MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF TRANSITIONING FROM THE

TRADITIONAL TEACHING MODEL TO THE BLENDED LEARNING MODEL: A

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Lisa Baucum-Manross

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the shared experiences of teachers going from a face-to-face traditional teaching model (FTFM) to a blended learning model (BLM) in a middle school setting in the southeastern United States. The theory, which guided this study was Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) Transition Theory. Within the study, one central question and four sub-questions were used to guide the study. The research questions focused on middle school teachers' experiences, as they implemented a BLM of instruction. To address these questions, data collection included individual interviews, a focus group, and a blogging activity. Using Moustakas' (1994) procedures of analysis of data, techniques such as bracketing, horzonalization, clusters of meaning and identifying textural and structural descriptions led to an overall composite description of the essence of the phenomenon. Findings from this study revealed that teachers recognized a shift in their roles from lecturer to facilitator and expressed self-efficacy played a role in a successful transition. Teachers described professional development as beneficial; however, it was not the deciding factor in the shift to a BLM but reliance on peers for new teaching strategies, emotional support, and shared knowledge contributed to the shift in teacher practice. Finally, teachers indicated that blended learning was a new concept and they needed more opportunities to devise new strategies through observing colleagues, engaging in collaboration and reflection, and time to research new teaching methods.

Keywords: blended learning, blended learning model, hybrid learning, online learning, self-directed learning

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my loved ones who encouraged and supported me throughout the entire dissertation process. To my friends who encouraged me and provided me with the support I needed to continue, even though I felt I would never move forward. They prayed and made sure to give me a time out when I needed it.

To my family and extended family for always praying, providing insight, or encouraging me to continue on even when I wanted to quit. I appreciate my mom, Betty Setliff, for always being in my corner and maybe not always understanding why it was taking me so long to write this paper; she always knew I could do it. For my brother for providing another rung on my support system and believing in me. To Ira and Joan Manross, for praying when I needed prayer, and believe me, there were many times! They always made it a priority to ask and inquire about the process and encourage me along the way. To Mark Manross, for providing comic relief, advice when needed, and encouragement along the way.

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Lastly, I would like to thank the co-researchers that participated in this research study. Without you, this study would not have been possible!

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List of Abbreviations

Blended Learning Model (BLM)

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)

Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Early Intervention Program (EIP)

Face-to-Face Teaching Model also known as the traditional teaching model (FTFM)

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)

National Staff Development Council (NSDC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Technology is changing the face of education, especially when considering that over

three billion people have access to the Internet (World Internet Users Statistics Usage and World

Population Stats, 2014). Today's schools have a variety of digital devices that provide access to

the Internet, including computers, iPads, digital response systems, and laptops. The estimated

number of students enrolled in online classes will reach close to five million by 2016 (Picciano,

Seaman, Shea, & Swann, 2012). Horn and Staker (2014) estimated that nearly 50% of high

school instruction would be available online by 2019. In April of 2014, six states made it

mandatory for all high school students to take an online course for graduation credit; these states

included Alabama, Florida, Arkansas, Idaho, Michigan, and Virginia (Horn & Staker, 2014).

This mandate led 75% of school districts across America to consider the possibilities of online

learning (Horn & Staker, 2014). Despite these facts, it is the case that many schools are not

providing technology as a means of instructional practice (National Educational Association,

n.d.).

Online learning has provided opportunities for instructional practices, such as blended

learning, to gain popularity in the area of K-12 education (Fleck, 2012; Guzer & Caner, 2014;

Horn & Staker, 2014). Blended learning combines the flexibility of online instruction with the

security of a brick and mortar experience (Caraivan, 2011; Fleck, 2012; Horn & Staker, 2014).

Essential components of a BLM include the ability of students to self-pace their curriculum,

learn to collaborate effectively, and to practice with performance supports in place (Horn &

Staker, 2014; Li, 2014; Oh & Park, 2009; Singh, 2003). Blended learning transforms the way a

traditional face-to-face school views educational practices, as blended learning allows students to

take advantage of skills they already possess from their personal use of technology and transfer those skills to the classroom (National Educational Association, n.d.). Budget constraints, especially in a traditional public school, do not allow students to take classes in certain subject areas, but blended learning may open new opportunities for students to overcome these budgetary deficiencies (Horn & Staker, 2014). A successful blended learning program leads to an increase in graduation rates, enables credit recovery, builds connections to future college careers, and allows for cost effective alternatives (Picciano et al., 2012). However, concerns remain about blended learning, especially because there is a gap in research on how a BLM affects student academic growth, the financial implications, and the strengths and weaknesses of each available program leaving stakeholders looking for answers and best practices (Alijani, Kwun, & Yu, 2014).

Most studies completed on blended learning revolved around student perception, higher education, and the benefits and challenges associated with this learning model. Students using blogs and wikis within a blended learning English class in Japan indicated blending learning as a positive and supportive environment (Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010). Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, & Rodriguez-Ariza (2011) corroborated the findings of Miyazoe and Anderson (2010) when they found that not only was blended learning a positive experience but that it also reduced drop-out rates and elevated exam pass rates. A study on the benefits and challenges of blended learning with postgraduate nursing students revealed students indicated feeling positive about the blended learning system, but that challenges such as poor Internet connectivity, delayed feedback, and lessened social interaction did surface (Smyth, Houghton, Cooney, & Casey, 2012). Although evidence shows blended learning has had some degree of success (National Educational Association, 2015), others warn research is limited in this area, especially on teacher pedagogy

(Cilesiz, 2011; Enyedy, 2014).

This phenomenological study will address this gap in the literature by solely examining teachers' experiences with the transition from the traditional face-to-face teaching model (FTFM) to the blended learning model (BLM). The experiences of teachers transitioning to a BLM may provide much-needed insight into the professional development and other resources needed as well as the challenges involved when teachers begin to implement a BLM in a middle school classroom. The purpose of this chapter is to address the background, problem, and purpose of this study, also including the significance of the study, research questions and plan, delimitations and limitations, and pertinent definitions. By focusing on teachers' experiences, this phenomenological study may provide valuable information for educational leaders, teachers, and advisors to incorporate best practices when using a BLM.

Background

Since the 1990s, educational use of technology has increased exponentially in the United States, which is an increase that has created a mindshift in education (Gerbic, 2011). The widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has also been a force that has encouraged the introduction of BLMs in schools. Georgia adopted the CCSS in 2010, and teachers began training on the standards in 2011. By 2012, Georgia had fully implemented the CCSS, including the technology component built into the standards that encourage BLM. The CCSS state that for students to become college-ready, students must utilize technology to facilitate their learning experiences and become self-directed learners. Expectations for students include the ability to synthesize, analyze, and produce well-rounded documents in part by utilizing technology (CCSS, 2012). Snape and Fox-Turnbull (2013) observed and indicated the need for students to take on an active role to increase their personal awareness of the purpose and

content of their learning. As the needs of the students change, the receiving of knowledge transitions from sitting and getting where the teacher is the focus, to learning by doing, where the student is the focus.

"The technological changes of the past 20 years have not yielded new tools and techniques, but have shaped a generation of students who seamlessly engage in the online and real-world environments in many facets of their lives" (Francis & Shannon, 2013, p. 359). Beginning around 1999, blended learning gained popularity, defined as a combination of traditional teaching and online learning opportunities (Fleck, 2012). Blended learning is a relatively new approach to instruction used in various ways, in different educational settings (Tucker, 2012). In BLM educational contexts, teachers tend to focus on students' learning, rather than on the activity of the students, thereby facilitating a co-constructed environment that highlights learner self-efficacy (Snape & Fox-Turnbull, 2013). Focusing on student-centered classrooms and creating opportunities for engagement with technology is a current educational trend. As a testament to the importance of utilizing technology in instruction, many school districts are allocating funds to purchase devices for teachers and students (Cheung & Slavin, 2013).

Over the last few years, the nation has spent over $100 billion equipping schools with computers to make the shift towards BLM education (Horn & Staker, 2014). Schools devote many resources to advancing technology. BLMs are expensive and require the allocation of funds for infrastructure, professional development, and maintenance (National Educational Association, 2015). Despite funding issues, the distribution of resources to create digital environments will prepare students for the 21st century (Ashton, 2014). Students in blended learning environments are more likely to be self-directed, and motivated learners are enhancing

their preparation for the future (Project Tomorrow, 2015). However, determining the right form

of blended learning may be a challenge, and the amount of funding needed may depend on how a

school system defines blended learning (Scott, 2014).

