to doing the more traditional 7-10-page research paper (that is done in most of the other sections)? Which would you rather do in a course of this type? Please explain.**
- 27). What did you gain from the experience of doing the Major Project? Please be as specific as you can here because we'd very much like to know what you learned by doing this work.**
- 28). How difficult was it for you to get the information about the story and the author for your Major Project? Please explain.**
- 28-B). How did you begin finding the information about your story and the author? In other words, which sources did you first examine when you started gathering information for the project?**
- 29.) Which did you do first—the critique sheet or the PowerPoint? Did one help you complete the other? Please explain.**
- 30.) Not counting the questions you designed, did you include a discussion in your PowerPoint about the literary elements and the historical context about the story you selected? If not, why? If so, how did discussing the literary elements and the historical context help, if in any way, with your interpretation and understanding of the short story you selected?**

**31.) At the start of the semester, did you own PowerPoint on your personal computer?**

**32). Please give your best estimate of the amount of time you spent putting together your Major Project.**

**32-B). What, if anything, did you struggle with as you put your Major Project together? In other words, what was the most difficult part of this assignment for you?**

**33). How many times did you read your story either before beginning your work or during your work on the Major Project?**

**34). How did your partner's work on the critique sheet and questions you prepared change your views about the story (and possibly about the author as well)?**

**35). If you had the opportunity to do the Major Project over, what, if anything, would you change -- either in your work habits or in how you put the PowerPoint together?**

**36). A large number of you included in your Major Project "hyperlinks" to film clips, movies, and information about the story and author. Did you already know how to do this, or was the creation of "hyperlinks" something you had to learn for this project?**

**36-B). Many of you included specialty items, such as hyperlinks to film clips, music, sites providing information about the life of the author, historical background, and so forth. If you used them, tell how, if in any way, this contributed to your Major Project. If you did not, please tell us why.**

**36-C). Was this the first time you put together a PowerPoint? What difficulties, if any, did you have putting the PowerPoint together?**

**37.) In what ways, if any, did the PowerPoint project help you as a reader and working with the elements of literature?**

**38). Given the experience with the Major Projects, do you feel they should be continued in future classes of this type? Why or why not?**

**39.) How did the major project change you, if in any way, as both a student and a reader? Please explain.**

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**PART 3: OVERALL COURSE STRUCTURE QUESTIONS:**

40). In this class, we covered the lives and work of over sixteen important writers (as opposed to studying just a few as is the case in many of the classes like this). For your own style of learning, would you rather study a full range of authors (as we did) -- or would you rather do more in-depth study of just a few authors? Please explain your answer.

41). This course was set up as a "hybrid/blended" class. That is, we met regularly for the full first half of the semester. Then, we added the "Independent Learning Pods" you completed on your own. Then, we met again as a class and shared more information with each other. Briefly discuss this format. Is there anything you would recommend we change about the structure of the course? We would very much appreciate your thoughts on this subject.

41-B). At the beginning of this course, what were your views about taking Introduction to Literature as a hybrid course? What were your views at the beginning of the semester about hybrid courses in general? Would you take a hybrid course in the future?



42). One of the major goals of the Independent Learning Pods was to help you set up your own schedules for learning, which would, in turn, help you with your jobs, other classes, and other duties you have as college students. Please briefly explain how the Independent Learning Pods helped you? And, did you like having the freedom to work on the Independent Learning Pods on your own schedule?

43). This question has to do with the "evaluation" of your work in the course. The way this course was designed, you received two grades/evaluations per week during the first half of the course (one for each critique sheet you completed). Most classes of this type rely upon the traditional essay for evaluation of student work. Which type of evaluation do you most prefer: the weekly evaluations of your critique sheets -- or would you rather do the traditional essays? Please explain your answer.

44.) How did this course change you, if in any way, both as a reader and how you look at the elements of literature?

45.) How did this course change you, if in any way, as a student/learner?

46). We'd also like to know what you liked best about this course. Please be as specific as possible in your answers.

47.) Would you recommend this course to others? Please explain.

48.) What benefits, if any, do you see from this course?

49). (Optional) -- Anything else you'd like to add to the review of the course -- or any additional comments you feel will help us as we design the course for future students?

50). This semester, other than your university studies/classes, what were the biggest demands upon your time? Examples: jobs, childcare responsibilities, designated university sponsored programs (athletics, speech and debate, music programs, College of

Education requirements, work with charitable organizations and clubs, and so forth).  
Other large demands upon your time?

THANK YOU for completing this final exam survey. Your responses will help us as we design our future classes! Also, please do not forget to send this to BOTH of us by midnight on December 15.

-Professors Copeland and Klein

1. Please list and define as many of the elements of literature you can define. If you need to, you may use the back of this sheet.

2. What are your feelings about reading? If you need to, you may use the back of this sheet.



**Consent Form for Using Web-based Instruction for an Undergraduate  
“Introduction to Literature” Class**

**Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of  
Northern Iowa – Research Projects Information Sheet**

**Purpose of the Study.** As part of the requirements for a doctorate of education degree at the University of Northern Iowa, I have to carry out a research study. The study is concerned with using web-based instruction to improve undergraduate “Introduction to Literature” courses and to evaluate the hybrid course format.

**What will the study involve?** The study will involve students who are taking the undergraduate general education “Introduction to Literature” classes with Dr. Jeffrey Copeland. Everything you do for this class, including the surveys, are the same items that would be required if these course sections were not part of a research study. The only thing that is different is that from time to time there will be some videotaping of lessons. Therefore, no additional assignments, activities, or time commitments are required of you than if this class was not part of a research study.

**Why have you been asked to take part?** You are being asked to take part in this study because you can specifically provide data about using web-based instruction to improve undergraduate “Introduction to Literature” courses. Your participation will help academics and hopefully, other students by supplying an evaluation of the hybrid course format by revealing student attitude, various levels of student achievement, strengths and weaknesses of this approach, as well as help us to make conclusions and recommendations for such a teaching approach.

**Do you have to take part? What about anonymity?** The answer is no. Participation is voluntary. You have the option of withdrawing before the study commences or discontinuing after data collection has started. Keep in mind that the work and surveys you do for this course is no different than what would be required if no research was being conducted. The only difference is that some class sessions may be videotaped to demonstrate hybrid teaching and student engagement. If you wish not to be filmed, your face and body will be blocked in video clips. Furthermore, grades will not be affected since Dr. Copeland and I will not see who wished or not wished to be filmed until after

grades are turned in. Some video clips may appear in my dissertation. Video clips not used will be destroyed six months after the dissertation has been completed. Students will have a chance anytime during the course to express that they wish not to participate in filming without penalty. Any extracts from student quotes, examples of student work, etc. that will be used in this research will not identify the student. Names will not be attached to specific pieces of data presented to the public. If needed, pseudonyms will be used for qualitative data and aggregate results will be reported for quantitative data. No one other than Dr. Copeland and I will have access to the data. Research records will be kept in a locked file in Dr. Copeland's office at Baker and the computer records will be protected by electronic coding or passwords.

**What will happen to the information which you give?** The data will be kept confidential from third parties for the duration of the study. On completion of the dissertation, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

**What will happen to the results?** The results will be presented in a dissertation. They will be seen by members of my dissertation committee. The dissertation may be read by others interested in the topic about using web-based instruction to improve undergraduate "Introduction to Literature" hybrid courses. The study may be published in a research journal and/or presented at conference(s).

**What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?** I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.

**What if there is a problem? Any further queries?** If you are feeling distressed or need further information, you should contact either Dr. Copeland or Professor Klein. Their contact information can be found on the course syllabus.

**Who has reviewed this study?** Approval must be given by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before studies like this can take place.

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form. Thanks.



**Consent Form for Using Web-based Instruction for an Undergraduate  
“Introduction to Literature” Class**

**Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of  
Northern Iowa**

I.....agree to participate in the Using Web-based  
Instruction for an Undergraduate “Introduction to Literature” Class research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission to be video-recorded while in class. If not, my face and body will be  
blocked out in video clips.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time,  
whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my class work may be quoted/presented in the  
dissertation and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

Signed.....

Date.....

## APPENDIX K: SURVEYS-STUDENT IDENTITIES

AT MID-TERM:

*Knowledge repeater to critical thinker by:*

- Learning how the short story is structured
- Identifying and applying/discussing how authors manipulate readers through the elements of literature to form a story
- Applying how the author's life influences writing style and content (Many students commented that they did not have opportunities to study the author before, and before this course, they believed the authors wrote in a vacuum.)
- Applying how historical context influences the author and can be applied to his/her story
- Comparing and contrasting short stories
- Seeing how authors have been influenced by other authors
- Recognizing universality by being able to apply the stories to their own lives
- Gaining a deeper understanding about the elements of literature, because in high school could list and define, but not apply
- Understanding that good writers do not write to write, but instead a good deal of thought, planning, and time goes into their work
- Understanding that in a well-constructed short story, the elements of literature need to work together to create a story
- Expanding their reading comfort zone

- Discovering the complexity of characterization through the methods of revealing character
- Learning how to back up my opinions/interpretations of the story with specific examples and proof from the story's text
- Figuring out that literature is more than simply words on a page
- Discovering that literature opens up minds to think in new ways
- Coming to the conclusion that it is okay to have different tastes in literature
- Finding out that literature is a tool to help people change the world or jump paradigms
- Ending up learning more about myself
- Becoming a stronger reader
- Figuring out it takes many steps to create a story, which means having a better understanding of complexity and insight in analyzing a story
- Finding out that the elements of literature play a big part in how well a story is constructed
- Realizing that art "mirrors" life
- Understanding that how well I liked a story may not reflect how well the literary work was constructed (before this course, students claimed how well they thought a story was constructed was based on their tastes)
- Taking short stories and breaking them up into pieces through the literary elements in order to understand them has made me enjoy the stories even more



- Seeing how syllabus was structured-how the stories built off of each other (through literary techniques)
- Enjoying thinking deeper, which gives a sense of satisfaction
- Appreciating how much my knowledge of literature has expanded (thought I knew earlier before enrolling in this course that I knew everything I needed to know about reading)
- Understanding that the author's style is much more than putting his/her thoughts down (e.g. use of language, irony, foreshadowing, symbolism, use of figurative language, etc.)
- Understanding that all the previous events in a person's life shapes who the person is at this moment, therefore understanding that the author is writing a story based upon who he/she is at that moment, and we interpret or give the story meaning from the perspective who we are and have experienced at the moment we read the story
- Being exposed to different authors and literary works as well as how others interpret can expand our horizons
- Playing with the titles of stories we can often help to unlock a story's meaning
- Becoming more familiar with more authors
- Learning about new genres, especially literary non-fiction
- Discovering that the use of humor aided my learning
- Identifying different points of view
- Understanding that a story can have multiple interpretations

- Discovering short stories can be really powerful because they are able to convey important messages in a small number of pages (compared to a novel) without losing any of the elements essential to literature
- Experiencing the importance of word choice
- Transferring the energy of the professors' love for what they do to me because now have a desire to keep taking English classes
- Becoming a better person since most of the stories have lesson-learned life lessons such as mercy and forgiveness, etc. to learn from
- Opening up history for me
- Evaluating how each of the authors we studied (except Saki) had an impact on American literature
- Learning to approach literary works with an open mind
- Discovering that depth can be present in a story that is relatively short
- Applying information I learned from reading short stories to the short stories I write

*Dependent learner to independent learner by:*

- Learning time management skills
- Learning how to be more organized
- Learning how to become more independent with my studies
- Retaining literary elements to long term memory
- Willing to research authors of literary works I read on my own
- Understanding that learning about literature can be a lifelong process

- Thinking critically on my own
- Realizing that the more time and effort I put into reading, the more I get out of it
- Feeling confident that everything I learned in the first half (face-to-face) part of class has prepared me to succeed in the independent online portion
- Feeling the elation in gaining the ability to critique stories on their own
- Finding class entertaining and interesting so became more engaged to learn on own
- Reading more in depth on my own by applying the elements of literature
- Expanding my own thoughts
- Learning to back up arguments with specific examples and proof
- Thinking harder due to professors' help
- Challenging enough to broaden literary skills but not frustrating
- Knowing what it is like to be engaged in reading, so I can do this on my own
- Acknowledging the course was “a breath of fresh air.” It has shown me that professors are noticing what it takes to be a student and fully respecting that by shaping a course to fit our needs. “I am one of those students working full time and going to school full time. It isn't easy, but this class has helped me feel better about my current situation. I don't feel like I am alone after taking this class.”

*Surface reader to close reader by:*

- Enjoying becoming a close reader
- Expanding to stories I normally may not have read
- Discovering such a thing as literary nonfiction

- Learning the difference between moral/lesson and theme
- Realizing short stories are not always short
- Working with the elements of literature helped in approach to interpret literature in a different way
- Being able now to give specific arguments/proof from literary work to support/back up opinions and interpretations
- Gaining author's perspective to writing from one professor who is a writer
- Taking strategies from the other professor who is "awesome" at getting us to dig deeper with literary analysis
- Reading skills built because enjoyed having two professors full of enthusiasm, especially early in the morning
- Increasing understanding of literature. This course is unlike other literature classes, where we usually read the story, write a paper, and call it good
- Finding new perspectives by being aware of multiple interpretations
- Appreciating how the amount of detail for a story can be condensed to a few pages

*Non-literary person to literary connoisseur by:*

- Gaining a greater appreciation of literature
- Gaining an appreciation of short stories-before this class didn't prefer reading them, but found I enjoy them
- Discovering that short stories can be as engaging as novels

- Finding out that I didn't fully understand the elements of literature before this class
- Discovering a personal love of literature
- Coming to the conclusion that literature is my favorite class
- Deciding I want to change my major to English/literature
- Discovering a love for certain genres such as horror, literary nonfiction, etc. that I didn't have before
- Developing more confidence in my reading skills
- Continuing literature/reading will continue as an important part of my life
- Realizing that literature can and does enrich my life
- Understanding that literature is really an art form/craft
- Gaining a new respect for authors
- Becoming more aware of my literary tastes
- Teaching me how to evaluate stories like no other English course
- Relaxing with reading
- Exploring literature from various literary periods and enjoying it
- Reading stopped being a chore for me
- Using stories to challenge me to think, and realizing they can lift one's spirit and touch one's heart and soul
- Understanding that the theme and moral of the story are not the same thing
- Increasing my interest in reading
- Discovering literature is fun!

*Student to teacher by:*

- Feeling like all in this together, meaning we not only learned from the professors, but professors learned from us
- Wanting one day to teach my future students to connect to the elements of literature and read better
- Willing to teach literature using similar approach to my students e.g. including author biography
- Learning best in a happy environment such as the one the professors created, and wanting to try to do the same in my future classroom

AT END OF SEMESTER:

*Transformed from knowledge repeater to critical thinker:*

- More critical in my thinking
- My thought processes have matured
- Can better construct an argument because now know have to supply specific examples and proof from text
- Literature can have multiple interpretations
- Now able to apply the literary elements
- Became more creative and imaginative
- Learning can be fun when going beyond merely reciting facts
- Literary interpretations are well thought out opinions of reading a literary work
- To look for the universality in literary classics
- Have a better understanding how stories are constructed

- See connection between writing and reading
- Need to challenge myself as a learner-that is how I grow as a thinker
- More aware of the world culturally and historically
- See interconnections between literature and other content areas
- Can apply reading skills to other classes and in life personally
- Gave me ability to think on my own
- More open minded
- Am more well-rounded as a learner
- Can see other perspectives
- Understand that authors use the literary elements as tools to manipulate readers to think and feel a certain way
- Now think from different perspectives, not just about stories, but life in general

*Transformed from dependent learner to independent learner:*

- Learned how to work independently
- More marketable for future jobs because know I can work on my own
- Becoming an independent learner due to the BL structure allowed me to pick up more work hours easing my financial stress
- Can do independent research
- Learned I can thrive in classes if I manage my time effectively
- Learning is enjoyable if practice good study skills
- Became more reliable and responsible

- Confident that I can make it in college as a student. I can do anything if I put my mind to it. I have potential.
- To believe and trust in myself when interpreting literature
- Gave me ability to think on my own
- Class and professors taught me to persevere
- Realize it is me, not anyone else who is responsible for what I get out of my education
- Helped to realize and discover there is no shame to reach out to professors when need help
- Discovered type of learner I am (e.g. visual, audio, haptic)
- Discovered that I operate best with consistency and regular feedback
- How to chart and keep track of my progress
- Became more organized as a student
- Realized the importance of having a positive attitude because found that if I like my profs and the work that I am doing, I am more motivated in doing well

*Transformed from surface reader to close reader:*

- Now a close reader
- Changed my perspective on reading; I was making the process more difficult than it needed to be
- Gained skills in interpreting literature
- More confident in my reading
- Know the elements of literature and can apply them