Throughout the literature, several definitions of blended learning have emerged

(Caravias, 2014; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). One of the most common definitions of blended

learning is class time mixed with a digital learning platform (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003).

Within the umbrella term of blended learning, several different models exist (Horn & Staker,

2014; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). In the first model, the same students are involved in both

face-to-face and online learning activities with the same teachers. The second model provides

opportunities for students in the face-to-face classroom to interact with different students in an

online environment, thus benefiting from one another. Finally, in the third model, students in the

face-to-face model also learn from other instructors in the online environment (Osguthorpe &

Graham, 2003). In this phenomenological study, blended learning is defined as learning in a

brick and mortar classroom combined with online learning experiences (Horn & Staker, 2014), a

definition that encompasses the fundamentals of the three models outlined above. This definition

also allows for self-paced attributes, collaborative learning, a combination of both structured and

unstructured components, and practice and performance support (Horn & Staker, 2014; Li, 2014;

Oh & Park, 2009; Singh, 2003).

The growing popularity of hybrid or blended learning contributes to the redefining of the

role of teachers and students, a fact that is creating new lived experiences (Cviko, McKenney, &

Voogt, 2014; Gerbic, 2011). Horn and Staker (2014) stated that by 2019, 50% of high school

classes would occur online. The need for adult supervision in online classes changes the role of

the teacher (Horn & Staker, 2014). Teachers are becoming facilitators of learning rather than

direct delivery of established content (Abidogun et al., 2011; Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur, & Sendurur, 2012; Gerbic, 2011; Preston et al., 2010; Smyth et al., 2012; Snape & Fox-Turnbull, 2013).

The role change has created new challenges surrounding how teachers deliver content and students obtain information (Gerbic, 2011; Horn & Staker, 2014). Indeed, role changes are just one part of the broader challenge of preparing students to become 21st-century learners (Ertmer et al., 2012). Other challenges facing teachers as they embrace a BLM include technical inadequacies, lack of experience and professional development, teachers' beliefs, and understanding of ways to be proactive concerning a student's performance (Napier, Dekhane, & Smith, 2011; Poon, 2013). BLMs examined in a higher educational setting noted faculty challenges including class time management, balancing the face-to-face interaction and online time, keeping students engaged and motivated, making sure students have support outside of class, and addressing the needs of all students (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Wachira & Keengwe, 2011). Teachers and faculty addressed these challenges by determining new courses of action that could facilitate a positive learning experience through yearlong professional development opportunities. Indeed, Napier et al. (2011) contended that proper training is essential to support a transition from a FTFM to a BLM and to ease the challenges associated with a BLM.

Although a BLM produces many challenges, blended courses may provide students advantages not provided by traditional educational teaching models. Those benefits include greater flexibility, more choices, and an increase in student achievement (Francis & Shannon, 2013; Horn & Staker, 2014; Moskal, Dziuban, & Hartman, 2013; Perez- Lopez, Perez-Lopez, Rodriquw-Ariza, 2013; Poon, 2013; Saritepeci & Çakir, 2015). One study conducted in a school

district in New Orleans found that 94% of respondents said the use of blended learning has the potential to increase student success through the student individualization process (Alijani et al., 2014). A different study by Gecer and Dag (2012) highlighted faculty and staff perceptions of blended learning in the higher education setting. In this study, one concern was the lack of one-on-one teacher to student interaction, resulting in the reduction of students' sense of community (Harrison & West, 2014). However, in another recent study, students indicated a positive relationship with the amount of interaction they received in the blended learning model, and they expressed that the quantity of interaction did not factor into their learning outcomes (Francis & Shannon, 2013). Similarly, another study in a higher educational setting found that a blended learning environment was more flexible because the students explained that it allowed sufficient opportunity for one-on-one interaction between students and teachers (Moskal et al., 2013). In other words, the flexibility and different allocation of time in a BLM provided instructors and students more individualized opportunities (Harrison & West, 2014).

In the middle school environment, limited research is available on teacher experiences and perceptions (Cilesiz, 2011; Gerbic, 2011; Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Lee, Lin, Michko, Padron & Waxman, 2012) concerning BLMs. As online learning and the utilization of BLMs increase, the roles of the teacher and student are redefined (Gerbic, 2011). Teachers in blended learning settings need information on how to facilitate and construct successful learning environments; moreover, to support teachers effectively, policymakers and administrators must understand the experiences, challenges, and successes of the teachers, thus improving student achievement (Cilesiz, 2011). This present study served to capture teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding blended learning in the middle school setting to add to the current literature and to provide a voice to those on the front lines.

Situation to Self

I have worked in education for 15 years as a classroom teacher. I have served on various committees such as the Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) committee, the leadership team, chair of the new teacher mentor committee, and I was the professional development coordinator for my school. Before beginning my doctoral classes, I was an adjunct professor of early childhood education at a local university for eight years. At the time of the study, I worked with teachers and served as a Personalized Learning Coach to promote personalized learning. At the time of this study, my job consisted of shifting teacher practice from a teacher-centered approach to a more student-centered approach. I provided professional development surrounding personalized learning, one-on-one coaching time, and informal observations to teachers.

For teachers, there seems to be an endless cycle of program changes. I am passionate about the need for targeted professional development for teachers and helping teachers understand what the future of education will entail. As the Teacher Keys (2014) evaluation system became fully active in Georgia's school systems, I believed professional development would help teachers prepare for their observations and the integration of technology. Technology is a powerful tool that may help students to meet educational objectives, but without the proper training or taking the attitudes and perceptions of the teachers into account, teachers may grow frustrated with the expectations related to integrating technology (Yu, 2013). Given the new expectations for technology use in the classroom, teachers need training, guidance, and support to create a successful technology environment in a non-threatening way (Davis, Eickelmann, & Zaka, 2013; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Yerrick & Johnson, 2009). Beyond the integration of technology, the pedagogical approach of the BLM requires teachers to integrate

technology as a facilitator and to think about teaching differently (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013).

Therefore, through this study, teachers shared their experiences as they shifted their mindset

from a FTFM to a BLM.

My ontological assumption was that individuals experienced different realities. This

assumption guided my decision to conduct a qualitative study that accounted for these various

realities (Creswell, 2013). Multiple realities told from different perspectives were the focus of

the study; therefore, in this study, the shared perspectives are those of teachers as they underwent

the transition from a FTFM to a BLM (Moustakas, 1994). During a phenomenological study, the

researcher and co-researchers are dependent on one another, but neither one is effective without

the other, thus making them co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994). Each co-researcher's voice

comes through by looking at multiple forms of evidence collected throughout the study. These

experiences and evidence provide insight and guidance to teachers that are transitioning into a

BLM as well as inform policymakers and administrators on the needs of teachers as they

transition to a BLM environment.

Based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), this study was viewed through the paradigm of

social constructivism. Vygotsky (1978) believed that learning and the act of being social could

not be separated, as learning occurs through earlier experiences in life and is applied later as a

child matures and develops (Pillay & James, 2014). By using Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of

Proximal Development, teachers can determine where a student is in his/her development while

also taking into account the maturation process that has occurred and is just beginning to

develop. Vygotsky (1978) believed that new experiences facilitate growth in development.

Teachers must engage students in their coursework in a more meaningful way through

technology and blended learning, to prepare students for the future (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-

Leftwich, 2010; Gecer & Dag, 2012; Polly & Hannafin, 2010). Learning is a way for a student's prior and new knowledge to meet, that provides a bridge of understanding that closes the gap between the two phases. In other words, learning is a social act and the framework that captures this qualitative work was constructivism; the current study encompassed this paradigm (Vygotsky, 1978).

Problem Statement

In a survey on classroom technology use, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010) found that 97% of teachers had access to technology on a daily basis, but only 40% of them used the technology to facilitate instruction. However, a survey by the PBS Learning Media (2013) found that the percentage of teachers utilizing technology increased significantly to 74% by 2013. In accordance with the new College and Career Readiness Index (CCRPI, 2014) of the CCSS, teachers are required to put available technology to use and provide effective instruction for students (CCSS, 2012; National High School Center, 2013). Teachers must be prepared to implement technology effectively in the classroom because their experiences (or lack thereof) with a BLM will influence students' learning environments, understanding of the curriculum, and achievement (Cilesiz, 2011). Therefore, there is a need to study teachers' individual experiences with technology implementation to gather a fuller understanding of how teachers experience the transition from a FTFM to a BLM, especially since any new instructional strategy affects student achievement (Cilesiz, 2011; Guzer & Caner, 2014).

Learning happens through real-life experiences, and those experiences in turn influence the future (Dewey, 1938). Studying the experiences of traditional-style teachers as they adjust to a BLM may enable an influence on future learning opportunities and contribute to the lack of research on blended learning (Cilesiz, 2011). Most research regarding the incorporation of a

BLM focuses on higher education. In a primary or secondary setting, many studies are focused on teachers' experiences with technology integration (An & Reigeluth, 2011; Hechter & Vermette, 2014; Nwosisi, Ferreira, Rosenberg, & Walsh, 2016; Pittman & Gaines, 2014). This study sought to address the gap in literature because very few studies focused on the experiences of teachers transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM (Cilesiz, 2011). The BLM is gaining popularity worldwide; the problem, which underpins this study, is that there is minimal understanding concerning how teacher practice influences students' learning environments, understanding of the curriculum, and achievement that provides a necessary foundation for successful career and college-ready individuals.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study was to explore teachers' experiences of transitioning from the traditional middle school FTFM to the BLM in a small town south of Atlanta. For this research study, the experiences of teachers transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM were defined as what the teachers may have undergone while constructing, planning, organizing, and implementing a BLM setting. Understanding the impact of teachers' experiences when transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM in a middle school setting has the potential to provide insights that may ultimately benefit both teachers and students alike in blended learning contexts to improve student achievement. Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) Transition Theory was used to drive the study in elucidating the experiences of teachers' transitions to a blended learning model of teaching.

Significance of the Study

This section sought to identify the significance of the study and why it is important to examine how teachers experience the transition to a BLM from a FTFM. This study will

contribute to the body of literature available for administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders by providing information on the needs and experiences of teachers transitioning to a BLM. The empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of this study highlights how the information gathered will close the gap on research in this area.

Empirical Significance

From an empirical perspective, data collection will focus on teachers' experiences in transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM. Blended learning is changing the delivery of classroom instruction (Alijani et al., 2014); that is why this study provided research on what these teachers experience during planning, implementing, and reflecting on this new instructional approach. The data gathered provided unique information about teachers' experiences implementing a BLM. According to Moustakas (1994), a phenomenological approach involves gaining an understanding of an experience to obtain detailed descriptions and highlight the essence of the experience. The effects of technology on society and the teaching and learning processes are not fully understood (Cilesiz, 2011; Guzer & Caner, 2014). Therefore, the results from the study will provide empirical data about the experiences of transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM, potentially enabling the implementation of new policies, best practices, student achievement, and strategies to improve transitions of this type (Cilesiz, 2011).

Theoretical Significance

The theoretical significance of this study lies in the contribution to the study's framework of Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) Transition Theory, and how this helps interpret the process by which the participating teachers transitioned from a FTFM to a BLM. Over the last several years, BLMs have increased in popularity (Gerbic, 2011). According to Schlossberg (2011), Transition Theory aids in understanding transitions by providing insight into how people cope

with transitions. Further investigation on the transition process and teachers' experiences is essential to understand the full impact a BLM has on teachers (Cilesiz, 2011). As such, this project examined the coping with transitions regarding four attributes, known as the four Ss: situation, self, supports, and strategies.

A teacher transitioning into a BLM from a FTFM may experience stressors due to a changing *situation,* such as teaching without the use of familiar traditional teaching methods, having to decipher unfamiliar pedagogical approaches, and the amount of time it takes for planning and design (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013). In addition to these stressors during the transition process, teachers must assess their support system. Support systems for teachers include mentoring and reflecting on their practices and learning from the experience (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). For some teachers, *support* comes in the form of ongoing professional development (Napier et al., 2011). Thus, examining teachers' experiences or lack of experiences with a BLM provides a foundation for future professional development or additional support systems such as colleagues and online help communities. This research may also provide information for teachers going through transition to a BLM that includes, but is not limited to, gaining insight into strategies that will allow them to move through the transition and stressors.

Strategies refer to the coping responses that may modify a situation (Schlossberg, 1981, 2011). This study refers to strategies as a teacher's ability to draw on coping mechanisms to transition their instructional practice into a BLM. As teachers transition into a BLM, a shift in teaching style, teacher identity, and authority, along with substantial course redesign, are essential in understanding educator experiences during the transition (Gerbic, 2011; Napier et al., 2011). Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) discussed the ability of teachers to understand the

importance of a transition in teaching and where it fits in their pedagogy mindset, and how it

relates specifically to how successful a new instructional strategy may be.

Finally, s*elf* refers to one's ability to cope, or utilize a strategy, with the transition,

thereby offering insight into how teachers deal with changes or stressors (Evans et al., 2010;

Schlossberg, 2011). A teacher's attitude towards the use of technology reflects how a teacher

views technology as a means of producing favorable outcomes in student achievement (Ertmer et

al., 2012; Sadaf, Newby, & Ertmer, 2012). Thus, the co-researchers' descriptions of their

experiences provided how each individual situation, the strategies incorporated, the support

received, their role expectations and their personal beliefs affected their transition from a FTFM

to a BLM through the lens of Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) Transition Theory.

Practical Significance

Teachers have to make frequent changes to their instructional strategies (Ramburg, 2014;

Sleegers, Thoonen, Oort, & Peetsma, 2014). Whether the change happens by choice or is a new

initiative for the district, through this study, the voices of the teachers transitioning to a BLM are

heard. According to Cheung and Slavin (2013), "educational technology will continue to play an

increasingly important role in the years to come" (p. 102). Revealing teachers' perspectives of

the transition experiences from a FTFM to a BLM may also contribute valuable information for

teachers, administrators, and county officials, as well as policymakers and parents, about the

process of implementing a BLM into a school system. These perspectives may prove beneficial,

as teachers will inevitably have to integrate new technology instructional practices, such as a

BLM, into the curriculum (f for Technology in Education, 2014). This study may also provide

insights into the experiences of teachers already embarking on their technology journey.

Therefore, this study should assist the design of effective professional development supporting

teachers in this process. Such professional development and training are essential to the success of new programs in school systems implementing blended learning, and as a result helps increase student achievement (Oliver & Stallings, 2014; Poon, 2013; Vaughn, 2007). The findings may become a catalyst for change in how teachers receive professional support (Gerbic, 2011). Therefore, practical knowledge gained from this study may be relevant in the future by informing the teaching and learning process while expanding on the available literature.

Research Questions

The central research question for this study was: What are the shared experiences among teachers changing from a traditional FTFM to a BLM in the middle school setting? The sub-questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do teachers describe the situational role changes that occurred throughout the transition from a FTFM to a BLM?

According to Schlossberg (1994), transitions are role changes; although, it is up to the individual whether they see the change as a gain or loss. Each transition may be positive or negative, thereby influencing people's experiences in unique ways. Teachers have shifted roles from deliverers of content to facilitators of knowledge, allowing students to take ownership of their learning (Abidogun, 2011; Francis & Shannon, 2013; Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). As the role of the teacher changes to one who mediates between the learner and knowledge (Abidogun, 2011), understanding the dynamics of the shift may provide insight into how to ensure the success of the transition.

RQ2: How do teachers' personal and professional beliefs about themselves influence the transition from a FTFM to a BLM?

Schlossberg (1994) indicated one "determinant of an adaptation to transition is the

individual him/herself" (p. 12). As teachers gain experience in their field, they also gain content and pedagogical knowledge; however, because technology is constantly evolving, teachers may lack the necessary skills to incorporate technology in lessons (Pegler, Kollewyn, & Crichton, 2010). An individual's self-efficacy and experiences influence the change process. Self-efficacy affects the transition from a FTFM to a BLM because self-efficacy influences the resources (or lack of resources) that a teacher brings to the situation (Reilly, Dhingra, & Boduszek, 2014). For teachers to embrace the change to a BLM, they may have to alter their beliefs about teaching and learning (Chiksandra, Ortel-Cass, Williams, & Jones, 2011; Dow, 2006). Letting teachers tell about their personal experiences helped to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the experiences (Bandura, 2007).

RQ3: What influence, if any, does professional development have on transitioning from an FTFM to a BLM?