- Gained new insight in how to read literature by examining and looking at the elements of literature
- See that literary elements can be used in various ways as tools authors use to manipulate their readers to think and feel
- Can find multiple interpretations of a story
- Gained a better understanding of the elements of literature
- Learned how to read beyond the surface of the text, to develop for complexity and insight in my analysis
- Will never read literature the same way again
- Improved reading comprehension
- By reading closely, have gained writing skills
- See how literary elements must interrelate to create a well-constructed story
- Learn life lessons from stories
- Reading involves lifelong learning
- Realize that reading deals with universal themes
- More open to reading styles

*Transformed from non-literary person to literary connoisseur:*

- Have become a better literary critic
- Helped determine my major-know I now want to major in literature
- Realized I have a passion for literature
- Improved my knowledge of classic American literature
- Learned about great short story authors

- Exposed to authors and literary works that would not have before
- Aware of various writing styles
- Greater appreciation of authors' craft
- Gained confidence as a reader
- Went a long time without reading for fun, but now will dedicated to setting up time to read for pleasure again
- Learned that stories are usually influenced by something author has experienced
- All of us can interpret literature
- Gained a greater appreciation of literature-want to take more literature classes
- We all are literary critics
- Met people who share a common interest in literature
- Reading is fun, relaxing, engaging, etc.
- Able to compare and contrast writing styles of authors
- More aware of my literary tastes
- Like to dissect literature

*Transformed from student to teacher:*

- Know now can be a teacher-confidence in my education major
- Can see myself as a teacher
- Can teach others how to analyze stories
- Realized characteristics of good teachers are knowledgeable about subject, passionate, and caring
- Felt BL is a blend of both face-to-face and online learning environments

- Realized different learning styles
- Honoring diversity
- Realized how hard teachers work
- Can apply the knowledge learned to create a lesson
- Teaching is fun
- To persevere

## APPENDIX L: SURVEYS-NOTES OF APPRECIATION

- Thank you for a great semester!
- Thank you for being such awesome professors. You two truly were blessings to me this semester with everything I had going on.  
Thank you so much!
- Thank you for teaching such a great course! I really did enjoy being a part of this class and I learned more than I expected.
- You were great teachers and I appreciate all you did for us.
- I loved the class!
- We felt you learned as much from us as we did from you. This was different, but good. Thanks for believing in us.
- Your enthusiasm, knowledge, and love for literature is contagious. Such qualities kept me engaged.
- This is odd, but knowing how well I have done in this course makes me question my major in art. I need to evaluate my major. I have always loved literature, and I feel I may be very good at it.
- This has to be my favorite class so far in my college career.
- Overall, I really enjoyed this class! I learned so much valuable information, and I thank you for that!
- Thanks for helping me to understand literature.
- I loved taking this course and both of you as teachers were amazing. I really hope I can have you both again as teachers. I

would recommend this class and both of you as professors to anyone.

- I hated waking up early, but your class is one that I didn't want to miss. I loved it and would take either one of you as professors again in a heartbeat.
- This class was planned out very well and I enjoyed being able to work on the assigned material ahead of time.
- I loved this class! The best part was I loved it and learned something. You are great professors.
- Great class, great professors.
- I liked the way this class was structured.
- I really enjoyed this class!
- I really enjoyed this class and I liked the schedule while we went half the semester until we knew what we were doing, and then it was independent. I liked the independent because it was different.
- I loved the way the course was taught and ran. I felt like I was very often encouraged in my work and learned a lot! Thanks for being great professors.
- Overall, I am glad I took this course. It taught me how to work independently and it was nice to work on my own time. Both of you were amazing. So nice and helpful. I am smiling thinking about this class.

- This class was one of my favorites this semester because of the style of this class.
- You both cared about the subject and teaching, making it worth waking up early.
- This was probably my favorite LAC class I've taken and it's one of my last ones! I loved the flexibility with the online portion.
- The course was very fun to take. It gave me new ways to view short stories.
- Great job!
- Your passion for literature was contagious.
- You were great professors. This was an easy and smooth class because both of you made it that way! I would recommend this class to anyone.
- I really enjoyed this class. You both really care about the work, and the class.
- I really enjoyed this course and thought that the second half really helped me learn. Being able to do things on my own taught me how to stay on top of things.
- The structure of this class was very good. Thanks for making me an independent student, better reader, and critical thinker.

APPENDIX M: SURVEYS-SAMPLE STUDENT RESPONSES HOW ONLINE  
CHANGED THEM AS READERS

- More confidence as a reader
- Think more critically about literature
- Now look for complexity, insight and depth when analyzing stories
- Improved reading comprehension
- Gained a new way of reading for understanding by examining how an author uses the literary elements as tools to manipulate readers to think and feel a certain way
- Can name and apply the elements of literature
- Clearer understanding of the elements of literature
- Will be able to retain the elements of literature in my long term memory because of all the applications in class, unlike high school where simply list and defined
- Have a wider perspective-more open to various writing styles
- Can see how literature opens us up to other cultures, historical periods, etc.
- Can elaborate my interpretations through specific examples from the text to support my literary interpretations
- Learned how to be more detailed in my writing and discussion answers
- Can set up well informed arguments/interpretations when doing literary analysis
- Realize reading is a lifelong skill so want to continuously challenge myself to improve my reading skills
- Experienced how reading stirs my imagination

- Like to learn about authors' lives
- Whenever read, will now use the elements of literature
- Figured out that authors do not write in a vacuum-they often had some life experience that influenced their writing
- Well-constructed stories don't just happen-they are usually well thought out by authors as they plan how to use the elements of literature
- Elements need to interrelate and work off of each other for a well-constructed story
- Want to dissect literature by discovering a story's construction, deeper meanings, and complexities
- Now developed or have an even greater love for reading
- Not only a more successful student in reading, but a more successful student overall because can stay focus, not procrastinate, and manage my time better
- Did not realize the endless possibilities in how to construct a story
- Can compare and contrast literary works
- Can recognize how authors influence each other
- Discovered literature is fun
- Know the elements of literature well enough can teach another
- Reading can take me places, on adventures, make me think, and time travel
- Has raised my curiosity so want to research authors and historical events behind stories
- Never was aware of the elements of literature in my reading, but am now



- Expanded my thinking about literature and it will continue to expand
- Can better articulate the strengths and weaknesses of a literary work
- Able to compare and contrast literary works
- See the interconnection between reading and writing
- Changed from being a dependent student of reading to an independent student of reading
- Now can better determine my literary tastes
- Have a better evaluation of myself as a reader
- Saw growth from being a student of literature to becoming a teacher of literature thanks to the major project

APPENDIX N: SURVEYS-MAJOR REASONS STUDENTS ENJOYED THE ONLINE  
EXPERIENCE

- I liked the independent learning pods because they gave me more time to sit down, do it, and really understand the material on my own.
- While instant feedback and conversation on ideas is nice, the online portion was a friendly setup that allowed students to do assignments without as strict time constraints in a face-to-face class.
- I liked the independent learning pods because the time that we would be in class I could use to catch up on other homework or other things I had missed due to softball.
- Both face-to-face and the online portions had their positives. I liked the online because I can go at my own pace, and enjoy the professors' responses. The face-to-face was good because we were able to discuss PowerPoint questions and topics from the story. Maybe a discussion portion could be added to the independent work.
- I absolutely LOVE the independent portion of the class because I was responsible for my own learning and getting my assignments done on time. I felt like learning independently helped me grow as a student. The learning pods also gave me more time to work and save money to help pay for college.
- I liked having the independent work in this type of course because it gave me a way to express my thoughts on the literature while still having guidance from the presentations and the feedback. And honestly, it was so nice being able to sleep in

later and not have to walk in the cold on those mornings! I wouldn't have minded having all of the instruction in class, but this was a fun, new experience.

- Even though the independent pods allowed freedom to do the assignment within a week or so, I would have preferred to have class in person because I enjoy the face-to-face experience. Also, I like to hear other people's opinions and I can state my own out loud as well.
- I wish the class was entirely online since I such an independent student.
- I would rather do half the work outside of class than class twice per week. I do not care for online classes. This was not a difficult class to take online though, especially since it was taught in person for the first half of the course. (I do not like fully online courses because they require more written communication and greater self-motivation.)
- I liked having the independent online portion of the class because I was able to work on my own stories at my own pace. I enjoyed the in-class portion, but the independent portion of the class allowed me to see how much I have grown from the beginning to the end of this class!
- I liked the independent portion of the class. It allowed me to work on the stories when I wanted to, on my own schedule. That being said, I did like the in-class portion because it is a lot easier for me to learn when I have someone in front of me explaining it.

- I loved having the independent/online part of this class. It was very fitting for my schedule and also to my personality. I am very independent and I like to work at my own time. This allowed me to do so.
- I enjoyed the independent portion a lot because it allowed for great freedom in my schedule. By trusting us to manage our time, we grew more adult.
- I was not sure if I would like the online portion, but I ended up enjoying being able to work on the assignments at my own pace and not have to worry about getting them done in a short amount of time. There were some times I wish that we had class because I felt as though I would have understood some things better if I was able to hear the professors explain them in person, but the PowerPoints usually did the job. Having no class for the second half of the semester took some pressure off because I did not have as much to worry about and more time to get things done.
- Once the in-class part of the semester was winding down, I really didn't want to start the independent portion of the class. I suppose it was because being in class was sort of a security blanket and I didn't want to mess something up when I was on my own. Looking back, the independent/online portion made me grow so much in all aspects of reading and writing. Without having to do part of the class on my own I would not have grown as much as I did. Having the entire semester in class may have been easier, but I wouldn't have grown as much.
- I enjoyed both the in-class discussion and the online independent pods. I would not recommend skipping them, but keep them integrated at the end of the class.

This really shows how far students have come and if they can apply what they've learned or not; something that all professors should want to see from their students.

- I really enjoyed it. Being a student athlete, it helped my busy schedule by taking some of the pressure off and giving me more time to do my work at a high level.
- I have! I think that it's a very cool idea to have some courses set up this way. Obviously, not every subject would be able to do this, but it was a unique opportunity that allowed me to stay in my pajamas while still learning, and I'm all for that.
- In a way, I did enjoy the experience of being able to freely do my own work. But if it was up to me, class would meet entirely face-to-face, because I believe the face-to-face experience is more important and helps students verbally explain their thoughts and opinions on a subject.
- Yes, I did like having this opportunity for the learning pods. I hope more classes become like this!
- I am glad I had the opportunity to take this course in a blended format. Although I would take this course again, I will avoid online courses in the future. I like the lecture/discussion format of traditional courses.
- I hope more classes follow this style in the future.
- Yes, I did. I think I have grown as a student because I have a better ability to think and act independently. This class made me step out of my comfort zone a bit and realize that I will not always have teachers and professors to answer every

question for me and someday I will be responsible for thinking on my own. I also feel like I learned more being able to think at my own pace and do my own research on a story.

- The independent part was a huge advantage to me. Being a student athlete this time outside of class helped me so much with organizing my school work better. I think it was a very successful tactic to use and I would recommend it for other classes.
- Yes, I could create my own schedule. If I had a lot to do for a different class, I could focus my time there and do my learning pod at a different time.
- I had a difficult time with time management. I missed deadlines during the online portion. It was like the saying, “Out of sight, out of mind.” My high school never prepared me for anything like this. I rather the class was entirely face-to-face.
- Yes, I enjoyed the independent part because it allowed you to work at your own pace and to complete the work whenever you wanted (as long as it was done by the due date).
- I did enjoy it. It allowed me to take things at my own pace, which was nice. The online portion really freed up my Tuesdays and Thursdays for work and other activities. I also felt like the independent sections gives us an opportunity to show the professors how much progress we’ve made with understanding and interpreting literature.
- I liked the independent portion, but I liked being in person with my classmates and my professors better.

- I enjoyed working independently because it gave me two extra days a week to pick up shifts at work. This helped me save an extra \$2000 this semester alone, which is great!
- I liked doing the independent online section. I was able to read the stories when I had time. I did like class though, because I was able to hear other peoples' reactions to the stories.
- I did like working independently online, because it gave me more freedom to complete the assignments when I had more time or motivation! Also, I felt I was well-prepared after the first part of the course to work independently and show my growth as a reader. And although I didn't always want to answer the additional questions at the end of the presentation, I felt that they really helped me to expand on my thoughts and from that I found that the stories stuck with me a little better. Sometimes I missed hearing the interpretations of the other students and the two professors, but independence is something that is crucial to learn, especially in college!
- I had "mixed feelings" about working independently. I enjoyed the freedom of being able to finish the assignments on my own time. However, I also feel that literature classes, especially a class that was set up in this way, should be taught entirely in the classroom, because I enjoy listening to the opinions of others and discussing our own opinions openly in class.

- I enjoyed the online portion of the class immensely, because it allowed me to work at my own pace and truly understand the story for myself without the pressure of class time to limit my time to do these things.
- Yes, I enjoyed having the chance to work on the stories individually. It really challenged me to read the stories and critically think to understand them. I was really engaged with the stories during the online portion.
- Yes, I enjoyed this experience because it gave me the opportunity to do my work on my own time and finish assignments when it was convenient for me. This also gave me a look at what I would be expected to do in the work world.
- I enjoyed the online independent part of the class a lot. I enjoyed the face-to-face part, too, but it was nice to not have to come to class during that time so that I was able to work on other things (which happened to usually be the independent part of this class). I did like being able to work by myself on each story and to take my time really getting in depth with each one. This class helped me to think and learn independently more than any other class I have been in, yet I never felt I was unprepared to be cut loose.
- I did enjoy working independently the second half of the semester. It was nice to be able to work on the critique sheet and PowerPoint questions when it was convenient for me. At the beginning of the semester I didn't want to do the online independent portion because I wasn't sure I would know exactly what to do, but by the time it came, I felt very well prepared.



- I did enjoy it especially since I could go at own pace and work on my own time. I felt well prepared to work alone and I can hold myself accountable for completing the work.
- I enjoyed the BL course and getting a fresh start halfway through when I knew I was well prepared to work by myself and adequately complete the assignments.

## APPENDIX O: SURVEYS-GOOGLE DOCS

- My experience using Google Docs was great. I never had any problems accessing any of the files, and I could easily access them off my laptop, tablet, or phone.
- Google Docs was a good way to give us information. Things that I liked were the use of giving us stories in the public domain as well as the note takers there. These helped a lot because they gave us information to help with our critique sheets before class.
- The use of Google Docs has been amazing. Prior to this class I haven't really used Google Docs at all. Thankfully, we did use it in this class, because shortly after three others of my classes started using it, and I had no problem then. I love having everything in one place and being able to access it whenever I need. Plus, it gives us another option of whether we want to type the information out or print the paper and hand write them.
- I never used the Google Docs information too much. The only time I would use it was for when I was confused with a story or wanted a little more information for my critique sheet. But when I did use Google Docs, I always expected more information about the story than I actually found. However, I still did find that the Google docs helped and was a good resource.
- Google Docs is really easy to navigate. I used it in high school, so I had previous experience with it. I like that Google Docs automatically saves everything on its own, whereas in Word you have to manually save everything. Auto Save is nice, because if suddenly my computer crashed, everything I had is still there.

- Since none of my other classes use Google Docs, I sometimes forgot where the information for this class was at. I would go into Blackboard then realized that nothing was going to be there.
- Google Docs was fine. They are easy to get to and easy to use. Though, I would rather have stuff on Blackboard so that I do not have the fear of getting kicked out of the system, and everything would be in one nice area. Also, if the professors wanted to, they could post grades on Blackboard, which would be beneficial to me since then I know where I stand in the class at any point in the semester.
- I like using Google Docs because if everything is emailed, I lose what emails I need. If materials were handed out on paper, then I would probably lose one.
- My experience with Google Docs is good. I find it easy to create documents as well as being able to view them. It is also convenient that I can make folders and separate my various class documents into them.

## APPENDIX P: SURVEYS-INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK

- They were very helpful comments. They helped me to improve every time I did a critique sheet and showed me specifically what I should work on.
- The responses were very thorough and allowed me to see what I was doing well and what I could do differently on my next assignment to better my grade and analytic skills.
- The responses were very detailed and REALLY helpful. I learned a lot from the personalized responses. This is something that can probably only be done in a course that has independent/online work.
- I loved that the profs were so thorough and encouraging with their responses! It made me feel like the work I was doing wasn't going unnoticed. I have had teachers and even professors here at college who give little or no feedback, and I am not fond of that. If I am going to do the work, I appreciate feedback. I love that they also gave pointers and suggestions for how I could improve while still saying they were proud of me and pointing out what I did well.
- I enjoyed receiving feedback on my work so I was able to know what my strengths and weaknesses are. The feedback was appropriate and I am thankful for the feedback I received. I do not like it when professors grade a project without commenting on my work, because that does not tell me why they graded my work the way they did.
- I really appreciated the professors' feedback! I was really impressed that they responded so quickly and always gave thoughtful feedback that was both positive

and constructive! I think the feedback I received from the professors really helped me improve my understanding throughout the course of the class!