The existing research stated that continuous professional development enables co-researchers to reflect and offer feedback on implementation (Oliver & Stallings, 2014; Vaughn, 2007). Schlossberg's (1994) Transition Theory aligns with Vaughn's (2007) description of what he referred to as the transition of an environment. Vaughn's notion of the environment of transition is one where there needs to be faculty support through course redesign and providing the time for the acquisition of technological skills. According to Vaughn (2007), three factors of an environment help enable a successful transition: (a) interpersonal support, (b) institutional support, and (c) physical setting (Schlossberg, 1981, 1994; 2011; Vaughn, 2007). Although these three factors are important, so is proper training. Indeed, Napier et al. (2011) stated that proper training is essential for professionals transitioning from a traditional learning environment to a hybrid or blended course.

RQ4: What strategies, if any, do teachers use to transition from a traditional FTFM to a BLM?

Schlossberg (1994) stated that the strategies used to conform to change or to cope with change are important factors in transition. If teachers lack an understanding of how technology affects students, then they will use technology inadequately (Cviko, 2014; Parette, Quesenberry, & Blum, 2010). Concerning adopting a BLM, teachers may need to change their attitudes and beliefs and learn how to regulate many different learning styles, as well as integrate online and traditional methods of teaching (Gerbic, 2011; Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). Making these changes effectively entails the application of suitable strategies. Teachers' explanations of their personal experiences in this regard may offer significant, new insights into what strategies may provide a successful transition to a BLM.

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Research Plan

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For this study, using a qualitative phenomenological design helped to provide an understanding of the experiences of teachers transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM in a middle school environment. This method is appropriate to give a voice to the teachers who are experiencing the transition from a FTFM to BLM. Moustakas (1994) described a phenomenological study as one that focuses less on the researcher and more on the description of the co-researchers' experiences. Each co-researcher provides a unique view based on his or her perceptions of the transition between models. The documentation not only yielded individual differences but also showed the commonalities between the experiences. A phenomenological approach was successful in capturing the lived experiences of teachers transitioning to a BLM learning environment (Cilesiz, 2011). Creswell (2013) stated that a phenomenological study involves an emphasis on one particular phenomenon and describes the common meaning several

individuals experience because of their lived experiences. In this instance, the phenomenon is of teachers transitioning to a BLM, and examining this phenomenon provided insight into the shared experiences of each teacher. According to Gall et al. (2013), phenomenology is the study of how an individual views a phenomenon through reflecting on their immediate experiences. Collected data from this study provided the "what" of the teachers' experiences and "how" the co-researchers experienced the transition, thereby depicting the essence of the experience of teachers transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM (Moustakas, 1994).

<div align="center">**Delimitations and Limitations**</div>

Delimitations of a study are boundaries that the researcher places on the design of a study (Joyner, Rouse, & Glatthorn, 2012). The educators or co-researchers participating in this study were middle school teachers, teaching in grades 6-8, who experienced or were experiencing the transition from a FTFM to a BLM. Additionally, co-researchers consisted of teachers from a variety of disciplines and grade levels because these variables may influence the experience of transition. Co-researchers were not new to the school or district; this delimitation helped to eliminate some potentially confounding factors that may be unique to relatively new teachers undergoing the transition.

This phenomenological study limits generalizability to other states and other school districts with different demographics or population because it included only one school district in a suburban area of Georgia. The schools in the selected district performed at or above the state average on standardized tests; as such, application to schools performing below the state average may be limited.

Limitations are boundaries placed on the methodology of a study (Joyner et al., 2012). A limitation of this study is that all of the co-researchers worked in the same district as the

researcher. To put the co-researchers' minds at ease, the primary researcher emphasized that she did not have any influence on their evaluations and that pseudonyms would be used to protect their personal information. All research subjects also met in a neutral location to help reduce anxieties. Additional assurances included statements that there were no correct answers and the information from interactions was for analytical purposes. However, these limitations may affect the study's effectiveness in fully capturing teachers' experiences.

Definitions

1. *Blended Learning Model (BLM)* - A program where students learn by a combination of face-to-face class time with a teacher and an online delivery system (Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003).

2. *Collaborative learning communities* - Shared and distributed leadership that allows a culture to emerge that facilitates innovation and collaboration among teachers and provides assistance for the transition to the teacher's role (Kuo, Wei, Hu, & Yang, 2013; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Msila, 2011; Papaioannou & Charalambous, 2011).

3. *Electronic learning (or e-learning)* - A system of delivering learning by electronic means (Agourram, Robson, & Nehari-Talet, 2006).

4. *Face-to-Face Learning Model (FTFM)* - A traditional teaching model where the instructor and students are in the same building at the same time (Redmond, 2011).

Summary

Teachers make many transitions throughout their careers. The experiences of teachers in the middle school environment transitioning to a BLM offer new challenges. Research on the perceptions of faculty in the higher institutions is prevalent. However, a specific study examining the personal experiences of teachers in a primary or secondary setting is missing in

the literature (Cilesiz, 2011). A qualitative phenomenological study investigating the transition from a FTFM to a BLM allowed for the analysis of themes found in the life experiences of teachers involved in the transition from a FTFM to a BLM (Moustakas, 1994).

Chapter One presented the evidence of the need to gain deeper understandings of the experiences of teachers transitioning into a BLM and highlighted a purpose for the study by showing the importance of this transition for effective education in the 21st century. By utilizing a focus group, individual interviews, and a blogging activity, co-researchers had the opportunity to voice their experiences of transitioning to a BLM from a FTFM. The triangulation of data added to a full, rich description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Chapter One also indicated the significance of the study, the central questions that the study addressed, and the delimitations and limitations associated with the study. Chapter Two will further substantiate the need for conducting research on teachers' experiences in a blended learning environment and provide insight into how successful transitions may influence through a comprehensive review of the literature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Blended learning is an instructional model that mixes online learning with traditional face-to-face learning (Horn & Staker, 2013; Li, Tsai, Tao, & Lorentz, 2014; Oh & Park, 2009; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). Over the last several years, online and blended learning have gained momentum in higher education and have trickled down to K-12 education (Bonk & Graham, 2012; Horn & Staker, 2011; Watson, Gemin, Ryan, & Wicks, 2009). The perceptions of experienced teachers transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM classroom may supply teachers, administrators, and policymakers with insight into the process, insights that may help to facilitate a more successful transition for other teachers, administrators, and policymakers. Teachers with under three years of service are considered novice teachers, and for the purposes of this study, an experienced teacher is a teacher who has five or more years teaching in a classroom (Claessens et al., 2016).

The literature review served as a means to examine Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) Transition Theory as it related to teachers transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM. The role of technology in the classroom was discussed as a way to provide insight into how the stakeholders' roles shift during the transition process. As part of the review, a presentation on the ways that the beliefs and preconceived notions of teachers contributed to the process was discussed, as well the influence of supports such as professional development and the intrinsic and extrinsic strategies that teachers used to facilitate the transition. The literature review concluded with the barriers and benefits associated with the utilization of a BLM by highlighting the gap in the literature for possible future research.

Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) Transition Theory provides the theoretical framework for this study. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) defined a transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Anticipated transitions include graduation, getting married, having a child, starting a new job, or changing careers. Unanticipated transitions include more disruptive events such as major surgery, serious illness, car accidents, loss of a job, or an unexpected promotion. In addition, there may be anticipated transitions that do not occur, such as not getting married, not having children, not receiving an expected promotion, or not being able to retire due to finances (Schlossberg, 2011). Schlossberg (2011) believed that it is important to understand the different types of transitions and understand how people cope with them. During a teaching career, teachers maneuver through many changes. When transitioning to a BLM, Schlossberg's (1981a, 2011) Transition Theory provides a framework that may shed light on the experiences of teachers as they move to a BLM.

The transition process consists of the Four S's: situation, supports, strategies, and self (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 2011). The *situation* in transition theory refers to how the individual sees the transition, the context of the situation and whether it is viewed as positive, negative, expected, or unexpected (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schlossberg, 2011). Those who view the situation as positive or voluntary and who feel good about the change will have an easier time with the transition. However, if a transition is forced or imposed on an individual who feels unhappy about it, the adjustment tends to be more difficult (Schlossberg et al., 1995). As the stakeholders go through the transition process, how the stakeholders perceive the change

affects the process (Schlossberg, 2011). As teachers transition to a blended environment, their roles become somewhat altered, given that a BLM entails teaching skill sets that require technological knowledge (Ertmer et al., 2012; Horn & Staker, 2011). If teachers do not value a student-centered approach to instruction and if administration and district personnel do not properly support teachers through professional development, then teachers may view their situation as stressful and the adjustment as difficult (Ertmer et al., 2012).

The *self* component of transition theory refers to the resources that the individual brings to the situation (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). An individual's experience contributes to the overall success or failure of a transition (e.g., their developed skills, training, age, or personal background) and perceptions of change. A person's strengths, weaknesses, worldview, and ability to consider options also contribute to the outcome of a transition (Schlossberg, 2011). For teachers, relevant factors may include (a) vantage point, or how someone sees the transition; (b) self-efficacy, or how one feels about his or her ability to reach a goal; and (c) constancy (Evans et al., 2010).

Supports in transition theory are the resources available to help an individual with a transition. Castro and Bauml (2009) stated, "A person's access to resources impacts the timing of the decision to pursue a career change" (p. 123). Resources can be internal or external, such as level of commitment, a husband or wife, friendships, close family members, community members, or institutions (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Schlossberg et al. (1995) contended that social support is the key to enabling individuals to deal with stress appropriately. Support can be either positive or negative. For teachers, positive support may come in the form of honest feedback from administrators, coaches, and other teachers who boost their self-esteem and confidence along the way. While negative

support may come in the form of harsh feedback from supervisors or negative evaluations from students (Akalin & Sucuoglu, 2015; Tuytens & Devos, 2013).

The *strategies* factor in transition theory concerns the responses or coping strategies that an individual uses in the process of transitioning (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Seeking advice and doing research are two possible types of strategies. Those who constructively use various strategies tend to cope better with transitions (Schlossberg, 2011). Evans et al. (2010) suggested that coping skills are necessary to find resources or solutions to problems arising in a new situation. Often those going through transitions ask themselves, "Are there ways in which I can change the current situation? Can I change my perspective on the situation? Is there a way to reduce my stress level?" (Schlossberg, 2011, p. 56). This thought process is especially so for teachers transitioning to a BLM because these teachers must be willing to find answers to their questions and are constantly reflecting on the process.

Throughout any transition process, individuals go through the stages of "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011, p. 56; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995, p. 73). The *moving in* stage is the entering into a new situation such as a job or marriage. Individuals must learn to adapt to new rules and the environment surrounding the change. After they have done so and feel supported, they are ready for the *moving through* stage, that is sustaining and remaining committed to the transition. Finally, the *moving out* stage is associated with the end of a transition as the new situation integrates into the individual (Anderson et al., 2011; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995). That said, it is important to note that Schlossberg (1981b, 2011) indicated that an individual's ability to move in, through, and out decreases under stress during the process of transition.

Transition theory is relevant to the present study because a BLM is a different way of thinking about teaching. Analyzing how teachers apply the Four S's of transition theory to their individual experience is essential to understanding the transition process to blended learning.

Related Literature

The trend of technology training has followed a path similar to that of blended learning (Bersin, 2004). Blended learning began with instructor-led training before the 1960s and evolved into mainframe computer-based training in the 1960s and 1970s, distance learning through satellites in the 1980s and 1990s, and then PC-based CD–ROM training in the 1980s and 1990s. These earlier stages of a BLM eventually led to the first generation of web training or e-learning, starting around 1998. Integrated forms of blended learning emerged in 2002 with video, web sources, simulations, and other media, as well as face-to-face interaction (Bersin, 2004).

This section of the literature review provides a conceptual framework of various theories to offer insight into the individual experiences of teachers transitioning into a BLM. The literature review also considers research on the evolution and current state of blended learning. As blended learning gained popularity in the higher education setting, it also piqued interest in the primary and secondary environments (Bonk & Graham, 2012; Horn & Staker, 2011, 2013; Watson et al., 2009). Many middle and high educational institutions have begun to use a blended learning approach, yet little research is available on the actual experiences of the teacher transitioning to a BLM. To understand the impact of this learning model on teaching and learning, we must "understand individuals' experiences with technology" (Cilesiz, 2011, p. 488). The following discussion relates the four S's of transition theory to (a) technology in the classroom, (b) situation change through role changes, (c) support of teachers through

professional development, (d) strategies to assist with making the change, and (e) personal and professional factors that affect the transition.

Technology in the Classroom

Technology integration has been a part of the classroom setting since the 1980s and has grown rapidly in popularity (Horn & Staker, 2012, 2013). The rapid growth of technology in the classroom has increased expectations on teachers to use technology as a learning tool in the classroom. Although teachers are expected to utilize technology in the classroom, and evidence shows technology as catalyst for instruction (Berrett, Murphy, & Sullivan, 2012; Rafool et al., 2012), it is still not widely used in the classroom for various reasons (Lin, Michko, Padron, & Waxman, 2012; Reinhart, Thomas, & Torskie, 2011). Explanations concerning why teachers shy away from technology include teacher beliefs, lack of time, lack of support, and lack of knowledge (Chen, Looi, & Chen, 2009; Gerard, Varma, Corliss, & Linn, 2011; Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Glazewski, Newby, & Ertmer, 2010; Song & Looi, 2012; Wachira & Keengwe, 2011). Even though these barriers exist, schools have attempted to help teachers move from just having general computer knowledge to integrating technology effectively into the curriculum (Donnelly & Kyei-Blankson, 2014).

In 2003, the American Society for Training and Development labeled the blended learning model as one of the top trends in education (Bonk & Graham, 2012). Interest increased due to the positive results BLMs have had on student achievement and the impact on learning environments. Studies conducted in blended learning environments found that students scored significantly higher in post-test factual and conceptual knowledge, showed increased motivation, and were more active learners in a BLM classroom (Chen, 2012; Mosca, Ball, Buzza, & Paul, 2010; Vernadakis et al., 2011). Another study by Al-Huneidi (2012) found that blended learning

increased the quality of the learning environment for postsecondary students; along these same lines, An and Reigeluth (2011) determined that students in a BLM show more initiative than those in a traditional setting. An and Reigeluth (2011) also reported feeling greater responsibility for their learning and increased motivation. The BLM cannot only improve the quality of education but can also bridge gaps between traditional and personalized learning (Thorne, 2003).

As technology has advanced, the use of mobile devices, such as iPads, has also demonstrated a positive effect on learning outcomes (Hwang, Shi, & Chu, 2011; Hwang & Chen, 2013; Kiger, Herro, & Prunty, 2012; Liaw, Hatala, & Huang, 2010). Mobile devices have demonstrated both motivation and engagement for students (Bozkurt, 2011; Louis, 2012). The purpose of using mobile devices in the BLM is to "empower formal and informal learning thereby shaping the pedagogical design" through active student engagement (Lai, Khaddage, & Knezek, 2013, p. 421). Empowering students to engage in academics creates motivated and creative leaders who facilitate change (Khaddage & Knezek, 2011). Even though many studies point to positive outcomes, teachers still need support to become effective change agents (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010).

To create self-motivated learners, teachers need ongoing professional collaboration to investigate, read, and reflect on how to integrate best practices in the blended learning classroom (Cifuentes, Maxwell, & Bulu, 2011; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Ferriter & Graham, 2010; Fleck, 2012; Kopcha, 2012; Napier et al., 2011). Bozkurt (2011) and Louis (2012) explored the various ways that teachers incorporated technology into a lesson. Their findings emphasized the importance of teacher collaboration and professional development when integrating technology into lesson plans. Louis (2012) contended that teachers who received in-

service training were more likely to try different strategies and develop lessons around the use of technology. However, teachers with less experience with technology rely on conventional methods to incorporate technology into their lessons, if at all (Bozkurt, 2011). Evidence from these studies points to learning communities and collaboration with others are essential to the success of the BLM (Fleck, 2012; Kopcha, 2012; Napier et al., 2011; Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Situations That Impact BLMs

According to Schlossberg (2011), the transition process includes any situation surrounding the changes taking place. These situations include several factors such as what caused the transition, whether or not the individual chose the situation, whether it is permanent or temporary, and the changing of roles. Schlossberg (2011) also indicated that the people going through transitions assess the role of the stakeholders responsible and how it affects them. Discussed below are some situations that could potentially influence the transition.