- Yes, I liked the detail that was sent back to me. It was personal and they put a lot of effort into sending me back my results.
- I always got good and useful feedback that I could apply to my next assignment. I like that they give us things that we did well as well as things we need to improve on. It is nice to get both sides. Their feedback was also very easy to put to use in my next assignment because it was clearly laid out.
- I thought the professors did an awesome job when they sent feedback for our work. It was evident that they wanted us to succeed just by the amount of comments and advice sent back with each paper. I was not expecting this much feedback each week, but it was nice to know that they took the time to look at our work so in-depth.
- The responses were wonderful! I have never had professors so detailed in feedback so that I know exactly what I'm doing well and can improve on. Each week I was impressed with the length and detail of feedback. The fact that the professors do that for each student shows great commitment to what they do and it is very constructive!

APPENDIX Q: SURVEYS- READING SEVERAL SHORT STORIES AS OPPOSED  
TO FEW

- From past experiences, reading a few stories in great depth was rather closed-minded compared to the greater picture. Throughout the face-to-face portion, we dabbled in reading various short stories where we were able to indulge in a vast range of writing techniques and styles. Rather than concentrating on a couple of stories, we traveled through many worlds of imagination without having to worry about the sameness, boredom, or dragging of detail often associated with studying a few literary works. Instead, we embarked on a literary journey that was spiced up with varying settings, themes, and plots. In short, all of these stories gave us sneak peaks to other peoples' experiences (even though many were fictitious), urging us to learn much in so little time.
- I liked reading many different stories. Reading just a few books and getting in depth about them can get really boring. After looking at the same book for a while, I get burnt out and can't wait to just get done with it. Sometimes I find myself getting lazy in the end, because I'm just so sick of that book. It's a lot different with short stories because you don't spend so much time on it that it becomes boring. With every class, came a new story which kept the course fresh and interesting.
- Covering many short stories instead of a just a few works was new to me. It was new to read short stories instead of novels. The average literature class assigns two to four hundred-page texts with short periods of time to read and fully

understand them. The way this class was designed is a much more effective learning tool. More time can be devoted to comprehending the material since there were less pages per assignment. Variety can be shown as well by examining the way multiple authors wrote the way they did.

- I prefer to read many stories, because I could apply the elements of literature to different selections which gave me practice in analytical reading. I'm the type of learner where I need multiple examples to learn a concept (or multiple concepts) and to keep practicing these concepts so I can fully learn it. Reading multiple stories helped me learn the elements of literature and to practice seeing them in various types of writing. Reading different stories made me more interested because I was able to see how different authors incorporated the elements of literature into their stories in different ways.
- I most definitely prefer reading multiple stories rather than reading a few stories in greater depth. The structure we had provides more variety and understanding. I typically get bored if we are constantly discussing the same story every class period. I enjoy reading differently structured stories with different styles! It is very beneficial to read many stories as opposed to only a few because each story is different from the last. Even with those differences, we can sometimes reflect back and find a few things in common to take away from the stories as a whole. It is similar to trying new things in our everyday lives. My own "escape from the traditional ways."

- I liked that we read a lot of shorter stories. I find it easier to manage my time when there are multiple small due dates keeping me on track. If I were assigned a long book to read in a couple of weeks, it would be extremely easy for me to put it off until the end, which isn't possible with critique sheets due every other day.
- I really enjoyed reading many stories throughout the first part of the semester (face-to-face-portion). I liked doing this because we got many different views on stories and the authors. I liked how the class was set up, with us reading the story and doing the critique sheet and then going over it in class (which we don't get in other classes). Getting to know the author's background helped with understanding the story and why the author wrote the way he/she did. It was cool seeing something from the author's life incorporated into a story. It was nice to how real life and the story tie together and gave us a deeper look into that story.
- I liked that even though we read a lot, the stories were relatively short and not overwhelming. We had the appropriate time to read and write the critique sheet.
- Reading many short stories helps a student stay focused and interested in class.
- I would have preferred reading fewer stories and going more in depth instead. I personally enjoy longer texts and getting to know the characters more in depth instead of having a new story to discuss every class.
- I prefer reading many stories. From past experiences, I usually have found the longer stories English classes require to be boring. Some of the works such as Shakespeare seem long and drawn out. I often have trouble following along with his language. The longer works often take a while to read and dissect. I feel as



though we look into these works almost too much. When we pick apart every little piece we over analyze, removing the joy of reading. Another reason why I like reading multiple short stories is that if you are reading one you don't like, you talk about it in one class session and move on.

- I thoroughly enjoyed reading multiple short stories! For someone like me I could totally get into the story and not have to read...put it down...read...come back to it... and be lost. For my schedule, it helped a lot.

APPENDIX R: SURVEYS-HOW BLENDED INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE  
COURSE CHANGED STUDENTS AS READERS

- It allowed me to be responsible to get my work done even when I didn't necessarily have to get it done right at a certain time.
- It made me more observant of the things the author was doing and less reliant on the professors telling me what was happening.
- I didn't read too much when I started this class. I've started reading in my free time now!
- The online portion helped me to become a more independent student. I learned that I had to put myself on a schedule since we did not meet face-to-face in class. I am a more responsible student and I don't procrastinate as much on homework.
- Because I knew that I wouldn't have class discussions to aid my understanding of the stories, it made me pay closer attention to the reading. As a student, this helped me to tap into my thoughts and interpretations of the stories, which will help me problem solve in other classes and in real life. Also, I was responsible for turning in my work electronically, which meant that I had to take the extra responsibility of prioritizing.
- As a student, the independent online portion helped me understand how important it is to meet deadlines. It has also helped me as a reader because

I now know the importance of the elements of literature and how my opinions truly matter.

- I do not think the independent portion changed me. If anything, I missed the opinions of the other students. There were so many literary interpretations, but I only got to experience my own opinions and conclusions.
- The independent/online portion allowed me to see how much I have grown since the beginning of the course. I was not too confident in filling out my critique sheets during the beginning of the course, but I was excited to do them towards the end of the semester, because I knew I improved! The feedback the professors gave really helped me!
- It helped me to think more on my own. It encouraged me to do outside research if I did not know the answer or wanted more information.
- It helped me to think more independently and not rely so much on the answers of my professors and my classmates. I like that I can now fully think on my own. I also developed as a reader. I can now better understand what I am reading after doing these assignments, because I now know how to close read better and find those underlying themes and other literary elements.
- It changed me as a reader in multiple ways. Now I actually enjoy reading, especially short stories. It has helped me in my reading for other classes, too. This class has proved to be very beneficial to me.

- The independent/online portion helped me grow both as a student and as a reader. As a student because I was given the responsibility to hold myself accountable for getting things in on time and doing the best work I can without being monitored. As far as reading, I have always been an avid reader, but I was not familiar with literary terms. Learning what these were and how to apply them is something I can continue to do in my future reading. It was also great to be able to dive so deep into a story and create a whole presentation from it, truly showing what I have learned.
- It gave me an opportunity to show what I truly knew as a reading student. I now understand how authors used the literary elements to manipulate their readers. Also, understanding that literary works can have multiple interpretations, makes reading more exciting. I will encourage my children to use this approach in their reading.

APPENDIX S: SURVEYS-STUDENT PREFERENCES FOR POWERPOINTS VS.  
TRADITIONAL LECTURES

- PowerPoint presentations should be every student's best friend because they are quite useful in a variety of ways. First, each slide separates the topics discussed in class, and the most important information for someone to know is usually noted on the slides as well. Second, the more methods of teaching used in a classroom, the more students grasp onto information with more understanding and a greater percentage of retaining this information. Simply put, people learn, understand, and remember information differently, and by relaying information in multiple ways-through the teacher's voice and through the usage of PowerPoint presentations, more people gain the ability to process the information. Last, PowerPoints are great tools to look back on for future reference, especially because most people do not have a photographic memory or have the ability to write down everything mentioned in class. These presentations are simply helpful to remembering the core things from the class discussions.
- I really liked the PowerPoint presentations because I'm a visual learner and like to have these in front of me to look at and read along with what the professors are saying. These made me more interested in what I was learning and helped me better understand the story and elements of literature better. Literature is a hard subject for me because there is not straight answer and it's our interpretation, meaning there could be multiple interpretations. I think these PowerPoints and

class discussions helped push me towards what I needed to think about and to look deeper into the stories' meaning.

- I like the PowerPoints because we can base class discussions off of them. The PowerPoints allow the discussion to go a handful of different ways and it is a different type of discussion each class period. Also, the PowerPoints give a visual (and sometimes audible) dimension to things such as what the author looked and sounded like, the historical context, etc. This insured that we were participating and really thinking about how to critique each story.
- I would much rather look at PowerPoints than being lectured because I am less likely to pay attention if I am being talked at. PowerPoints help me pay attention because the information is in front of me and the instructors is talking more in depth than what is on the PowerPoint. This helps me pay attention, because if I forget what we are talking about, the PowerPoint will guide me in the right direction.
- I like the PowerPoints since in most of my classes, I usually take a lot of notes, and so using PowerPoints makes this easier since I can see exactly what I'm writing and don't have to keep up with professors speaking fast.
- I loved the PowerPoints because they really helped me to understand. The way the professors explained everything really kept my attention, because I can tell how passionate they both were, which made it more fun for me to learn.

- I rather have PowerPoints than traditional lectures. I liked how in depth the PowerPoints were. The questions included aided so much to my understanding the stories.
- I would rather receive the information about the stories in the PowerPoint format rather than a class lecture. The PowerPoint helps me pay attention more, because it contains pictures and videos. Also, students are more likely to become bored or fall asleep in a lecture where the professor/s are talking and there is no communication between the professors and the students. The PowerPoints allow the students to interact more with the professors and other students. I appreciate how the professors always ask and accept our inputs on how to interpret stories. In addition, PowerPoints are more modern than lectures. Today's college students have more experience with technology, therefore, if class uses modern technology like PowerPoints, the students will be more alert to follow the class discussion.
- I enjoy the PowerPoints. I am a visual learner, so seeing pictures or videos works better for me. During traditional lectures I often get bored. I don't remember things as well by just hearing facts or listening to someone talk than I do when I can look at something. The PowerPoints had questions written on them, so the class was able to talk, and answer the questions. This was nice because we could hear other people's thoughts. Communicating with one another is much more beneficial than listening to the professor speak. By hearing one another's ideas and thoughts we learn more and can develop a better understanding for one another which is good practice for us, so we can become not only more

empathetic towards others, but we are better prepared for the workforce where we need to listen to others.

- The PowerPoints were overwhelming. There was so much information thrown at me at one time.
- I think the professor's teaching style determines how to present the information. For this class specifically, it was good to use the visual PowerPoints so we could clearly see the questions and information. Also, the professors for this class are passionate and like to have fun with their subject area. The PowerPoints allowed them to do this like the wolves howling when we entered the room before our discussion of "The Interlopers". However, if a professor is traditional lecturer, and is really good at doing that, lecture would also be a good way to teach. Honestly, though I thought the PowerPoints were a modernized way to do lecture and discussion.



## APPENDIX T: SURVEYS-FAVORING AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

- The authors' biographies help me to think more about the author's style and may give insight to the story. Sometimes learning about the authors reveals how or why they wrote their stories the way they did. The authors' personal experiences and/or influences often show in their work. When we hear about when the author was born, we can think about how the time period influenced the author's writing. If we hear about where an author lived, then we can think about the setting and how it may relate to the story. Also, this may help with theme if the characters go through the same hardships the author struggled with. Some authors like Tan "wore the shoes of her major character in "Two Kinds." She showed us what it was like struggling growing up with immigrant parents who held the values of their culture while trying to be an American kid. Others wrote about things they read in newspapers or magazines, like Oates. Knowing this makes her story, "Where are you Going? Where have you Been?" even creepier because it was based on true events. Knowing such information can really open up students' minds to see the story in a whole new way than they did before reading it and not having any background.
- I found this information valuable. I happen to be a fan of random facts, so it made me pay more attention because I was interested.
- Knowing information about the author didn't benefit my reading of the stories. Obviously, we know that the author got their inspiration for the story either through one of their own life experiences, a story they heard already, or simply a

story they made up reflecting how they lived and/or thought. It really didn't matter to me how the author came about writing their story, it just matters that they wrote it.

- I most definitely think the author biographies has been helpful. It allows us as readers to better understand how who they are as writers, are coming from, their passions, and how their experiences influenced their writing styles, topics, and way they chose to use the elements of literature.
- Author biographies didn't make a difference. If the story is made by having to do research about an author, it's not a story I will ever enjoy.
- I think this information has helped me understand the story better. Though, in the evaluation of the stories, I don't think it has helped me much since I would rather focus on the actual content of the story and not the background behind the story. A story should be evaluated how the story is written and the techniques used to do this.
- The author bios provided us as readers a personal connection to the writers. It's also very interesting to see how they came to be as successful, which is motivating and inspiring!
- Not essentially since I felt that my own experience and interpretation of the stories were more relevant.
- Knowing a little background about the authors helps us often to figure out the message they are trying to convey in their stories.

## APPENDIX U: SURVEYS-POWERPOINT QUESTIONS

- They helped me understand what might be more important to the story and made me think critically about the message the author was trying to convey.
- I liked the questions at the end of the end of the PowerPoints. Even though some of them were kind of difficult, they made you really think about the story and they did help me understand it better.
- The questions were very helpful. They forced me to put my thoughts into words which is something I'm occasionally uncomfortable doing. It forced us to think about the stories in potentially new ways.
- The questions were very helpful because they helped me to think deeper into the story and see elements that I had not seen the first time reading it.
- The questions at the end of the story were not something I always wanted to do, but they did offer more insight about the author and the story. By answering the questions at the end of the PowerPoints, I always felt like I understood the story better and was able to adjust my thoughts to try and see from the author's perspective. Also, I liked that I was able to share my opinions because I knew I would get feedback, which I find very helpful!
- Some of them were helpful and got me thinking more about the story, but others seemed to be there just to fill in and have more questions. There were more questions that helped me than there were that didn't help.

- The questions at the end of the presentation did help me better understand the story. I had to go back to the presentation and contemplate the information. It prevented me from taking any fact or opinion at face value.
- Sometimes I felt the questions were a bit repetitive. I felt my answers were sometimes justified as answers for many of the questions asked so I felt it occasionally seemed like tedious work. But, some of the questions allowed me to explore the literature more than I was doing before reading the questions.
- The questions helped me think deeper about the story and its meaning. I felt like before the questions, I had a pretty fair understanding of the story, but the questions really helped me think about the story and all of its elements and how every part of the story works together!
- I thought the questions were very helpful. They revolved around important parts of the story and things that we should have picked up on. They made me look further in depth at the story, and many times, there were questions about things I did not pick up my first time reading the story. Many times while answering the question, I would have to go back and reread parts of it several times, so I could give a complete answer to the question. They contributed to a deeper understanding of the story.
- The questions at the end of the PowerPoints were extremely helpful in understanding the stories better. Sometimes I think I understood everything, and then a question at the end of the presentation would make me think of something

in a completely different way. Put simply, the questions at the end of the PowerPoint made me think of the stories from more than just one point of view.

- The questions were very helpful. I especially appreciated the ones that pulled quotes from the story so that I could go back and review a section to better understand the story as well as read further into something I might have skimmed over previously.

## APPENDIX V: SURVEYS-USEFULNESS OF CRITIQUE SHEETS

- The critique sheets have helped me know what to look for and think about when reading the stories. First, if I didn't have the critique sheets to fill out, I don't know if I would have done the readings. Being busy with other school work, I would probably just Spark Note the story and not even read it. Then I would arrive in class not able to participate in the discussion, and I wouldn't get much out of class. With the critique sheets, I knew what to look at when reading. The professors wanted students to elaborate their thoughts and think about how and why the author developed the story. For example, I wasn't able to just write down the characters' names. I also had to think about how the author presented the characters. Were the characters revealed through their thoughts, actions, words, and/or how others saw them? The professors kept asking us to dig deeper into each of the literary elements making these critique sheets very valuable for learning and understanding advancing my critical thinking skills. They wanted us to think HOW the author developed the characters, HOW they described setting, HOW they developed plot, etc. Now I am thinking about literature in a different way (why the author wrote/took the route they did in writing the story), instead of just listing things I read in the story, and moving onto the next story.

Therefore, I would much rather complete the critique sheets than do research papers. I am learning just as much as I would be writing a research paper. The only skills I am not gaining is composing paragraphs into an essay and improving my grammar. Research papers make me anxious, and I would spend more time

thinking about the spelling and format than I would about the literary elements. Also, the critique sheets make the class more casual, making me more relaxed, and willing to share my thoughts and ideas with the class in discussion.