District roles. The transitions associated with blended learning affect everyone in the school setting, from district leadership to students. Administrative roles and responsibilities need to shift at all levels of the district to allow for a restructuring of shared decision making and effective leadership in implementing digital change (Kuo et al., 2013; Mills, 2007). A study completed by Berrett, Murphy, and Sullivan (2012) on administrators' views of technology integration in the schools suggested that a district leader who mandates policy change from above "creates resistance at the school level" (p. 200). District leaders must provide encouragement for reflective learning communities where teachers feel safe to make mistakes (Berrett et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Effective leaders are involved and help create learning communities to engage teachers in discussions, reflections, and

evaluations of best practices to strengthen teaching practices (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010). Successful blended learning communities should consider the opinions of all stakeholders, and the people's vision must align with the bigger vision of the district, thus giving all stakeholders a sense of ownership in the BLM (Berrett et al., 2012). As such, district leaders should encourage teachers, provide learning communities, and make resources available to fit the teachers' needs (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

Successful district leaders encourage teachers through short-term and long-term visions, thereby creating a pathway for teachers to use technology through leading by example (Ash, 2012; Mills, 2007; Schachter, 2010). A leader embraces technology facilitation and instills new ideas into the teachers who are initially resistant to change. If the leader sees the value in the use of technology in the classroom, this provides an easier pathway for the teacher to transition (Msila, 2011). For districts to move teachers from the role of the lecturer to that of facilitator, it is important to foster qualities of instructional leaders and recognize teachers as change agents (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Gao et al., 2010). Byrom and Bingham (2001) found five leadership characteristics that determined whether technology integration was successful in schools: (a) vision, (b) leading by example, (c) teacher support, (d) open dialogue, and (e) shared leadership. As Byrom and Bingham noted, "leadership is probably the single most important factor affecting the successful integration of technology in schools" (p. 4). Therefore, leaders must envision the possibilities for technology in the district (Ash, 2012). However, district leaders must also be ready to listen to the voice of the teachers and provide information that will address their needs (Lee, Leary, Sellers, & Recker, 2014).

Studies have confirmed the need for leaders to recognize that teacher perceptions play a crucial role in the implementation of technology in a classroom. Lu (2009) and Reinhart,

Thomas, and Torskie (2011) both examined teachers' perceptions and the factors that kept

technology out of lessons or enhanced the use of technology in the classroom. Lu (2009)

indicated that administrative input was critical to the usage of technology in the classroom and

that ample professional development led to the successful utilization of technology. District

leaders can only help one location and one teacher at a time; however, facilitators, coaches, or

mentors are also an effective means of assisting teachers. Schools that implemented technology

use through the use of facilitators had higher success rates in enabling students to use higher-

level thinking skills (Reinhart et al., 2011) and played a role in promoting positive teacher beliefs

(Kopcha, 2012).

Lee et al. (2014) reported findings inconsistent with those of Lu (2009) and Reinhart et

al. (2011), but Lee's study involved a combination of online and face-to-face assistance for

teachers without the use of facilitators. Lee et al. (2014) examined the level of backing provided

by the district and how it impacted the use of technology. The findings from the study showed

that the teachers who received high levels of online assistance from district coordinators made

less use of the technology than those who did not receive high levels of assistance from the

district. These results suggested the roles of the superintendent and district coordinator must

involve a balance of support and control (Lee et al., 2014).

Administrators' roles. Administrators are central to technology implementation,

especially when one considers that teachers need strong leaders and guidance as they begin to

implement BLMs in the classroom. LaFrance and Beck (2014) indicated that pre-service leaders

need opportunities to gain experience with traditional and online learning environments. The

more experienced principals have with technology, the more assistance they can offer teachers.

Hadjithoma-Garstka (2011) examined leadership styles of principals in the implementation of

Informational Communication Technology (ICT) and found that those who maintained an open-door policy without compromising their authority had greater success in implanting technology within their school. By providing assistance, principals made it possible for teachers to take on roles that advanced ICT in the school (Hadjithoma-Garstka, 2011).

Effective leaders must provide reliable professional assistance and effective leadership (Kuo et al., 2013; Lu and Overbaugh, 2009; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Msila, 2011; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Vanderline, Dexter, & van Braak, 2012). School administrators are instructional leaders and, therefore, fulfill the role of facilitators of instructional technology (Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). These leaders should provide professional development opportunities within and outside the school setting (Vanderline et al., 2012). Lutrick and Szabo (2012) examined the factors contributing to the effective professional development, concluding that it should be (a) ongoing, (b) collaborative, (c) data-driven, (d) interest-driven, and (e) interactive. Professional development with these qualities builds learning communities where teachers have active engagement and needs-based training.

According to Kuo et al. (2013), administrative roles and responsibilities at the school, district, and state levels should change from a focus on control to an emphasis on shared decision making. Msila (2011) suggested that strong leadership provides a necessary foundation for teachers charting unknown waters with the use of technology and that technology implementation in schools will not be successful without adequate assistance from the administrator. Collaborative learning communities typified by shared and distributed leadership (Kuo et al., 2013; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Msila, 2011) allow a culture to emerge that facilitates innovation and collaboration among teachers (Papaioannou & Charalambous, 2011) and provides assistance for the transition to the teacher's role.

Teachers' roles. A teacher's role should include accountability for their teaching, transparency and openness, and the ability to work collaboratively (Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). Teachers working together create a collaborative environment throughout the transition that provides assistance to each other and develops learning communities (Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). In today's classrooms, in regard to the BLM, the teacher's role is rapidly changing from an instructor to a facilitator (Abidogun, 2011; Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur, & Sendurur, 2012; Francis & Shannon, 2013; Hernandez-Ramos, 2005; Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Smyth et al., 2012). Comas-Quinn (2011) stated that the success of a learning approach relies on how well teachers transition from one role to another. Many teachers are reluctant to change, but a significant shift in the teacher's role becomes necessary with the use of new practices (Reinhart et al., 2011). Although the teacher's function has changed over time (Snape & Fox-Turnbull, 2013), the use of educational technologies allows for a redefinition of the teaching profession (Abidogun, 2011).

As teachers become learners of digital media, they are more likely to facilitate the use of technology into their lessons. As such, administrators should provide assistance and guidance concerning the teachers' learning of technology, as this will contribute to further technology use in the classroom (Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Other evidence has suggested that self-efficacy in teaching and technology skills will influence technology use (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Sand, Valcke, Braak, & Tondeur, 2010). Teachers who encourage collaboration among students were more likely to engage in professional development activities to improve their teaching skills (Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012); therefore, the likelihood of incorporating technology and developing positive perspectives on the use of technology in lessons increased (Kopcha, 2012).

The teacher is critical in the classroom for the overall success of the students. However, the role of the teacher has moved from the old model where the teacher merely delivers content to a new model where the teacher encourages higher-level thinking, promotes information literacy, and incorporates collaborative learning environments into a course (Abidogun, 2011). As facilitators of the learning environment, teachers allow students to take responsibility for their learning (Abidogun, 2011; Francis & Shannon, 2013; Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011), encourage higher order thinking skills, provide collaborative opportunities, and promote literacy (Abidogun, 2011). Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) suggested that administrators must recognize teachers as change agents who use appropriate pedagogy to identify valuable technological learning tools; therefore, administrators must give teachers the assistance necessary to create a successful learning environment.

Studies are limited on the role of teachers and understanding how the use of technology redefines the parameters of teaching (Blau, 2011; Civko, McKenney, & Voogt, 2014). Abidogun (2011) stated that teachers must be collaborators and cooperators who shift their roles to become mediators between learners and what they need, especially where technology-based learning is concerned. By shifting roles, classrooms became less teacher-focused as teachers spent more time on student-centered activities through scaffolding and moderating of students (Blau, 2011). A study by Civko et al. (2014) contributed to the idea that a teacher's role should be that of a collaborative, involved facilitator of curriculum and less teacher-centered, and that by doing so, the change of teachers' roles will lead to the change of a student's role.

Students' role changes. Today's students view technology as something important to their way of life (Housand & Housand, 2012). Because of the dramatic changes in how youth view technology and its function in society, administrators encourage teachers to implement

lessons aimed at utilizing technology to increase self-motivation, allow time for student collaboration, and fine-tune students' problem-solving skills (Overbay, Patterson, Vasu, & Grable, 2010). More and more teachers are discovering that the blended learning environment fosters increased student engagement and motivation by the utilization of technology (Grover, Pea, & Cooper, 2015; Perrotta, 2013; Saritepeci & Çakir, 2015; Shivetts, 2011). For example, Rafool et al. (2012) found a positive correlation between the use of technology and student engagement, motivation, and satisfaction. By providing a more learner-centered environment through technology, teachers can focus more on the actual learning and less on the activity, thereby stimulating student thinking (An & Reigeluth, 2011; Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). Ultimately a BLM, along with authentic learning opportunities, allows students to take responsibility for their learning (Baytak, Tarman, & Ayas, 2011; Smyth et al., 2012; Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). Teachers strive to keep students engaged and motivated to be independent learners. When teachers offered experiences that students perceive as worthwhile and activities that require higher-order thinking, students stayed interested and challenged (Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). This process enables students to become more self-directed learners through experience (Rigby et al., 2012).

   Self-directed learners. Students becoming competent in self-directed learning are discovering how to learn for themselves as well as discovering what they need for learning to occur (McCown, 2009). An and Reigeluth (2011) described a learner-centered classroom as one where the teacher serves as a facilitator of knowledge and allows the students to direct their learning process. Teachers in learner-centered classrooms encourage participation and sharing throughout the process, thereby making the student more aware of the goals that he or she remains accountable (Ertmer et al., 2012; An & Reigeluth, 2011; Overbay et al., 2010). Making

students aware of academic goals creates an environment for students to take control of their learning.

Teachers face a difficult challenge in helping students to increase their autonomy as learners by maximizing self-motivation and creating choices for students (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Rigby et al., 2012). In other words, a BLM requires teachers to give up some control by allowing students to become self-directed learners on a quest for answers to questions (Van Deur, 2011). The BLM combines instructor or peer input with self-directed learning techniques, thereby increasing the knowledge gained through classroom experiences (Vernadakis et al., 2011). It is important to note that teachers not only need to teach students how to take on their new role but also teach students time management skills, as these skills are necessary to become disciplined and independent learners (Horn & Staker 2012).

Student perception and motivation. Motivation is a common challenge for students, and a BLM may encourage student motivation and engagement (Dziuban, Hartman, Cavanagh, & Moskal, 2011; Francis & Shannon, 2013; Saritepeci & Çakir, 2015), thereby producing active learners who are satisfied with their educational experiences (Mosca et al., 2010; Rafool et al., 2012; Vernadakis et al., 2011). A study by Shivetts (2011) highlighted how a blended learning environment increases student motivation. Similarly, Van Deur (2011) found that students in gifted programs at the elementary level were more likely to use self-directed learning and that self-directed learning increases motivation and engagement. Teachers must find ways to motivate all students, and by using technology, teachers may see a further increase in student engagement (Grover et al., 2015; Ottenbreit-Leftwich et al., 2010) and motivation (Shivetts, 2011).

Several studies have shown that a BLM produces positive results concerning student

satisfaction (El-Deghaidy & Nouby, 2008) and that the BLM increases the effectiveness of learning new concepts (Akyuz & Samsa, 2009). However, research is limited to student perceptions of technology on e-learning in higher education (Baytak et al., 2011). Teachers transitioning into a BLM must be aware of the role student perceptions play in the success of a BLM. For example, Wu, Tennyson, and Hsia (2010) described specific ways to implement blended learning successfully and highlighted student perception as the key to the overall program success. Another study by Baytak et al. (2011) explored student perceptions of technology use, concluding that students valued technology as a way of making learning easier and viewed it as a positive learning opportunity. However, more information is required to understand the roles of student and teacher perceptions, a goal that this project will attempt to satisfy.

Self

The *self* component of transition theory refers to the resources that the individual brings to a situation (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). An individual's prior experiences contribute to how difficult or easy a transition occurs. Whether the individual feels that he or she can carry out the transition, the person's level of resilience, and the presence of either a pessimistic or an optimistic attitude, can affect the transition process (Schlossberg, 2011). The following concepts contribute to these ideas.

Pedagogical beliefs. A teachers' ability to embrace change depends on his or her aptitude to alter how he or she thinks about teaching and learning (Chiksandra et al., 2011; Dow, 2006). An alteration in pedagogical beliefs guides the transition from a FTFM to a BLM (Papaioannou & Charalambous, 2011). A new approach to teaching, such as a BLM, requires teachers to make judgments as to how valuable a tool may be; the more helpful a teacher considers a tool, the

more likely that teacher is to use it (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010).

Technology is a bridge between a student's goals, the standards for learning, and student performance of those standards (Polly & Hannafin, 2010). Technology may enable students to organize their thinking and knowledge in a more meaningful way, and teachers must value technology as a tool for this to happen (Yu, 2013). Fleck (2012) indicated that due to the increased usage of technology in society, pedagogy must carefully consider its application within the school setting. Blended learning is one such application that is on the rise and has the potential to make learning more meaningful, but the basic pedagogical principles are "necessitated by the explicit design of the learning experience" (Fleck, 2012, p. 409) and the pedagogical beliefs of the teacher (Yu, 2013). Caravias (2014) indicated that much literature is available on what teachers need to know to integrate technology effectively, but that very little research has been conducted on teachers' perceptions of the BLM, especially related to issues of "pedagogy and content knowledge" (p. 71).

A teacher's attitude and pedagogical beliefs are critical in his or her assessment of the value of emerging technology (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Ertmer et al., 2012). Teachers inexperienced in e-learning were particularly likely to incorporate or not incorporate resources based on their pedagogical beliefs (Stein, Shephard, & Harris, 2011). Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2010) explained that as teachers introduced new instructional approaches, such as the use of technology (or a BLM), teachers determined the value of the approach and whether it fit in their pedagogical beliefs. The value that they attribute to the approach determines whether they will utilize the new strategy. Yu (2013) and Song and Looi (2012) discovered a relationship between a teacher's beliefs about e-learning and the actual practices taking place in the classroom. These studies indicated that teachers expressed enthusiasm about

utilizing technology but needed to understand how it fit into their beliefs before they could internalize and accept the changes. Recognizing the value of technology, viewing it as a teaching and learning tool, and aligning it with teachers' pedagogical beliefs are all vital to the success of the use of technology (Yu, 2013). If the goal of blended learning is to motivate and create self-directed learners as a way to improve student achievement, then understanding the BLM pedagogy becomes a necessity by definition.

Self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986, 1997, 2007), self-efficacy is a personal judgment about one's perception of the level of competency that he or she can achieve. Self-efficacy entails self-regulation and the ability to reflect on personal abilities. Personal experiences shape a person's self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2007). Although previous studies found no significant relationship between self-efficacy and teachers' job satisfaction (Chen et al., 2009), recent studies have indicated that self-efficacy does affect teacher's job satisfaction (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Reilly et al., 2014; Sang et al., 2010). Negative past experiences, stress, anxiety, and loss of control also tend to reduce feelings of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2007).

Studies completed on technology implementation with a BLM have indicated that teacher self-efficacy plays a significant role in how successful teachers are when incorporating technology into the classroom (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Sang et al., 2010). High teacher self-efficacy relates to higher self-esteem, lower stress levels, improved confidence, and the ability to overcome obstacles, all of which may assist with technology adoption (Cullen & Greene, 2011; Reilly et al., 2014). Furthermore, Sang et al. (2010) indicated that self-efficacy played a major role in whether a teacher incorporated technology in the classroom. Indeed, self-efficacy may be a more influential factor in a teacher's willingness to implement technology than

having technological skills (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Shea & Bidjerano, 2010).

Supports

Traditional face-to-face teaching methods are not adequate for teaching students in a blended learning environment (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013). Therefore, new skills developed through professional development opportunities should help to increase student achievement in a BLM (Poon, 2013). Glocowska, Young, Lockyer, and Moule (2011) and Johnson et al. (2010) indicated that online and face-to-face classroom activities required careful planning to ensure that each activity was sufficiently relevant and engaging. Professional development that is ongoing, collaborative, and timely increases a teacher's ability to incorporate technology effectively into lessons (Banister & Fisher, 2010; Finger & Houguet, 2009; Gerard, 2011). Additionally, effective professional development should be consistent and carefully thought out, and it should provide a high level of support to engage teachers in best technology integration practices (Gerard, 2011). Although technology is a major component of blended learning, it is only a means to facilitate the learning for students, and professional development must focus on teaching and learning methods (Poon, 2013).

Effective professional development. With new technology practices emerging every year, teachers need to understand effective strategies and why the technology tools are vital for students (Civko et al., 2014). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) and Deluca, Luu, Sun, and Klinger (2012) stated that new professional development strategies are needed to create greater support and structure for teachers dealing with the rapid changes in instructional practices. Effective professional development includes the application of skills learned and the ongoing practices teachers use with students. Teachers need support and training to aid in the adoption of new technology practices (Kopcha, 2012). This need makes effective professional

development necessary to create long-term change (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Wiener (2013) stated that professional development should be engaging and meaningful and that it should provide an intellectually stimulating environment that makes it relevant to the learner. Teachers need the activities to relate to their professional lives, so they find significance in the strategy and are more willing to try it in the classroom.