- The critique sheets helped me to understand the stories better than a paper. Logistically we could do more critique sheets than papers. With the critique sheets we had to apply the comments from the professors to the next assignment. We would not be as likely to apply the advice from the papers' comments since we do only a few of them, we could get by not applying the advice. So, we would develop better skills interpreting literature since we would be continuously practicing working with the elements of literature and with a variety of stories.
- The critique sheets are better because they are not as overwhelming a paper as an evaluation tool than a paper, because with the critique sheets it is easier to pinpoint specific areas of strengths and weaknesses in working with the elements of literature. We knew what to focus on better than a paper to improve our work especially since the profs for this course were very detailed with their feedback.
- This experience has been extremely valuable to me personally, because it brought back memories of high school English when we discussed the elements of literature. However, I definitely forgot what most of them were. The critique sheets sparked these memories, and I was able to relearn the elements of literature. I truly believe they will now stick with me better for the rest of my life, because now I genuinely understand them, enabling me to interpret different meanings to stories I wouldn't have before.

So, I personally prefer doing the critique sheets, because I have learned, understood, and retained information better than writing traditional papers. With papers I would have simply looked up the information in a book or online article and typed what I found in a Word Doc without even thinking about what I wrote.

- I prefer the critique sheets because they worked as an outline to help us break down the story into its basic literary elements.
- Critique sheets allowed us to practice more working with the literary elements. Although students do learn some important skills to go into their personal “writer’s toolbox” when writing these longer research papers, I personally felt that the student grows a lot more in their understanding the elements of literature by practicing on the critique sheets. Also, by reading many different short stories while using the critique sheets, helps the student to pull out the deeper meanings in literature through the continuous practice. Basically, it comes down to the professor’s objectives. If the professor’s main objective for his/her literature class is to enhance students’ writing skills, then the professor should have their students do research papers. However, if the main objective is to help students understand the importance and working of the literary elements, then the professor should use the critique sheet method.
- The critique sheets supply consistency and makes it easier to compare stories and our growth in understanding the literary elements when compared side by side. They helped to build my confidence as a reader.



- I will now be able to fully appreciate how stories are constructed by how authors manipulate the literary elements. This is something I don't think I could have picked up on by writing papers. Odds are I will never read literature the same way again since I am much more aware of the literary elements. Also, this method and by reading short stories, I was able to experience a great variety of literature and learn so much more.
- I liked the critique sheets because each time we did one, it expanded my analytical reading skills more than the last one. I get better each time we complete one at interpreting literature.
- Personally, I would rather do the critique sheets because I am not a very good writer. The critique sheets aren't based on my writing, but my analytical skills. Also, the critique sheets help me to become a literary critic rather than writing a paper based on what other critics have to say about the story. I like finding my voice about literature.
- Unlike ordinary classes, we were not required to sit around and hear a lecture about some topic that we would simply get tested over a few weeks later over information we would never use beyond the classroom walls. Rather, we learned a few basics about the literary elements which are the tools writers use to fill their "tool boxes" that helps them create a literary world and put their readers under a binding spell to keep reading. It was our job with the critique sheets to learn how the writers were able to manipulate the readers through these tools as well think critically and interpret that information beyond what was said on the surface of

the page. With these critique sheets, we were bounded only by our imagination. Instead of memorizing things, we implemented our knowledge creatively and found applications for it.

And even though research papers can be very useful and applicable to completing further projects beyond the scholastic world, sadly, there are many problems with research papers that should be addressed because they inhibit learning. Like standardized testing, research papers are structured in a very rigid manner, and learning is being implemented in schools for merely a good final product—a good research paper. By following given guidelines, students learn how to write a so-called “good” paper, but one major problem to method of madness resides. There should not be one definition to what a good research paper should be like as there is no definitive answer in standardized testing how reading should be interpreted.

On the other hand, there is no one way to write a good critique sheet. Students do not have to research the information (they will probably never use again) to fill them out. Rather, with critique sheets, students learn to use their powers of imagination to think critically about reading literature created from the world of someone else’s imagination. Ultimately, critique sheets encourage creativity instead of being shackled to believing and going along with social norms.

- I’ve always struggled with understanding the different elements of literature. In high school, I never had to look at each element in great depth like we had to

with our critique sheets. Often, in high school, my teachers would just tell us the literary elements and not make us look for them ourselves. Thinking such a way is what I want to do with my students when I become a teacher.

For my learning style, I liked the critique sheets a lot. They are repetitive, which really helps me understand each literary element better. In most classes students are writing papers and it is nice to get a break from writing so many papers. When I'm done writing such a paper, I tend to forget what I just wrote and will probably never look at that paper again, whereas the critique sheets I continuously must build upon what I learned from previous stories.

- The critique sheets have been quite valuable. They allow us as readers to reflect in many different ways what we personally thought of each story, how that story was told, and the way the characters were revealed as well as some of the big take away messages and themes the author wanted us to walk away with after reading. The critique sheets also expanded our thinking about the literary elements for each story and see how the stories are similar or different in structure, plot, point of view, etc.

One of my favorite aspects of the critique sheet was being allowed to share our own personal thoughts and opinions after reflecting first on a story's structure based on the literary elements. The critique sheets also allowed the professors to have some sort of accountability from the students in making sure that we read each of the stories and had the opportunity to "bring something to the table" when we came to class to discuss the stories.

Not only did the critique sheets help us learn how each of the writers uses the setting, plot structure, point of view, themes, characterization, stylistic techniques, and possible historical and/or biographical elements to complete a unified work of art, we were encouraged as said earlier to incorporate our own views, interpretations, and opinions about the literary work to become real literary critics. This is a skill we can apply in real life to other school work, readings, movies, etc. Plus, the critique sheets allowed us to cover a larger number of stories than having to write long drawn out papers over fewer stories. By having more stories, class discussions are run at a quicker pace, giving us the opportunity to move onto a different story, which is good especially if a student can't connect to a particular story. And even occasionally if we couldn't relate to the story at hand, we still walked away with literary knowledge and felt we had another chance to contribute more for the next assignment. Listening to others literary interpretations was enriching. Overall, due to the quicker pace, I think students are much more likely to have better class discussions.

- Critique sheets are valuable. By completing a critique sheet, I was able to look at different literary techniques more in depth. This is because I was thinking about them individually rather than altogether. Therefore, I could spend more time on a certain technique and really be able to see how the author uses it to persuade the reader's thoughts. For example, before this class I didn't think much about the setting of a story, other than it describes where and when the story took place. But now I see how setting can influence a reader's thinking and how it can

be used to shape a story. This has helped me to become more interested in literature.

I prefer critique sheets because they are less stressful than research papers since they do not take as long to complete even though they require the same amount of thinking.

- I prefer the critique sheets because these promoted deep/critical thinking about the literature we read by forcing us to develop arguments better by learning to give specific examples and proof to support our interpretations.
- I like the critique sheets better because they gave a consistency for assignments since we had to do so many of them. By having so many and evaluating the same things, the critique sheets served as a better progress report than papers which would not have been as many.
- Critique sheets are better because they give a more accurate depiction of our knowledge about the literature. They better our skills in interpreting literature instead of putting the focus on writing. The critique sheets cover the same information as a paper would, and since we have to complete so many of them, we constantly think about the class.
- I prefer research papers because they are more valuable later in life, because you learn handy skills such as how to construct a paper properly, making text citations, and wording. I plan to go on to graduate school and will need to know how to write research papers well.

- The critique sheets are valuable due to the fact that usually I must take notes about the story I am reading. But with the critique sheets and doing them while reading the story helps me to comprehend and answer questions without taking notes and being disorganized. My reading skills have been built through the critique sheets.
- Critique sheets are more interesting, fun, and engaging than papers.
- The critique sheets gave us more chances to improve grade for the course. We could not do as many papers, because they are more time consuming.
- The critique sheets helped me to evaluate the stories better. They forced me to think about the readings. To be honest, in other classes, I would read the story and go to class and not participate in discussion because I really didn't know what was going on in the story. The sheets, on the other hand, helped me to actually understand what the stories were about. I rather do the critique sheets than traditional papers because I, like most students, just write to get it done and meet the page limit, not deep thinking about the subject.
- The critique sheets are better. They really made the literary elements stand out since this was the focus and the critique sheets broke them down. This helped us to get a clearer idea how the elements of literature are interrelated and work together in a story. It was more specific than doing a paper to understand how a story is constructed through the elements of literature.

- I prefer the critique sheet because it helped us to grow as people since these helped with time management skills and responsibility since every week had a critique or two.
- I like critique sheets better. They feel safer than papers for interpreting literature, because we had to have confidence in ourselves first with our interpretations and they allowed us to grow as writers by taking more baby steps to develop those skills than having to write a ten-page paper.
- Critique sheets are better than papers. They help students to stay current with assignments-this way more likely to read closely and think deeper about all the stories-with a paper, a student can skip or take short cuts with literary works that you know you will not use for paper.
- Critique sheets make sense as the better choice. We do not yet think in essay form and is silly of profs to think otherwise.
- The critique sheets made sure we had a clear understanding of all the elements of literature. We can avoid some of the elements when doing a paper.
- I personally love to write research papers, so I wouldn't have minded one. On the other hand, most students don't like to write papers, so the critique sheets are good for them. The sheets weren't too easy, but not too hard that they become frustrating to complete.
- I personally would rather do the critique sheets rather than doing research papers. Research papers tend to be long and super specific about one thing. The critique sheet allows me to dig into all the different elements of literature. That helps me

understand the story better by looking at all of the literary elements instead of just one of them.

- I rather have the critiques sheets. With them we could chart and keep track of our growth throughout the semester, not to mention it was an easier way to see our strengths and weaknesses in interpreting literature through the elements of literature.
- Completing a critique sheet has been valuable to me because I am able to look at the story in small parts and in greater detail. This has helped me look at the different elements of literature and not just the overall story. This helps me to read deeper and see things such as symbolism, characterization, and themes. By doing the critique sheet over and over again (not just one time), I learned more than doing the one-time research paper.
- I would rather do several critique sheets than do a few research papers. Doing several, shorter assignments allowed us to explore a variety of tools I was able to see how I could better critique a story twice a week, and I have seen amazing growth in critiquing skills since the beginning of the semester. Writing fewer, longer papers would not have allowed for the immediate feedback or as many chances to improve as the shorter critique sheets did.
- I prefer doing more traditional research papers because they require a large amount of knowledge on the story before the research paper can actually be put together. Although I find critique sheets do a great job of breaking the story down, it is more of an outline than a review of the story.



- Going into this class I couldn't explain what the literary elements were, but now I certainly can! The critique sheets are a great way to every part of the story. Like both professors have said, I can now have anyone pick up my critique sheet and they will be able to know what the story is about. Research papers, on the other hand, are awful. They are so time consuming and what do they accomplish? Nothing. No one ever wants to sit down and read the papers nor does anyone want to write them. Students receive a much better understanding of the stories read and literary terms doing the critique sheets.

APPENDIX W: SURVEYS-BLEND OF DISCUSSION AND INFORMATION FOR  
FACE-TO-FACE PORTION

- The blend of discussion and information has been just right. I enjoy listening to what my peers have to say. Sometimes I don't like when the professors call on me, but when we relate our lives to the stories, I enjoy talking and listening to my peers. By discussing as a class, we are able to learn more about the story and peoples' thoughts, helping me to think about the stories in a different way. I don't like it when the professors are the only ones discussing, but I think they share a good amount of information on the slides. I pay better attention the way class was set up. The questions encouraged deep and critical thinking.
- For my learning style, the blend of information and discussion is right. I also liked the little add-ons the professors would throw in. This made learning fun, not boring. The information wasn't too much, so it didn't blow you away, but it wasn't too little where you had lots of unanswered questions about the literature.
- I'd have to say the current way you teach is the perfect blend. It goes into depth about the author's background and historical context, and also helps us break down bits and pieces of the stories! I loved how we created a personal connection with both the story and the author's history. It's a great combination.

- Less information would be better for me. I like reading a story and then trying to figure out where the author got the idea and why they wrote the story he/she did. If I had too much information, it takes all the fun away.
- Too many discussion questions.
- I would say that the information given in class had been perfect for me to retain the information. The background of the author gives us a good idea of what he/she is like and why they might write the way that they do. Going over the story really helps when it is confusing to completely solve on our own. Lastly, the questions at the end were awesome. They helped us recap everything we had learned and highlighted the important lessons.
- I like the blend of discussion and information we had. Helps me know more information about the story that I did not see earlier, and it makes the students get involved.
- I would say the blend of discussion and information has been about perfect for my learning style, because it was not too many visual aids and not too much regular old discussion. I was able to learn from the visual aids, discussions, and out of class assignments. There was enough time between the discussion and visual aids for me to jot down notes so I would be able to retain the information, because I retain and learn information better when I write it down. Students come to college for an education, and less information about each story would have just shortened our education.

- There was just enough information about the story and just enough discussion over each story. We picked the story apart and explored it in detail, but we didn't interpret every possible meaning for each word or what detail symbolized.
- I would have liked it if we could spend an extra day with each story. I like to have a complete understanding of what I read.
- The blend was perfect. Sometimes before coming to class, I did not completely understand the story, but after class I had a thorough understanding of the material.
- The blending of discussion and information is the most suitable option. If too much information is told in class, it gives too little work to do beyond the classroom setting. But if there is too little information discussed, that would inhibit further understanding for confused souls. On the other hand, if too much time was spent on discussion, the critique sheets from everyone would be very similar because too much of the interpretations would be done in class. But if too little time is spent on discussion, some of the story's most important literary elements could be forgotten, which could lessen the overall reading experience for the students.
- The amount of information we received about each story was just right for me. When I get too much information, I get overwhelmed and don't know how to organize the information or decide which information is relevant and important to know. The information we received was enough for me to

understand the story, but still have some unanswered questions for me to think about.

- The visuals drew me in as a learner.
- I would say the blend of discussion and information that has been provided in class is just the right amount of information to facilitate class discussion, create a fun learning environment and give students an opportunity to learn how to properly critique a story and what to look for as a critic. I really enjoy the amount of information, the relevancy of the information, the way it was presented on PowerPoint, and the class discussions. I felt as though each students' views and opinions matter and we as students can go back and forth in both large and small group discussions.

APPENDIX X: SURVEYS-NO SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING FACE-TO-FACE  
PORTION

- Overall, this class is unique and interesting. It goes in depth about several short stories to show many styles and genres of writing. I appreciated how the professors demonstrated how to access documents online and how the course was organized. The passion of the professors toward the students and the subject area carries over to the students.
- It's hard to think of things that would improve the class, because I thoroughly enjoyed it. This maybe because I like to read so much and I don't mind writing either. This class is definitely my favorite this semester!
- I don't have any suggestions for improvement because this class is wonderful. It has taught me so much already. I love the enthusiasm that is brought into every class, which helps me to learn better because my attention span is kept.
- Honestly, I can't really think of anything to improve the first half of the course. The way the information was presented, I was able to fully understand what was going on, and properly evaluate each story. The amount of information given regarding each story is a proper amount for being successful with the critique sheets. The professors do a great job, and I really enjoy this class because of it.

- I love how our professors are always so passionate about what they are talking about. Having professors who don't care and don't love what they are teaching really turns students off of the subject. Our professors love their job which makes it easy for us students to love this class. Literature was my favorite class that I took this semester.
- Honestly, I have no suggestions on ways to improve this course due to the fact that I feel everything is running very efficiently as well as having very approachable professors. By allowing this course to be face-to-face as well as incorporating independent online time not only helps the students be able to grow, but also forces them to try thing for themselves first before asking a teacher right away for help. This combination of learning is very effective as well as very convenient for the students. I am very impressed with this class and extremely appreciative of how compassionate both professors are about helping their students reach their full potential. So, in short, keep up the good work, and I hope to see more of these classes appearing in the future!

## APPENDIX Y: SURVEYS-ONLINE LECTURES/POWERPOINTS USEFULNESS

- I wouldn't change anything.
- The information was easy to understand. It was portrayed in a way that very clear and wasn't too difficult to understand.
- I found the information very easy to understand, probably in part because the first part of the course where we met in class and went through the presentations. Also, the slides were all thorough and coherent.
- The information on the PowerPoints were usually easy enough for me to understand. If there was a concept I didn't quite understand, I would not hesitate to ask the professors.
- I thought the information on the PowerPoints for the independent portion of the class was easy and clear! I thought they were extremely useful, especially because they were in the same format as the ones presented in class. This made it easy to follow and I knew what to expect!
- I liked how the PowerPoints gave background information first and then went into information about the story. I think that really helped me put everything together.
- Yes, I found them easy to understand, because we had extensive practice with them during the in-class portion of the semester.
- Sometimes the questions at the end of the PowerPoint were difficult to understand and I had to really think about them.



- It was the same as it had been during our time in class, so it was easy to go through and very straightforward, especially since it was the same thing we had been doing in class.

APPENDIX Z: SURVEYS-DIFFICULTIES COMPLETING THE CRITIQUE OR  
POWERPOINT QUESTIONS

- I felt I was prepared after the first half of the semester and didn't have much difficulty with the independent learning pods.
- Overall, this has been a difficult semester with my grandmother passing away around Christmas, my father having a heart attack, and my own health issues. But once I had time to sit down and get my bearings, the stories were easy to follow with the PowerPoints that were provided.
- It was easy to complete the critique sheet and the questions. The critique sheet provided new insights to the stories.
- I did not have a lot of problems answering the PowerPoint questions or filling out the critique sheet. But when I did, I either asked the instructors for help during their office hours or emailing them. Sometimes I would look up some hints on the Internet as a guide for my responses.
- No such instance stands out for me. There were times it took me longer to fill out the critique sheet, but that was because I was struggling to think of quality thoughts about an element of literature.
- No, I did not have any problems or difficulty completing my independent work. I felt very confident in my interpretations and understanding of each story. I also felt confident in what was expected of me!
- There was only one time that I had a hard time and it was because softball was on the road on Wednesday until Friday, and I didn't have much time earlier in

the week. Other than that, I felt like I got them done in about two days. I gave myself one day to read the story and then I would read it again the next day and do the critique sheets.

- There were never any times that I absolutely could not complete a question or a part of the critique sheets. There were times that questions were a little more difficult. Or a literary element of was harder to pick up on. To solve these problems, I would go back and try to reread a section of the story the entire story if I needed to. The PowerPoints usually helped me to understand the story, so if I got confused, I would try to find help through the slides. If not, I found that the Internet is a great source to find additional information on the story and help understand the work at a deeper level.
- Personally, I didn't struggle with anything in the online independent learning pods. By the time the first part of the semester was over, I was extremely comfortable with filling out the critique sheets and answering the questions. With all the critique sheets we did in class, I felt that I was extremely well prepared for the independent part.
- No, I was always able to complete the assignments and questions. While some were more challenging than others, I'd just reread the story or come back to question to answer it better last.

APPENDIX AA: SURVEYS-DIFFICULTIES PUTTING TOGETHER MAJOR  
PROJECT

- Had some trouble understanding and analyzing story
- Finding material about author's background
- Finding material about historical context of story
- Finding appropriate video clips
- Laptop needing repairs
- Embedding video
- Time consuming
- Organization of project
- Not using time efficiently
- Choosing the story
- Putting thoughts into words
- Technology-first time made PowerPoint
- Technology-learning how to hyperlink
- Technology-sending in the project (e.g. too massive or sent in wrong format)
- Prefer to have a rubric rather than a checklist of what was required
- Wanted a second opinion to give confidence was on right track with analysis  
(Note: student took responsibility for not coming in during office hours or emailing)
- Locating visuals to use

- Writing text that will promote understanding of the story
- Determining if facts were indeed factual and reliable
- Technological difficulties with PowerPoint applications
- Making information creative and interesting
- Formatting, organizing, designing, and layout of PowerPoint
- Deciding how much information to include

## APPENDIX BB: SURVEYS-PROJECT VS. RESEARCH PAPER

- The PowerPoint project seemed more casual than the traditional paper, so I was less stressed about perfection.
- Traditional research papers have many rules and constraints. Professors usually require students to research information on a topic that isn't their choice. In most cases, we combine a bunch of facts together that represent what we think the professor wants to hear. In reality, these papers are very dull to read and a nuisance to write. They lack imagination and creative expression. Also, the major project had a lot of flexibility and freedom. Even though there were some requirements, we had the right to pick out the story we wanted to do as well as how we wanted to organize the information. We were guided by our creativity and critical thinking skills.
- I most definitely enjoyed the major project over the traditional paper. I already had four research papers in my other classes and the novelty of this project made it fun. When something is enjoyable, I am engaged. The project allowed us to be creative, think deeply, and work on other important skills such as learning how to master computers and to work visually. It felt like the project accomplished the same goals as a paper would have, but in a much more enjoyable way. Like a paper, we were able to demonstrate our interpretive reading skills.
- This was far less painful way to demonstrate what we learned about applying the literary elements to reading a piece of literature.

- Being an education major, it was a great learning experience for me to do the major project. I have written numerous papers, but I have never created a PowerPoint to teach someone else about a specific topic.
- Is this even a question? Yes, I loved the major project. It was an outlet to be creative and do something different.
- A PowerPoint project was fitting for this class to teach others since the professors did the same thing to teach us about short stories.
- It was fun to be the teacher!
- YES!!! Working with both visuals and text is more beneficial than working with text alone in a paper. Adding visual elements to text and being creative will help me to remember the literature much better.
- I am burnt out on paper writing. Also, papers tend to be regurgitated facts. I thought deeper with the project.
- I definitely enjoyed the major project over the paper. It was more oriented for a blended class. It was a total flip from the professors teaching us to us becoming the teachers. I liked that!
- Not only did I learn more doing the major project instead of the paper, because I was having more fun, but also because I was learning through a different way through the use of technology.
- I am an awful writer. With the project I was able to apply what I learned about reading literature. This may not have come through with a paper.
- The project was a better use of my time and helped me interact with the story.

- The project goes beyond using words. Adding things such as color and visuals, I could influence my partner's thinking.
- The project is easier and less time consuming than a long paper.
- With a paper, I would be bored and would wait until the last minute to do it and wouldn't get as much understanding out of it.
- I definitely enjoyed the project more than a paper. The project required us to show an understanding of the story and the elements of literature. We also get to help others learn in the process!
- I really enjoyed doing this project because it was a creative outlet that was not only fun and interesting, but also taught me how to research in a different way because this was a bit different than other PowerPoint projects I have done in the past. Once I begin writing papers, I can just keep writing, but getting started tends to be difficult for me. I was excited to work on this project because it was outside of the box. Literature is about creativity and opening up your mind, and this project did this. Besides, this course was unique, so why not have an equally unique final project to go along with it?
- As much as I honestly love writing essays, the final project helped me better understand the story and the life of the author in a fun and different way than most college courses.
- I liked doing this project because it gave me more of an insight of how the professors put things together and actually helped me learn a lot more and retain the information about the story than I would have just doing a paper.



- I enjoyed the major project better than a paper. It was fun to do and it helped me gain confidence about my literature knowledge! It was more true way to show what we learned in this class than a huge paper.
- I do not enjoy writing papers. The project also gives a more accurate representation of what I have learned and what we have been doing in class all semester, so it is very fitting that this was how we were able to show our understanding of literature. Being given student choice as to which story to select and creativity in teaching about it increased my interest in the assignment.
- I had to write a paper for all my other classes and I absolutely hated it. I put much more time and effort into the project because it was actually enjoyable.
- The project was a good idea. I do not mind writing papers but his was very refreshing and I think I did the same amount of work I would've done for a paper, but in a way that was more enjoyable for me and someone else to review.

## APPENDIX CC: SURVEYS-LEARNED FROM THE FINAL PROJECT

- How to think independently
- Strategies for creating a thorough story analysis
- Technical skills in making a PowerPoint
- Developing my creativity
- New artistic skills
- Teaching skills
- That I can teach which is good to gain this confidence since I am a teaching major
- How to become a literary critic
- Learned more about myself as a reader
- To appreciate literature more
- Ways to strengthen my own writing skills
- That peer evaluations as well as teacher evaluations can help improve my work
- Seeing the connections how the author's background and experiences often influences what he/she writes
- Understanding that historical context can influence a writer
- Gaining a good understanding of the literary elements-we not only had to have basic knowledge but we had to go further by applying our knowledge
- Seeing the depth and the hard work writers go through to write a story
- Thinking critically

- Possessing a deeper understanding how the reader adds meaning to the text which may cause multiple interpretations of a story
- Taught me to look into stories further on my own rather than be guided by or simply restating someone else's analysis
- Confidence as a reader
- Literature can be fun
- Better time management
- Improved my research skills
- How to form well thought out questions as a teacher
- New vocabulary
- Philosophies such as feminism
- About other cultures
- Expanded my reading skills
- That good literature is universal
- That I am capable of taking a story apart and analyzing it on my own
- That I can be more independent as a learner
- How to organize information
- How to evaluate resources
- Teacher have to do a lot of work
- Have a greater appreciation for my teachers
- Learned special artistic techniques

- Realized that “stories are never just stories”-there are always stories behind the stories such as the author’s life or what is happening historically
- I learned more about myself as a learner (e.g. I am a visual learner.)
- Knowledge about my author
- Gained a new understanding to see how the author manipulates his/her readers through the use of the literary element
- A new appreciation for authors
- How to look at a story from multiple perspectives
- I now pay attention to the little details a writer supplies within the story-read closer now
- Importance of being accurate
- How to be more detailed
- How to better support my arguments with proof and specific information
- How to be more efficient with my time
- The importance of following directions

APPENDIX DD: SURVEYS-REASONS MAJOR PROJECT SHOULD BE  
CONTINUED

- The project is less stressful than a traditional paper
- The project allows us to share our knowledge with someone else (We play the teacher role)
- The project is a great learning experience
- The project took us out of our comfort zone by trying something new
- The project gave us a chance to be creative
- The project showcases how much we have learned
- The project enabled us to explore stories beyond critique sheets
- The project expanded our critical and higher level thinking (Bloom's Taxonomy)
- The project opened us to different interpretations of story
- The project is a fun, enjoyable way to learn causing greater student engagement
- Rather do a project than a traditional paper
- The project helped us to learn as much, if not more, than a traditional paper because we are more engaged with learning
- The project taps into other learning styles e.g. visual
- With the project, we are more likely to retain information
- Can apply learning from the project to other classes, jobs, leisure, future, etc.
- The project expanded our technological skills

- Be better if students were given the option to do either traditional paper or the PowerPoint
- The paper is a better choice because it would have forced us to connect with the literary elements more
- The project since novelty is nice
- The project allows us to bring ourselves to the text when interpreting (transactional theory)
- Felt the project took more work and is more challenging than a paper since we had to teach another to understand a story
- The project helped those of us who are education majors because it gave us a chance to teach
- The project provided clearer insight between author and his/her writing
- The project provides clearer insight between literary work and its historical context
- The project gave us a chance to experience what the professors go through when creating lessons for students
- The project because it is like the saying, “you really must understand something if you have to teach it”
- The project because it switched the learning power from the professors to the students
- The project brought the entire course together (It was the culmination and marriage between face-to-face and online portions)

## APPENDIX EE: SURVEYS-REASONS TO STUDY A FULL RANGE OF AUTHORS

- Able to experience a diversity of stories which exposes them to many writing styles, themes, etc.
- Liked reading the works of several authors
- Gained a better understanding of the literary elements because saw how various authors would use different techniques to manipulate their readers' thoughts and emotions
- Felt variety increases interest
- Thought working with fewer authors would mean that professors would "beat a work to death" by analyzing everything
- See more examples of how to be imaginative and creative with writing
- Working with various authors meant dealing with shorter works such as short stories, thereby making the process of creating a literary analysis less overwhelming
- Helped to make them more well-rounded readers since they dealt with stories they would not have selected to read on their own or even knew existed
- Works better because have shorter attention spans, less likely to get bored
- Was neat to compare and contrast authors' writing techniques
- Had a clearer understanding how authors influenced each other
- Having more authors meant more stories so could practice more in seeing the complexity of literature

- Made class feel as if it was constantly new and exciting
- Increases student engagement so more likely to pay attention to what is going on
- Helped me to better figure out my tastes in reading
- Had more practice working with the elements of literature
- Learned more about history since studied authors connected to different time periods
- Opened us up to more ways people viewed the world
- If did not like a certain author knew that soon would be working with a different one



## APPENDIX FF: SURVEYS-50-50 FORMULA

- I think splitting the semester in half between the face-to-face and the online learning pods is good, just because it gives us time to have the class and really understand it with a teacher/s and then us being able to do it on our own and be able to do it successfully.
- The learning was not overwhelming this way.
- I got the hang of the critique sheets and PowerPoints way before we moved to the independent online portion, but I am glad we did not have to do more online independent learning pods. The independent stories took a long time.
- I wish we had more online independent learning pods. I feel that if the main portion of the class was the independent portion and we were given one or two class meet ups to ensure that everyone is fully encompassing the material, it would be better since we can work at our own pace and schedule more time for jobs and/or activities.
- It is not that I did not like the online part, it is just I prefer being around people as in the face-to-face part.
- I was not too fond of the independent online portion of the class, because I believe it is important for students to be able to share their opinions face-to-face with other people and receive immediate feedback for their thoughts.
- I manage my time better and am more disciplined when meeting face-to-face.

- I liked that the class was set up half and half. I felt the in-class portion was just long enough for me to understand the basics of the literary elements, so I could complete my online independent portion confidently.
- The class structure was just right. The in-class portion laid out the class for me and then I was set free when it was time for the online independent part.

APPENDIX GG: SURVEYS- SUGGESTIONS FOR THE BLENDED LEARNING  
STRUCTURE

- Wished the class kept some online, but had more face-to-face meetings because I would have liked to have met after each learning pod was due so we could discuss the problems or our thoughts on the story with each other. I think the class discussions over each story were my favorite part of the course, because they helped me see how each story can be interpreted a different way depending on who is reading the story.
- Wish the class was entirely face-to-face because then we could express interpretations of stories and instantly hear, see, and feel what peers and professors had to say
- Wish the class was entirely face-to-face because I am more of a social person and like physically being around people
- Wish the class was entirely face-to-face because that was always what I have known
- Wish the class was entirely face-to-face because the “out of sight, out of mind” which means I am more likely to mismanage time and forget about the class if not physically coming to a classroom on a mandated schedule
- Wished the class was entirely online since I like working independently
- Wished the class was entirely online since I am an introverted person
- Wished the class was entirely online or face-to-face, because I don't like to change

- Wished could have got the final sooner so could have finish this class super early and could then focus on my other major classes.
- Wished to have the first six weeks be face-to-face just as normal. Then, on the seventh week, have a trial run to what the independent part of the course would be like with learning pod one, and on the eighth week, have the final week of face-to-face classes with the midterm exam. Then, if anybody has any initial troubles with doing the independent part, these troubles could be addressed and resolved in class as a whole instead of over email.
- Wished could start the major project at the beginning of the year instead of after the end of the first half-semester. I felt like I had plenty of time to do this project, but many other students have more time restraining schedules where this extra time would be very beneficial. Originally, we had to do three independent learning pods before actually having to determine what our projects would be. Instead, during that previously suggested experimental independent work week (week seven), assign the first learning pod like what we first did with our projects—stating what short story our major project would be on and how much we have done thus far.
- Wished the independent online portion contained a few extra stories. I spent maybe an hour a week on the class, and while it was fun enough, I don't feel like I did a lot to earn my credits.

- Wished changed due dates of assignments because that's a lot of work in a short amount of time, especially for independent work. Maybe one due Friday and another on Tuesdays? I don't really know.
- Wished for more of a range in time periods. We did a lot of older stories from several decades to being from the first half of the 1800s. We did not do really any present-day stories—the closest to that was “A Moment of Grace.” Other than that, the second closest story to today's time was “Two Kinds” by Amy Tan, being published in 1989. I recommend adding one or two more American short stories from the past few years or just in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in general to give it more relevance and universality to the students' lives.
- Wished could see what would happen if the class, during the Independent Learning Pods we met maybe once a week for maybe a half an hour or so just to discuss the story for that week and to turn in the assignment. By meeting for that half an hour and turning in the assignment, it could cause for less confusion in sending the assignment through e-mail, and it would maybe minimize the amount of times people forget to do the assignment and/or forget to turn it in.
- Wished for the major project work to be split and evaluated before doing the next chunk for it. For example, the first assignment would have students read the short story selected, fill out an independent critique sheet for the story that they chose, a draft of the questions they would like to add at the end of the slideshow, and then have them include these questions and answers with the completed independent critique sheet by Friday at midnight like when the usual independent work was

due. The professors would critique the work and the students would finish the project based on their feedback. This method would contain a lot of the work that the students will end up using in their PowerPoint, and it will be a good building block to making their overall presentation. Also, the professors have the ability to correct any fallacies and mistakes that the students have with their story initially, so they do not make same mistakes later on. Lastly, this will steer the students in the right direction to making their presentations, and this assignment will hopefully seem like a helpful tool rather than a bunch of extra work.

## APPENDIX HH: SURVEYS-LIKING THE BLENDED FORMAT

- I liked the format of the course because we were able to connect with our professors in the beginning, forming a relationship so that asking questions later on was not awkward. Then, having the independent part allowed us to grow as readers. I believe the structure added an open learning environment, and I would not recommend changing it.
- It was a great way to divide the class up into the two sections of meeting regularly and then for the second half doing the Independent Learning Pods. It was a great place for the switch when we started the Independent portion of the class, because we had learned the basics during the first portion. If the first portion where we met regularly would have been expanded and lasted longer, there wouldn't have been enough time for us students to get the full grasp of the independent portion. Also, if the first portion was cut shorter, then we students would not have had as good an understanding of the stories and literary elements as we did, making the independent portion a lot more difficult. Therefore, I would not recommend changing the structure, because the way the two portions were separated worked well.
- No, I think it worked wonderfully and I wouldn't change it. It allowed students to do the work when they were able not rushing through it, because it was due the next day.
- I really liked being part of the experiment of the in-class portion then the independent portion. It taught me what class style I prefer and taught me how to

make myself better as a student. I do not think the professors should change anything about either section of the course. It was taught and structured very nicely.

- I really enjoyed this class set up. I learned a lot throughout the course and doing the learning pods on my own was actually quite fun. I liked being able to interpret them my own way without hearing everyone else's interpretations.
- I liked meeting as a class first because we knew what was expected of us. We knew what the professors wanted on our critique sheets. We were also able to practice developing our thoughts during this time. Then when we worked independently, we applied the information we learned during the face-to-face portion to create the work ourselves. I like that the structure of the PowerPoints and the critique sheets were the same from the face-to-face to the independent online section. This helped us know what the professors expected from us. I enjoyed meeting with the class to hear what other people thought about the stories.
- I really enjoyed this format. Since the class stopped meeting around midterm time, it was nice to take advantage of the ability to set my own schedule. The frequency of major projects in other classes seemed to pick up after midterms, so it was really nice to have a chance to restructure a bit. I wouldn't change anything about the format of the course. It was awesome! I loved it!
- I thought that the way this course was structured was perfect. It is awesome for students who are scared of taking a completely online course, but also don't have



the time to take a completely face-to-face course. I also liked that it was perfect for extroverts and introverts because it gave each of us a chance to be successful.

- I liked the way this class was set up. The beginning helped me earn the confidence and understanding of the elements of literature, so when it came time to the independent part, I was able to show off what I knew.
- I thought the way that this class was formatted was perfect for my liking. I enjoyed meeting with the class to get to know other students, my professors, and to show each other's thoughts about the stories. I also liked the independent part because I could work on my own schedule and think individually.
- I liked the way this course was set up. I think it is important to have the class meet consistently in the first half of the semester because that way we know what is expected of us for the independent portion. I wouldn't change anything about this course, I enjoy the way it is designed.
- I really enjoyed the format of the class and would most definitely recommend more classes moving in this direction, especially the more liberal arts courses that may not necessarily pertain to students' majors.
- It was really nice to be able to do learn on my own. I think teachers should trust us more and let us do things outside of class, because we are in college and we are able to take care of ourselves. I think this shows everyone we are capable of performing well outside of the classroom.

- I liked this type of class. It worked well for my schedule so that I could get the stories and/or Major Project done early so I could focus on my other classes and be less stressed.
- I liked how the class was set up. By meeting the first couple of weeks, we learned what is expected of us when completing a critique sheet. My first critique sheet only contained a couple of sentences, mainly because I did not know how to interpret the story or what to write. However, after a couple of in-class meetings, I learned how to write one. Therefore, when it came time for the independent part of the class, I was able to complete the work effectively on my own. This not only showed me what I had learned in this class, but it also showed me that I can work independently.

## APPENDIX II: SURVEYS-NEW STUDENT IDENTITIES

*Identity as critical thinker:*

- Can better construct an argument because now know have to supply specific examples and proof from text
- Literature can have multiple interpretations
- Now able to apply the literary elements
- Became more creative and imaginative
- Learning can be fun when going beyond merely reciting facts
- Literary interpretations are well thought out opinions of reading a literary work
- To look for the universality in literary classics
- Have a better understanding how stories are constructed
- See connection between writing and reading
- Need to challenge myself as a learner-that is how I grow as a thinker
- More aware of the world culturally and historically
- See interconnections between literature and other content areas
- Can apply reading skills to other classes and in life personally

*Identity as dependent learner to independent learner:*

- Learned how to work independently
- More marketable for future jobs because know I can work on my own
- Becoming an independent learner due to the BL structure allowed me to pick up more work hours easing my financial stress

- Can do independent research
- Learned I can thrive in classes if I manage my time effectively
- Learning is enjoyable if practice good study skills
- Became more reliable and responsible
- Confident that I can make it in college as a student
- To believe and trust in myself when interpreting literature

*Identity as surface reader to close reader:*

- Gained skills in interpreting literature
- Gained new insight in how to read literature by examining and looking at the elements of literature
- See that literary elements can be used in various ways as tools authors use to manipulate their readers to think and feel
- Can find multiple interpretations of a story
- Gained a better understanding of the elements of literature
- Learned how to read beyond the surface of the text, to look for complexity and insight
- Will never read literature the same way again
- Improved reading comprehension
- By reading closely, have gained writing skills
- See how literary elements must interrelate to create a well-constructed story
- Learn life lessons from stories
- Reading involves lifelong learning

*Identity as non-literary person to literary connoisseur:*

- Have become a better literary critic
- Helped determine my major-know I now want to major in literature
- Realized I have a passion for literature
- Improved my knowledge of classic American literature
- Learned about great short story authors
- Exposed to authors and literary works that would not have before
- Aware of various writing styles
- Greater appreciation of authors' craft
- Gained confidence as a reader
- Went a long time without reading for fun, but now will dedicated to setting up time to read for pleasure again
- Learned that stories are usually influenced by something author has experienced
- All of us can interpret literature
- Gained a greater appreciation of literature-want to take more literature classes
- We all are literary critics
- Met people who share a common interest in literature
- Reading is fun, relaxing, engaging, etc.
- Able to compare and contrast writing styles of authors
- More aware of my literary tastes

*Identity as student to teacher:*

- Know now can be a teacher-confidence in my education major

- Can teach others how to analyze stories
- Realized characteristics of good teachers are knowledgeable about subject, passionate, and caring
- Felt BL is a blend of both face-to-face and online learning environments
- Realized different learning styles
- Honoring diversity
- Realized how hard teachers work
- Can apply the knowledge learned to create a lesson
- Teaching is fun

## APPENDIX JJ: SURVEYS-INITIAL FEELINGS TOWARDS BLENDED LEARNING

- I was unsure about how it would turn out; however, I was excited to give it a shot. I had never taken a BL course before, so I didn't really put much thought into anything, except that I liked the idea of having an independent portion. I would definitely take a hybrid course again.
- At the beginning of the course, I was nervous about taking Introduction to Literature as a BL course, because I had no idea what to expect at that point in time for the class. My views at the beginning of the semester about BL courses in general was it would be a great learning experience and allow me to work on my own free time, which I knew would be a nice benefit. I would definitely take a BL course in the future, because this one helped me a lot with my time management skills and it was a great experience.
- I actually was very nervous because I didn't know what that BL meant, but I'm so thankful that I took this class.
- I was excited to experience this type of course, because I had never had a BL class before. I would rather take in class courses in the future, but if I end up in a BL class again, I would not mind it now that I know what to expect.
- I thought it was a cool and new way to take a course. I never had taken a BL course before so it was interesting to be in one. I would definitely take another hybrid course if it was similar to this.
- I was excited for the opportunity. I have taken online classes before and I almost prefer this BL style because of the interaction between people. With an online

course you get so bogged down because you always seem like you don't have the same connection with people. I would rather get to know the teachers and people in the class and then transfer to an online portion. For some reason, it just feels more human and you know you're talking to someone you kind of know. I would defiantly take a BL course again.

- In the beginning, I was curious to see what BL was and how it would work. It ended up begin one of my favorite classes. I would definitely do one in the future.
- I wasn't sure what BL meant being a freshman. I honestly didn't know it would be this style of class till the first day, but I'm so glad I signed up for it! I would jump at the chance to take another class designed like this again. My schedule with work changes a lot and its flexible being in a course like this.
- I was really excited about taking it because it meant that I wouldn't have to wake up earlier for class. I would definitely take a BL course in the future because it is a time savor.
- Quite frankly, at the beginning of the semester I was just taking the course to see if I wanted to have English or TESOL as my major. I never actually knew what the course entailed other than reading literature. I didn't even know that the course was a BL class until the first day of class. I have taken BL courses before. One was great and the other not so much. The class fit well with my schedule, so I didn't change. I'm sure glad I did because this has been an excellent class.



- I honestly took this class because I knew that it was going to be a BL course. I didn't really know what BL courses were in general so this was my first experience. I would definitely take these types of courses again in the future.
- I thought it would be an interesting class and study to partake in. I thought the BL class would be a good fit for me because then I could have both the class discussion but also have the time to work on projects and other things on my own. I am not really sure I would take a BL course again just because I don't think I am good at having class online.
- I didn't think too much except that we would read a lot of short stories considering by the book we got for the class. Now I would definitely take this class again, because it was inspirational to my reading and writing skills.
- I was nervous about taking this class after hearing that it was BL. That was because I was worried that I would not get my homework done on time. I also thought it would be too time consuming and stressful for me to handle. I never took any BL course prior to this, so I was unsure on what to expect, considering it as a bad idea because of thinking that I would always forget to do my assignments. Now, the stress is off, and I would highly recommend taking a BL class if people could handle scheduling out the time and working harder in order to not be in face-to-face class as much. I would now recommend taking BL classes and hope to take more BL courses in the future.
- I've always pulled to have more BL courses; I have really liked the idea ever since the beginning and that has only become clearer after taking this class. I find

that this format is much more realistic to college students today as well as the flexibility of the format that allows students to be at several places while still learning and getting a fairly quality education.

- If I had known it was a BL class I probably would not have signed up for it. This is because I do not like the fact that I would be paying a professor to sit back and make the students do everything on their own. I am paying them to teach me, that's why I'm in college. Also, BL classes scared me before because you are on your own; therefore, you make up your own schedule and do the work whenever you want. This scared me because I was afraid I would forget to do something. However, now that I have taken a BL course, my views on them diminished and I'm no longer afraid of them. It was a fun new thing to try, and I'm glad I decided not to drop this class.
- I thought it was going to be boring. I honestly just took it to get it out the way, but it ended up being my favorite class that I took this semester.
- At the beginning of the course I was excited to participate in this course because I had never done a BL class. I didn't know what to expect. I am planning on taking a completely online course next semester so I am excited to compare the two.
- I have never really heard about a BL class like this before, but I found it to be an interesting idea. I was a little skeptic at first to see how it would work since I never had heard or taken a BL class before, but in the end it turned out to be a pretty good idea. I would definitely take a course like this again in the future to

see how it would work in a class like a math class, since I want to be a math professor one day and my class might run that way one day.

- I love literature, so this class was fun. I thought the BL was going to be different and interesting.

SURVEYS-APPENDIX KK: WHAT STUDENTS LIKED BEST ABOUT THE  
BLENDED INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE COURSE

- I enjoyed the variety of stories because each story had its own unique qualities that allowed me to further my skills as a reader.
- I enjoyed getting the chance to read stories from so many different authors and discovering more about what makes me tick as a reader.
- What I liked most about this course was the independent portion of the class, because as I have stated several times, it was a great learning experience and I am so grateful for the opportunity. It taught me how to work around my schedule with my other classes, work, senate, meetings, intramurals, and still have time to socialize with friends and family.
- I liked that this course taught me so much about the literary elements that I completely forgot about from classes in high school. I really enjoyed learning these literary elements again, and, in a way, that was fun for us students and we could easily relate to these with the PowerPoints for each story.
- I liked that the course was a very laid back environment, and you could speak in class without being scared of saying the wrong answer.
- Throughout the whole entire hybrid course, I liked the profs' feedback the best. The feedback always gave me something to take away. There was always advice and a helping hand in their feedback. I always felt like I could improve with this feedback.

- I liked that the course was blended and half independently done online. I thought more in depth by myself.
- I liked looking at the PowerPoints. I enjoyed the visualizations to the stories. I thought the information about the author was interesting and helped me understand the stories. I enjoyed answering the questions and hearing what my peers had to say about what we read.
- I liked not being forced to dissect a short story to death.
- I liked listening to the information from both professors and the opinions of my peers to help me deepen my understanding of the stories.
- I liked the discussion part in class where everyone would chip in on what they thought. It helped everyone out on thinking differently.
- I enjoyed the independent online part because I enjoyed the free time and the layout of the learning pods on Google Docs.
- I liked learning about a variety of different stories, because they opened my eyes to classic literature that is well-known.
- I really enjoyed the class discussions, since they opened my eyes to many different ways of thinking.
- What I liked best about this class was how it taught me to appreciate literature. It made me question why I liked a story or didn't, and how did the elements intertwine with each other to push the story and characters forward?
- I liked all of the different authors and stories that we looked at because I now know about many more authors and genres than I would have ever known about.

- I liked the in class or face-to-face time I had with the great instructors.
- My favorite part about this entire class was the class discussions we had during our face-to-face classes.
- What I liked best about this course was my professors. They were always so enthusiastic in class and were very well prepared. I also liked to see how passionate they were about literature. I think seeing my professors like this made me realize that I would like to keep literature in my life.
- My grade! But to be honest, I loved not having this class be a huge time commitment. I still learned a ton without having to think about this class every day.
- The best thing about this course was its different factor. I never took a course like this one before where your imagination and creativity were so involved with the work done in the class. I enjoyed how there was not one right answer like there would be with a bunch of factual information from a history or science course. We had to digest these stories and interpret and critique them as if we were book critics. I liked its flexibility, yet its need for diligence and how each of us individually was supposed to improve and grow as a person and as a writer.
- I really liked working outside of class and not having to be present in class.
- I really enjoyed being able to read multiple stories, learn about lots of the authors as well as learn how to apply the elements of literature and have the opportunity to take the class online and learn independently for the second half of the semester.

- I liked that it was a good learning environment, and it was fun to attend. I can tell that the professors really cared about the success of the students and that pushed me to do better to be the best I could be.
- My favorite part of this course was the professors who taught it. Both professors seem to enjoy their job; as well as, truly care about every single student. Every once in a while, you get a professor who could care less and doesn't care if the students pass or fail. However, this is not the case for this class. Both professors made class fun and interesting. It made me kind of sad during the independent part of this course that we did not meet as a class twice a week because I looked forward to attending class. Also, both professors provided excellent feedback that helped me grow as a student. Not many professors will sit down and go through thirty plus papers and provide as much feedback as they did. Since they did this, I was able to expand off my thoughts and to develop a better appreciation for what authors do.
- I like reading the variety of stories and breaking them down in class. Each story had its own uniqueness and meaning to learn from.
- I liked that we were able to work on our own and manage our own time.
- My favorite part of this course was definitely the assignments and the independent online portion where I got to work on my own time.
- My professors are what I liked best about this course. They were very passionate about what they were teaching, and that passion overflowed out into their

students. I would take this course again in a heartbeat if it meant that I got to have these professors again.

- I liked the independent portion of this course the most because I was my own boss.
- The thing I liked most about this class was the free time in which I had in the second half of the semester. Because of the online Independent Learning Pods, I could schedule to work on the assignments around times which best fit my schedule when I would be able to do them, and be less stressed in the long run when trying to work on homework for other classes and tutoring other people in math.
- I liked being given the freedom to select our own story for the major project.
- I liked the major project the best since it was creative, and I could demonstrate in the role of a teacher what I had learned.
- I liked the critique sheets a lot. I felt like I was able to clearly explain what I liked about stories, since each small part (point of view, plot, etc.) was laid out for me to individually assess.
- I liked the readings.
- I liked it all!



APPENDIX LL: SURVEYS-STUDENTS RECOMMENDING THE BLENDED  
INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE COURSE

- Yes, I found the course to not only be helpful in furthering my skills as a reader, but also in allowing me to gain independence as a student. I believe that others may benefit from its format as well.
- Yes, I would definitely recommend this course to others, especially ones who have not tried a blended or online course before, but have been thinking about giving it a try. This class is a perfect way for students to see if they would like taking an online course with the first portion of it being meeting face-to-face and then switching to the online format. There is not a better way to show the difference between meeting face-to-face and having the class online rather than doing both in one like this class.
- It will make me a better teacher, and so everyone in education should take it.
- Heck, yes. This class made me a better reader and challenged my thinking, and it was online half of the semester so I'd tell everyone to take it.
- Yes, I would recommend this course. I think everyone should experience a BL course. I also think everyone should read the literature pieces that this course shows us.
- Yes, it was an interesting class and I learned a lot. It also did not have huge essays like other classes.
- Yes, I have recommended this course to my roommate and friends. I told them about how this course looks at many different stories. I told them that they don't

spend much time reading each story, so if they don't enjoy that story, another one will soon take its place. They also get to look at many different types of literature rather than just one or two. I also told them that the professors make the class interesting and make you feel welcome to class each class time.

- YES, YES, and YES. This is something I tell my other friends about a lot. They go to college in other areas and work just as much as me, but they don't get the flexibility and they hate that. They want this implemented everywhere.
- I would recommend this course to other students because it is something different, and I think that pretty much everyone in the class enjoyed the layout. It was really neat and helped free up some time for busy students.
- I would. It's easy to understand what you are being asked to do and students follow a simple guided critique sheet. Also, the class was engaging, unlike a lot of college classes where you simply sit there in silence during a lecture. This class was a lot of fun; I will miss it.
- I would, and I have. I thought that it was a very well put together class and it was worth it to go to class for me. There wasn't a day that I wanted to skip. I enjoyed class that much.
- Yes! Most definitely. I truly enjoyed this course. It really broadened my understanding of literature, and made me fall in love with it even more.
- Absolutely. I would tell anyone and everyone that it is literally the perfect course for everyone because you get the best of both worlds (face-to-face and online) in every way possible.

- I would only recommend this course to those kids who have work/school conflicts and those who like online courses, because it does not work for those kids who hate online courses.
- I would highly recommend this class to other students. I have learned so much in this class and I have become more of an individual. I also really like the way this course was set up. I enjoyed that we learned about multiple short stories instead of just about two novels. I just feel like I have grown as a reader and a student. Also, the professors are amazing. Everyone should experience these professors sometime in their journey at this university.
- Yes, I would. It is easy to get a good grade if you do all the work but it is also a fun and interactive class. I would really recommend this class to anyone that has other major time commitments, and the assignments for class you can do anywhere.
- Yes, because it was a fun class and it also helped to teach you responsibility.
- It is a good class, but not for everyone. Some students do better in an entirely face-to-face situation. Some just need that immediate human interaction.
- Many students liked this, but there are some like me, who need the constant face-to-face, because when the class is online, I slack off by forgetting assignments and not managing time well. I need to have a regular schedule to go to class and having the instructors lead me by the nose” telling me what to do next.
- I would highly recommend this course to people wanting to get this liberal arts core requirement out of the way. It is neither easy nor hard. They will learn a lot

of new techniques, habits, and perspectives from it. It requires an adequate amount of work that is not extremely restrained—not having numerous, picky requirements to it. The demands of this class are simple and easy to follow. It can be time consuming sometimes, especially with the major project, but like any other class, you put the amount of time into it that you want to get out of the class. People can easily get good grades in this class if they put in the time, effort, and energy to do everything done on time with great quality.

- I would most definitely recommend this class to others because it allows you to learn takeaway tools and information that you can apply in so many other parts of our life as well as the idea of taking the course independently and being able to complete the class on my own which I found to be really helpful.
- Yes, I would. I loved this course.
- Yes, I would recommend this course to other students. In fact, I already have recommended it. This is because this class was both fun and interesting. Since I love reading but do not have time to read a book for fun, the stories we read fulfilled my enjoyment for reading and did not take long to read. It was nice to have a break from the math and science courses I am currently taking.
- Yes, it's something that everybody should at least experience once throughout their college years, just to see if it suits them or not.
- Yes, I would definitely recommend this to other people. It was fun, I learned a lot, and it was by no means overwhelming if you used your time effectively.

- I will recommend this course to others because I think it is helpful to see if online course is right for you.
- I already have! I have a friend who is taking this course next semester. I think it is a wonderful class in which the professors are really cool (not trying to suck up!), and a class where one can learn a lot and be able to apply what you know in the Independent Learning Pods. Plus, by having more free time and being able to schedule your work around when you are busy, one can be less stressed later on in the semester when classes tend to get really stressful.
- Yes, I enjoyed this and would tell others to at least try it. It isn't for everyone, but in the 21st century, a lot of people enjoy technology more.
- Yes. I have a lot of friends who love to read, and I think they'd enjoy this class a lot.
- Absolutely, I already have!!

APPENDIX MM: SURVEYS-BLENDING OF THE INTRODUCTION TO  
LITERATURE CONTENT

- Allowed me to go out of comfort zone
- Is a good fit for me
- Is not scary
- Was a gentle way to help me become a more independent learner
- Have more interest in BL courses
- Is a marriage with the best of face-to-face learning with online learning
- Liked BL structure of first half face-to-face and second half as online
- Enabled me to grow as a person by becoming more independent, responsible, and reliable
- Appreciated that BL allows flexibility to learn anywhere, anytime, at own pace for online portion
- Enhanced deep learning
- May ease my financial and time burdens because BL lets me work, raise a family, do extra-curricular, etc.

APPENDIX NN: STUDENT WORK-STUDENT A CRITIQUE  
FOR "AMONTILLADO"

SHORT STORY CRITIQUE & DISCUSSION RATING GUIDE (Rubric)

TITLE OF STORY: The Cask of Amontillado

Your Name: Student A

Rating Scale:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	(low)		(average)			(outstanding)	

Setting: 4 catacombs skeletons

Characterization: 6 Fortunato

Point of View: 5 Montresor- first person

Theme: 6 wanting revenge

Plot Structure: 5 stops right at the climax

Author Style: 5 stops right at the climax

Author Biography

Tie-In...

(if appropriate): from real story where Poe in army. Company gets Captain Greene drunk and take him down somewhere and wall him in, trapping him

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Overall Reader Response:

(Your evaluation, summary comment and thoughts about the story, using the scale above as a reference for your thought...): At first I didn't really understand what was happening in this short story. After reading on it started to make a little more sense.

## APPENDIX OO: STUDENT WORK-STUDENT A NOTES

## Student A's Notes for Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado"

When Poe was 15 he wrote his first poem

1835 Poe takes job as editor of the Southern Literary Messenger

1840 editor Burton's Gentleman's magazine.

In 1841 first detective story

1843 Poe begins to travel and deliver lectures on Poetry.

1845 Poe publishes "The Raven"

1846 "Cask of Amontillado"

1847 Poe's wife dies-Poe turns into a drunk

1848 Poe proposes to Sarah Helen Whitman

Rufus Griswold said bad things about Poe after death.





## APPENDIX QQ: STUDENT WORK-STUDENT B NOTES

## Student B's Notes for Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado"

-1809-1849

-Elizabeth and David Poe: both traveling actors-Father deserts family.

-Mother gets sick w/ tuberculosis-soon after father dies of tuberculosis

-Poe taken in by Allan family

-\$2,000 gambling debt while at Univ. of Virginia-John Allan won't help

-Poe enlists in army-Edgar A Perry

-Goes to West Point, tries to get himself kicked out

-1835 takes job as editor of Southern Literary Messenger Magazine

-1836 marries 13 yr. old cousin Virginia

-1841 first short story collection

-First to create detective story

-1842 Virginia gets tuberculosis-dies 1847; Poe becomes alcoholic

-1845 publishes The Raven

-Not sure how Poe dies. Many theories.

-Theme-revenge

-The bait- playing upon vanity and desire – with deception.

-5 ways to reveal character



Based from true story where army company where Poe served had before he got there got a Captain drunk and took him down to lower level and walled him in for seeking justice because he killed a popular man in a duel. Poe warned to don't ever tell story to public.

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**Overall Reader Response:**

(Your evaluation, summary comment and thoughts about the story, using the scale above as a reference for your thought...)

The point of view and the setting really worked w/the story and gave readers more of an emotional and sensory tie to the story. There really wasn't any falling action, as Fortunato led himself to death by drinking wine. However, I really loved the ending at the climax because it built you up (suspense), and then 'Boom' he died and it ended. Overall, I think it was a great story that kept me thinking. I also love how it ended w/ "In Pace requiescat", meaning "Rest in Peace". This gave the ending more meaning. I believe his father leaving and his mother passing have all contributed to his writing style and the darkness in his stories.

## APPENDIX SS: STUDENT WORK-STUDENT C NOTES

## Student C's Notes for Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado"

- 1809-1849
- Born in Boston
- Parents were traveling actors
- Father deserts family in 1810 after Rosalie (3<sup>rd</sup> child)
- Elizabeth Poe (mom) dies of tuberculosis
- Then father died
- Edgar taken in by well to do Richmond couple
- His middle name Allan was given by Richmond family
- 1826 went to University of Virginia
- Ran up \$2000 debt while in college, "father won't bail him out"
- 1827 Poe enlisted under Edgar A. Perry
- 1829 foster mother dies
- 1831 he got into West Point: But he didn't want to do any work
- 1835 works as editor of Southern Literary Magazine
- 1836 married his 13-year-old cousin Virginia
- 1841 first short story collection
- 1842 created detective genre by writing short story
- Virginia got tuberculosis
- 1843 travels and reads poetry & lectures
- 1845 Poe publishes "The Raven"
- Became editor author of Broadway Journal
- Not good at business
- Nov. 1846 Cask of Amontillado
- Virginia died, Poe became alcoholic
- Tried marrying one woman but didn't stop drinking
- Married childhood sweetheart
- Missing in Baltimore for 5 days-died in hospital
- No cause of death
- Theme-revenge
- Deception
- The bait- playing upon vanity and desire – with deception.
- Fortunato displays no uneasiness in Montresor's company, and is unaware that his friend is plotting against him.
- Told in first person.



(if appropriate)

A tie-in for this story is how O. Henry was taking *money* from a bank. I say this because he ended up getting sent to prison for his actions and in the story Sam and Bill were willing to do whatever it took just to get rid of Johnny, even though *they* kidnapped *him*. All of this involves money as the center focus!!!

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Overall Reader Response:

(Your evaluation, summary comments and thoughts about the story, using the scale above as a reference for your thoughts...)

I thought this story was enjoyable to read and I enjoyed the twist of the story. It was not a boring story to read and it was humorous.

### Questions from PowerPoint

1. To me at the beginning of the story the two men did not come off as hardened criminals. I say this because their plan did not sound scary. To me, they came off as simple men trying to get some money.
2. The speech at supper revealed a lot about Johnny's character. At this point, he showed us that he loved "camping out" and he just rambled about things that came to his mind. Showing Bill and Sam that he was not afraid. Bill and Sam are starting to think they kidnapped the wrong kind of kid! Also, during their night of rest, both Bill and Sam show how they are secretly scared in a way.
3. O. Henry's humorous writing style definitely is being used during this part to make it more funny than scary. Bill accused Sam of being a liar because he was afraid but not wanting to admit it.
4. One: The scene where Bill was backed up against the side of the cave because the boy was threatening to smash him with a big rock! Also, when Bill got a red-hot boiled potato put down is back. I thought those were humorous scenes because Bill really wasn't in charge, the kid was!  
Two: The scene where Johnny was "riding a hoss" I thought this was hilarious because the boy was just doing his own thing and Bill just listened to him. It's funny because all in all Johnny, who is kidnapped, should be frightened! Not having the time of his life.

5. I think at this point in the story, all of the characters get the hint that their roles are being switched around! Johnny does not want to go home, therefore he is being threatened by this idea of being taken back home.
6. Even at the beginning of the story when it was stated that the boy put up a fight before they finally got him in the buggy, I wasn't sure what was going to happen throughout the story. I say this because usually a young kid does not understand what is going on and won't put up a fight. Also, they chose a kid who was throwing rocks at a kitten.
7. I feel as if Johnny always terrorizes his family and neighbors. I say this because you can even tell in the letter the father writes back to the men. He says that he will "take him off your hands" because he knows that the men really just want to get rid of the boy now.
8. One phrase that really stuck out to me to be humorous: "I like this fine. I never camped out before" It's so funny to me that this little boy thinks he is on a camping trip when in all reality, he had gotten kidnapped. The second phrase that goes along with my first phrase: "All right!" says he. "That'll be fine. I never had such fun in all my life." This whole part in the story to me was my favorite and I found it very funny!
9. It is sort of funny, at the end it kind of gets you thinking: who should I feel the sorriest for, the little boy who did not want to go back home, or the two men for having to deal with the boy. Just a little food for thought! Something I will take away from this story is never underestimate a child with a great imagination or a child who never fears having fun. I say this because Johnny was having the time of his life during his time away from home.



## APPENDIX UU: STUDENT WORK-STUDENT B “RED CHIEF”

## SHORT STORY CRITIQUE &amp; DISCUSSION RATING GUIDE (Rubric)

TITLE OF STORY: “The Ransom of Red Chief” (O. Henry)

Your Name: Student B

Rating Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	(low)			(avg.)			(outstanding)

## Setting (5)

- This took place in Alabama, but it read like an old Western film to me. The time period was significant because the whole “cowboys and Indians” bit was still alive and well. The mountains made it feel remote and scandalous.

## Characterization (6)

- What the characters did and said contributed the most to their development. Obviously, Red Chief was a hand-full, and his actions and words let us know that. As for Sam, his scheming ways and calm language painted him as manipulative, and Bill was just an anxious softie.

## Point of View (5)

- This was told in first-person from Sam’s point of view. Because of this, the story only gave away how Sam was feeling and how he perceived the events, limiting the amount of what the reader sees. I think I would’ve liked to hear it from an objective third-person’s point of view.

## Theme (5)

- The theme I got from this story was “think before you act” because boy oh boy did their plan backfire. Finding themes can be difficult for me, and this story proved to be a challenge. Another point I picked up was how things hardly ever pan out the way you want them to.

## Plot Structure (5)

- I would say this plot structure was pretty average with the climax occurring when the reply note came saying the kidnappers would be the ones paying back Ebenezer Dorset.

### Author Style (5)

- This story is pretty old and was set in a time period and in a place that I am unfamiliar with, so some of the words and sentences were foreign. O. Henry's writing is full of wit and vivid details in this story.

### Author Biography

Tie-In...

(if appropriate)

- I can't really draw any connections between O. Henry's life and the story other than that they both involved money scandals and fraud.

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### Overall Reader Response:

(Your evaluation, summary comments and thoughts about the story, using the scale above as a reference for your thoughts...)

- This story was bizarre and oddly humorous. I felt that it was well-written and I'm sure it was received well by readers, especially with children. I think that Red Chief was a good representation of how cultures and lifestyles can be taken out of proportion and context with stereotypes because certainly not all Native Americans were out to scalp the "paleface".

Your new thoughts after reading/viewing the PowerPoint presentation about the author and the work.

- Well, O. Henry was quite the trickster. He was obviously very bright, and it seems that he used his talents to yield profits in a way that was not exactly constitutional. After reading about his writing style, it is clear that he loved to entertain and make people laugh, and I like his knack for painting vivid and strangely relatable characters. The language used was also pretty funny at times.

### Question #1

- Bill and Sam seem like kids themselves in a way because their idea to kidnap someone came about abruptly and was not thought out very well. The language in the beginning is not threatening at all, and I feel like I'm in a saloon hearing this story over a couple of drinks. Bill and Sam do not seem like hardened criminals

because they would likely be better at planning their illegal activities if they were hardcore criminals.

#### Question #2

- Red Chief is a very hyperactive little boy with a racing imagination and tragically short attention-span and detachment from reality. Bill had an uneasy feeling about him from the get-go, but Sam seemed to chock it up to just being a kid in the beginning.

#### Question #3

- O. Henry used casual insults about Bill's weight and the range of things women scream at to describe Bill's howls, keeping the scenes humorous, but I still found them to be flat-out creepy. O. Henry used his wit and goofy language to keep things relatively light in these scenes when something terribly wrong could have possibly arisen.

#### Question #4

- Two other scenes that I found humorous were when Bill said he took Red Chief home, but really, the kid was standing right behind him and he had no idea. Another funny part was when Bill and Sam got the letter back informing them that they would be the ones paying money to return the kid. These scenes showed O. Henry's excellent use of humorous irony.

#### Question #5

- In this scene, Bill and Sam are just in utter distress and are ready to get Johnny off their hands, even if it means they won't be getting any money like they had originally planned. Bill is scared and hurt as he just got bludgeoned and Sam is upset that this kid is not afraid at all to be held as a hostage, and who knows what Johnny was thinking other than that he ruled the world and didn't want to give up his "fun" and go back home.

#### Question #6

- It was obvious the kidnapping was going to go awry when Johnny threw a piece of brick at Bill's eye and beat him up when they were trying to take him. Also, once they got to the cave, Johnny immediately took on the character of Red Chief as if it was normal to be in a cave with two strangers. Most children would be petrified, but Johnny was not like most children. He was an absolute terror.

#### Question #7

- I reckon Johnny threw a variety of rocks and shards of brick at neighbors' homes and the neighbors themselves. He probably rough-housed with their pets. You know, he probably started some petty fires and caused a ruckus.

## Question #8

- I found the word “hoss” for horse to be humorous because it’s like saying it was a terrible, unplaceable accent and I just got a kick out of it. Also, the word “chawbacons” was funny even though I have no idea what it means. Maybe townspeople? I’m not sure, but it’s fun to say regardless.

## Question #9

- I think I will take away a better understanding that I need to think through my actions and plans carefully before going through with them. I will also take away a good sense of birth control from seeing how riotous of a child Red Chief was.

APPENDIX VV: STUDENT WORK-STUDENT C “RED CHIEF”  
SHORT STORY CRITIQUE & DISCUSSION RATING GUIDE (Rubric)

TITLE OF STORY: “The Ransom of Red Chief” By O. Henry

Your Name: Student C

Rating Scale	1	2	3	4	5	<b>6</b>	7
	(low)			(avg.)			(outstanding)

Setting: 7 – The setting was mostly in a cave, which was nearby Summit, Alabama, in the early 1900s. The main mood of this story was fear where Sam and Bill kept thinking that ten-year-old Johnny was going to kill them. This mood of fear had more emphasis and impact on the story that the actually backdrop of the cave did. “Yes, sir, that boy seemed to be having the time of his life. The fun of camping out in a cave had made him forget that he was a captive, himself. He immediately christened me Snake-eye, the Spy, and announced that, when his braves returned from the warpath, I was to be broiled at the stake at the rising of the sun” (Henry 2). At first, Johnny acted like he was just joking around, but I was crept out when it was revealed his death threats should be taken seriously. “Just at daybreak, I was awakened by a series of awful screams from Bill... It’s an awful thing to hear a strong, desperate, fat man scream incontinently in a cave at daybreak. I jumped up to see what the matter was. Red Chief was sitting on Bill’s chest, with one hand twined in Bill’s hair. In the other he had the sharp case-knife we used for slicing, bacon; and he was industriously and realistically trying to take Bill’s scalp, according to the sentence that had been pronounced upon him the evening before” (Henry 4).

Characterization: 7 – O. Henry did a great job using all of the methods of characterization, and three methods of characterization that O. Henry used prominently in this story were what they say, what they do, and what others say about them, especially involving Johnny Dorset. A great example of characterization by what they do was on page two when Johnny Dorset debuted in the story. He was stoning an innocent kitten. This action not only showed his troublemaking nature but also foreshadowed how horribly he would behave while being kidnapped. Red Chief’s speech on page three exemplified how well O. Henry could describe his characters without having to explicitly telling us all the details. “I never camped out before; but I had a pet ‘possum once, and I was nine last birthday. I hate to go to school. Rats ate up sixteen of Jimmy Tablot’s

aunt's speckled hen's eggs. Are there any real Indians in these woods? I want some more gravy" (Henry 3). This reminded us of the short-term attention span that many kids have as well as a lot of curiosity and a huge imagination. Through this section, Johnny's unusual nature was noted, especially when he mentioned he used to have a pet 'possum. Lastly, a wonderful example of how Henry used the method of characterization of what others say about them was on page six. "He put a red-hot boiled potato down my back," explained Bill, "and the mashed it with his foot; and I boxed his ears. Have you got a gun about you, Sam?" (Henry 6)? This scene showed how aggravating this kid was and how Bill was starting to get more and more desperate to get rid of the kid than to actually get the ransom.

Point of View: 7 - This was told in first-person POV, and the narrator was Sam, one of the desperate men who kidnapped Johnny. O. Henry did a fantastic job making Sam the narrator because in this story, the biased view of the situation made this story even better than if it was told in alternating person view or even in third-person omniscient. The reasoning behind that is in most stories about kidnapping, the kidnapers are very brutal to their victims, and the victims either are killed or have unknown fates. This story, unlike most kidnapping stories, is cheerier and entertaining with the kidnapers being two desperate, Alabaman men who wanted some cash. Without having the story in first-person, the transition from how these men were desperate for money to being desperate to getting rid of the kid wouldn't have been as evident and emphasized.

Theme: 7 – The theme was an escape from reality. Throughout the story, Johnny Dorset was a huge troublemaker who used his imagination to play in the world of Indians with his captors. In reality, his life at home seemed like a miserable existence. That was first seen on page one. "We selected for our victim the only child of a prominent citizen named Ebenezer Dorset. The father was respectable and tight, a mortgage fancier and a stern, upright collection-plate passer and forecloser" (Henry 1). From here, the father was depicted as a rich man who spent so much time working and helping others with their financial needs that he hardly spent time with his only child. This section made us sympathize the child before his debut, and the neglecting nature of the father explained why Johnny was not only a troublemaker but also some reasoning behind why Johnny did not want to go home. Here are two prominent examples of how Johnny was escaping reality. "Yes, sir, that boy seemed to be having the time of his life. The fun of camping out in a cave had made him forget that he was a captive, himself" (Henry 2). That showed how Johnny thought this entire thing was a game, and he was having a lot of fun playing in it, which was very sad considering the fact that these maniacs kidnapped this kid. The other example was on pages 12-13 when Bill and Sam were returning the kid home. "We took him home that night. We got him to go by telling him that his father had bought a

silver-mounted rifle and a pair of moccasins for him, and we were going to hunt bears the next day... When the kid found out we were going to leave him at home he started to howl like a calliope and fastened himself as tight as a leech to Bill's leg. His father peeled him away gradually, like a porous plaster" (Henry 12-13). This scene showed how Johnny would rather keep living in a false reality of going camping and playing Indians with his captors than living in actual reality with his neglectful father.

Plot Structure: 7 – The plot was structured in a typical way and had more of an arched plot. The reasoning why this worked so well was because the ending was extremely unexpected. In the exposition, it was revealed that Sam and Bill kidnapped this kid for the ransom, which started the story similar to any ordinary kidnapping story. Then, O. Henry shook things up, and he created Johnny to be so much of a nuisance that in the end, Sam and Bill would practically do anything to be freed from being around this kid.

Author Style: 4 – The title was rather ironic— “The Ransom of Red Chief”. That was because in the beginning of the story, Bill and Sam wanted to kidnap Johnny to earn a couple thousand dollars to have enough money to do some criminal work in Western Illinois. Towards the end of the story, Sam and Bill were the ones pay Ebenezer Dorset \$250 to take little Johnny from them, and these criminals were trying to run away from this kid. There was lots of foreshadowing in this story, especially when talking about the neglectful father on page one and how Johnny was first seen throwing some rocks at a mere kitten. This foreshadowed how much of a troublemaker Johnny was and the ending result of Sam and Bill getting desperate to get rid of Johnny. O. Henry did a great job being very descriptive and playing with his words. The major problem I had with this story was some of the vocabulary was so descriptive that it was distracting and extremely over my head. For example, “philoprogenitiveness” was used on page one, which was defined as two different things in the dictionary—having many offspring and showing love towards one's offspring. “Philoprogenitiveness, says we, is strong in semi-rural communities” (Henry 1). A little later, it had an ironic sense because of both definitions. The father supposedly lived somewhere where philoprogenitiveness was strong, yet he had one child and hardly loved him. This word exemplified how some of the words were used well, but they were beyond most people's vocabulary to the point of causing the readers to be more distracted by not knowing what this word meant than what the story was saying.

Author Biography Tie-In... (if appropriate): 7 - William Sydney Porter had Southern roots—born in North Carolina—like how this story took place in Alabama. Like Sam and

Bill, William Sydney Porter was a criminal who was found guilty for embezzlement and was imprisoned because of it. He also tried to escape the horrible reality of going on trial in 1896 by running away to New Orleans and eventually to Honduras, but he returned to home after hearing his wife was on death row. Similarly, the theme of this story was escape where this little kid used this imaginary world to escape from reality, but then, he was forced to return to it after his captors returned him home.

Overall Reader Response:

(Your evaluation, summary comments and thoughts about the story. Be sure to include information you learned from the PowerPoint presentation about the story.

6 – When I first read the title, I thought I was going to be reading a story about some white folks kidnapping an Indian chief and demanding some ransom from his tribe in order to have their chief be freed. Instead, we end up getting a story about two desperate men who kidnap Johnny—a ginger boy who loved to play Indians and was so intolerable that the kidnappers were desperate to return the boy to the father and pay him money to keep this child away from them. His usage of escape surprised me by using the world of imagination as well as camping in the caves away from his father. These twists in his plot were very impressive, and I hope to read more of his stories in the future.

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1. Sam and Bill were not hardened criminals by any means. In fact, they acted as if they were very dumb and inexperienced. Their logic did not make any sense. On page one, Sam's and Bill's logic was that it was easier to kidnap someone in Summit because of its strong, "philoprogenitive" nature than in a city. On the contrary, people from smaller communities like Summit have tighter bonds than people from bigger areas because there are a lot less people there. Word of mouth would easily make everyone aware of this situation in a matter of hours, and since a community is so small, a stranger in town could easily be identified, so it would be more difficult to get away without someone noticing the strangers with the prominent man's son.
2. That paragraph showed how childish Red Chief was. He was a very curious boy who asked a lot of questions and got easily distracted and off topic. This reminded Sam and Bill that Red Chief was just a kid who liked to play. Johnny was not always able to stay in character, sometimes even failing at portray himself as Red Chief. The kidnappers also determined their plan would be more difficult than they imagined because this little kid was very hard to tolerate without losing their patience.
3. O. Henry was juxtaposing what the stereotyped man would do to the reality of what Bill was actually doing. He could have simply, "Just at daybreak, I was awakened by a series of awful screams from Bill" and omit the rest of the paragraph. Instead, he



- used his witty manner to visualize how he was screaming like “women emit when they see ghost or caterpillars” and explained how awful it was to hear a grown man screaming bloody murder because of a little kid.
4. On page 10, it was hilarious when Bill thought the kid would leave because of being sent home. In reality, the kid was standing eight feet behind Bill and listening to what his kidnapers were saying about him. “Bill,” I says, “there isn’t any heart disease in your family, is there?” “No,” says Bill, “nothing chronic except malaria and accidents. Why” (Henry 10)? This was funny because Sam thought what Bill was saying was so crazy that he might have had some sort of health problem that prevented him from seeing reality. Another funny place was towards the end when Sam and Bill paid the ransom to Ebenezer Dorset to keep Johnny away from them. It was funny and ironic because it was supposed to be the other way around—Ebenezer should have been the one to pay the ransom to Sam and Bill to get his kid back.
  5. Sam was a little irritated that Johnny kept messing around and causing trouble, and he did not like how much control Johnny had over them, especially over Bill, because of fearing Johnny. Bill was hurt. He first got hit by a rock the size of an egg and then fell into the fire. Bill was getting more afraid of Johnny and becoming desperate to bring this kid home. Johnny felt bad that he hurt Bill, and he really thought being brought home would be a huge punishment.
  6. I first suspected something would go wrong with the kidnapping in the third paragraph. “Philoprogenitiveness, says we, is strong in semi-rural communities; therefore, and for other reasons, a kidnapping project ought to do better there than in the radius of newspapers that send reporters out in plain clothes to stir up talk about such things. We knew that Summit couldn’t get after us with anything stronger than constables and maybe some lackadaisical bloodhounds and a diatribe or two in the Weekly Farmers’ Budget. So, it looked good” (Henry 1). Sam kept narrating how good things looked instead what reality actually was, which depicted how complicated this would be and how they would not succeed. Also, their underestimation in how easy this entire scheme would be triggered some foreshadowing to how much more complicated this was than they thought, which led to their plan’s downfall.
  7. Johnny probably accidentally hurt some of them like he made Bill fall into the fire. He asked so many questions that it was irritating for Sam and Bill to be around him. Similarly, Johnny probably annoyed his neighbors with his numerous questions as well. He could have tried to kill some of them like he tried to kill Bill with the case-knife on page four. Lastly, he most likely terrorized his neighbors like he terrorized Bill and Sam, so it made perfect sense that Johnny’s neighbors to wish Johnny was out of their lives permanently.

8. Bill described Johnny as a “forty-pound chunk of freckled wildcat” on page seven. It was funny because it reminded me how ironic that many schools use wildcat as this nice, innocent mascot, but in reality, a wildcat is known for its ferocity like how Johnny first appeared to be an okay kid but turned out to be a little monster. Another funny phrase was describing the search dogs as “lackadaisical bloodhounds”. First off, this phrase exemplified how O. Henry used juxtaposition brilliantly because this breed of dogs is well known for their sense of smell and their tracking capabilities that considering these dogs as lackadaisical would be completely ignorant. Secondly, this was an example how these criminals were underestimating everything in a senseless way.
  
9. I learned that you should never underestimate anyone or anything. In this story, Sam and Bill thought earning \$2000 from ransom would be a breeze. In reality, it was way more difficult than these criminals ever imagined, and they paid the price for it by not earning their ransom.

## APPENDIX WW: UNIVERSITY EVALUATION

On university teacher evaluation, the students made following comments about strengths:

- Making concepts easy to understand. Keeping the class interesting
- Answering questions whenever asked. They did a great job at making the PowerPoints and documents available to us through Google Docs. They also provided good feedback and graded things right away.
- Keeping the students engaged. They would their PowerPoints and discussions interesting and fun to listen to. Great teaching style!
- Their attitude towards teaching.
- Communicating with students, mentioning important things more than once, explained key concepts in a relatable way and making class fun.
- Always provided answers to the questions I had in a reasonable time.
- They were able to grade and give feedback by the next class. They explained everything clearly, not like a third grader, but so the class knew what to do.
- Both instructors really have a passion for teaching. They always came to class prepared, sent out plenty of reminders throughout the semester to help us students, they made instructions very clear, always gave great feedback in a quick amount of time, always available and willing to help.
- It was really helpful to get such great feedback. Every time I handed/emailed one of my assignments, I got great feedback. It was very helpful for me in the future. It was also nice to get praised for our work. Not many professors do that.

- Describing events that took place in an author's life and connecting them to the story to see how that event affected the style of the short story. Also, another strength was keeping me engaged in the lectures by connecting it to our lives.
- Very passionate and has experience with literature.
- Positivity, enthusiasm, and knowledge.
- I was always engaged because there never was a dull moment.
- Made the content understandable. Also, made what was expected clear.
- Knowing the material they taught well enough to answer questions on the spot in class.
- Engaging the students into discussion, caring about the information that they were teaching and helping students if they needed it.
- Made class fun and interesting. Best professors I've had so far in college.
- Engaging. Care about students and subject matter.
- Giving PowerPoint presentations and trying to get students involved.
- Lecturing in an engaging way, sparking discussion, and providing feedback.
- Both instructors really showed how much they like teaching the class. Always prepared and made class fun.
- Communication more than anything. Great at consistently keeping students engaged in lecture and are always prepared for class.
- They are organized and both were always in class. They were engaging with all of the lectures. They really got me to pay attention.

- Explaining why authors did things a certain way. Creating PowerPoints and making them interesting.
- Staying positive throughout the course and making people ask questions.
- Being able to give us information in a way that was relatable to ourselves.
- Building PowerPoints easy for students to understand. Always open for questions. Challenges us to think outside the box. Always prepared. Cares for students.
- They are very helpful, informative, and make things interesting. They also graded work fast, so I was not waiting a long time for my grade.
- Making class interesting and getting us engaged. They were passionate about what they were teaching and that made me want to do the assigned readings.

APPENDIX XX: ACTION RESEARCH-SAMPLE TEACHER CORRESPONDENCE  
TO STUDENTS

To: Students in our "Introduction to Literature" class  
From: Professor Copeland and Professor Klein  
Subject: Welcome! -- and a few other notes....

All:

We would like to welcome you to our "Introduction to Literature" class. We are excited about the opportunity to get to know you, and we are looking forward to a happy and productive semester. Great literature is meant to be provocative. It shocks us with its language and images and its distortion of our concept of the world. At its best, great literature forces us to question or examine our ideals, or to aim for transcendence beyond set ambitions. Literature is not only one of the most creative outlets in academics, but it is a mirror of culture and all of its wonderful weirdness as well. In this class, we will look at the classics of the American short story form. We both love teaching and sharing literature with others -- and we like to have fun while doing so. We will do our best to make sure our work this semester is both educational and enjoyable for you.

At this time, we'd also like to stress the importance of attending the first class. You absolutely **MUST** attend this first class as we have forms that must be completed by everyone, will hand out and go over the schedule for the first half of the semester, we will assign the first work to be completed (which will be due the next class period), and we'll also cover all the "technical" components of the course. In short, if a person was to miss the first class, we'd recommend that person transfer to another section of the course (other classes still have seats available). It is **THAT IMPORTANT** everyone attends the first class.

Again, welcome to class! Let's work together to make this the best course ever! We'll see you Tuesday morning!

-Professors Copeland and Klein

“The more you **read**  
the more **things** you know.  
The more that you **learn**  
the more **places** you’ll go.”  
-Dr. Seuss

*“Believe in your dreams and they may come true; believe in yourself and they will come true.”*

*- Author Unknown*

Dear Students,

Sad farewells are given to those people who are extremely prized and special. You all are such. We wanted to let you know that we are grateful to have been your teachers. You made it very easy for us to have the enthusiasm and passion to teach the Introduction to Literature classes. All of you brought much happiness into our lives. We genuinely enjoyed teaching literature, but even more than literature, we enjoyed teaching all of you. We both will miss you. It has been a privilege and honor to work with you.

We hope you won’t forget the lessons and skills you learned in this class. We will never forget the deep discussions we had in class and the lessons we learned from you. These classes had a chemistry that is rare for college courses.

We have been amazed by your brilliance. We hope that no matter where your future takes you, you will continue the learning process. Keep reading. Keep seeking knowledge. The more we know the better people we become. Please continue to work hard, set goals, and do everything in your power to achieve them. Remember how smart you all are! We truly believe you are all capable of doing great things. We believe in you. We know your potential.

Please keep in touch with us. We would be honored to write recommendations and/or to have you share with us the fantastic things you will do. We look forward to hearing about honors, new jobs, marriage announcements, etc. We have no doubt you will succeed wherever you find yourselves. As teachers, we take great joy in seeing the good you have done and will do with your lives. You are an incredible group of students that have forever changed our lives. Take care. We wish you the very best in all your life's endeavors. May all of you find the winter break relaxing and joyful.

-Professors Klein & Copeland