For teachers to transition from the traditional FTFM to a BLM, they must have adequate training (Napier et al., 2011), including ongoing professional development over an extended period (Banister & Fisher, 2010; Finger & Houguet, 2009; Gerard, 2011). Tamim, Bernard, Borokhovski, Abrami, and Schmid (2011) stated that the use of technology to increase student learning outcomes depends on teacher pedagogy, content knowledge, and instructional goals that incorporate technology. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC, 2011) developed a list of standards for effective professional development, with one of the most important being ongoing support. Furthermore, NSDC (2011) determined continuous improvement focus on student and teacher learning goals, and less on the number of hours that one engages in the event. A study by Lutrick and Szabo (2012) supported the NSDC's emphases on ongoing professional development that included collaboration among teachers, interactive participation, and both data-driven and interest-driven design.

Just as blended learning encourages students to become active learners, effective professional development requires teachers to be active learners as well (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Deluca et al., 2012; Gerard et al., 2011). For adults to acquire new knowledge, they must work in collaborative groups where there is a minimal risk (Lumpe, Vaughn, Henrikson, & Bishop, 2014). Allowing teachers to interact with one another while immersing teachers in professional development will improve classroom instruction (Gerard et

al, 2011). Professional engaged teachers who see appropriate modeling of practices become more likely to engage students in technology-enhanced lessons (Wachira & Keengwe, 2011).

Ongoing professional development. Continuous professional development is an effective means to help teachers implement technology in the classroom (Banister & Fischer, 2010; Cifuentes et al., 2011; Finger & Houguet, 2009; Gerard et al., 2011; Reinhart et al., 2011) and, more specifically, a BLM. Often, the lack of professional development prevents some teachers from implementing technology (Finger & Houguet, 2009; Kopcha, 2012). However, traditional group professional development has not proved to deliver adequate support for this transition, but situated professional development may provide a comfortable environment so those teachers can reshape their perceptions of integrating technology into lessons (Gerard et al., 2011; Kopcha, 2012). Continuous situated professional development allows teachers time to repeatedly test new strategies, with the support of a mentor, to help facilitate classroom change (Kopcha, 2012).

In a study by Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013), teachers reported that insufficient technical support, lack of collaboration, and the reluctance of students added to the challenges involved in implementing a BLM. The teachers in the study realized that blended learning required a pedagogical mind shift in the way students learned and how instruction was delivered, creating role shifts. Successful implementation of a BLM depends largely on how well teachers can transition from a FTFM to a BLM and on the evolution of the complex roles within the transition (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Gerard et al. (2011) determined that teachers who participated in professional development for one year and who engaged in comprehensive, constructivist professional development integrated technology as a tool to enhance the curriculum in effective ways.

Blended learning is an up-and-coming change in the teaching of curriculum, and many school districts have provided blended learning opportunities (LaFrance, 2014). Blended learning is one of the fastest-growing categories of online learning (Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2010). This shift in education practice makes it imperative that learning opportunities for teachers be sustaining and socially driven to improve teacher satisfaction (Cifuentes et al., 2011). Professional learning communities and mentors need to engage in supporting student success through collaboration (Cifuentes et al., 2011).

Professional learning communities and mentors. As Fleck (2012) noted, "communities are bound together by common interests or practices and integrated through rich communication about those interests" (p. 406). A professional learning community is a group of educators who collaborate with one another to ensure students' successes (Cifuentes et al., 2011). These communities provide opportunities for collaboration and experimentation to support teacher growth (Cifuentes et al., 2011). Potter and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) agreed, noting that professional learning communities require teachers to work together to determine best practices and offer a safe environment where teachers may try new approaches and learn from their mistakes.

As teachers venture into a BLM, anxiety may be present because of lack of knowledge or other barriers associated with a transition to a new teaching style (McCown, 2009; Wachira & Keengwe, 2011). Inan and Lowther (2010) found that more years of teaching experience might negatively impact a teacher's technology proficiency and decrease the integration of technology. However, professional learning communities may lessen a teacher's anxiety (Cifuentes et al., 2011). In contrast to Inan and Lowther's (2010) study, Pegler et al. (2010) found no correlation between the age of a teacher and personal or professional use of technology. Teachers exhibited

equal amounts of frustration, achievement, and success technology implementation in the classroom regardless of age.

Napier et al. (2011) studied faculty who shared best practices through professional learning communities relating to the BLM and the use of technology; those who participated in the communities had positive experiences. Teachers invested in professional development and committed to sharing resources were likely to increase the probability of high student performance (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Teacher networks are an important part of bridging the gap between technologically more and less proficient teachers as they learn from one another (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Kopcha, 2012). Teachers offered other resources other than face-to-face or peer interaction rarely interacted with these resources and gravitated back to familiar learning committees and mentors (Cifuentes et al., 2011). The need for creative and targeted professional development and professional learning communities is critical.

Learning communities support teachers through professional development. Using teachers as peer mentors is another way teachers are provided support (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Gerard et al., 2011; Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012) and may improve the use of technology in the classroom (Kopcha, 2012). Mentors not only help navigate problems with technology and equipment but also facilitate the improvement of skills and knowledge so that teachers can integrate technology effectively in the classroom (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Kopcha, 2012). Other teachers within a professional learning community provide support helping to improve a teacher's use of technology (Gerard et al., 2011; Kopcha, 2012). Gerard et al. (2014) suggested that teachers and mentors could apply technology in a more meaningful way if they reflected on practice and understood how it applied to students. Mentors also play a substantial role in shaping a teacher's beliefs, providing personal support for teachers, and helping with equipment

setup and troubleshooting issues (Gerard et al., 2014; Kopcha, 2012). However, within a BLM, these mentors should be seen as additional instructors to facilitate instructional strategies; otherwise, teachers may only go to the mentors for technical assistance and not use their help in devising meaningful lessons for students (Gerard et al., 2011). These mentors play a significant role in the lives of the teachers.

Mentors not only provide support but also understand that attitudes and teacher beliefs are some of the strongest barriers preventing technology use in the classroom (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Inan & Lowther, 2010). Integrating technology will require a change in attitude among teachers (Yu, 2013) and an investment of time (Finger & Houguet, 2009). Learning communities and mentors can lessen the barriers associated with technology use (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Kopcha, 2014), and teachers tend to have a more positive outlook when a mentor is present (Napier et al., 2011). In a BLM, to forge powerful academic strategies, learning communities or mentors may harness the combined knowledge from teachers, academic advisors, and observers (Fleck, 2012). When using a BLM, mentors create lesson plans, as well as provide technical support, assist with technology integration, and provide resources that describe effective teaching strategies (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Kopcha, 2012). Mentors also can offer teachers various levels of support that will assist with transitions through new teaching strategies.

Strategies

The *strategies* factor of transition theory entails the response or coping strategies that an individual uses when going through the process of transition (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Schlossberg, 2011; Schlossberg et al., 1989). Those who constructively use various strategies tend to cope better with transitions (Schlossberg, 2011). Those passing through a transition often

ask if they can (a) change the situation, (b) change their perspective on the situation, or (c) reduce their stress level (Schlossberg, 2011).

Leading to new strategies. Blended learning is changing the way students learn and how teachers teach. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social constructivism stated that students learn in social settings and that teachers are necessary for successful learning experiences to take place. Teacher situations are changing, and technology expectations are growing every year. Increasing teacher expectations includes having to implement technology-rich, constructivist activities (Debele & Plevyak, 2012; Gerard et al., 2011) to help students understand and learn complex concepts (Liu, 2011). Therefore, teachers must know what strategies they possess, what strategies they need, and how a BLM fits into their pedagogy.

The ISTE standards, formerly the National Education Technology Standards, are internationally recognized standards for effectively integrating technology into the classroom (ISTE, 2014). Along with the increase in technology usage by districts, the standards also provide guidance on how teachers can change their teaching strategies. These standards also contain sections aimed at administrators, students, and coaches. The ISTE (2014) standards define administrators' responsibilities as including digital citizenship, providing leadership in ways that help institute systematic improvement, promoting excellence in professional practice, demonstrating visionary leadership, and providing a rigorous learning culture for the education of students. For students, the emphasis is on digital citizenship, technology operations and concepts, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, research and information fluency, creativity and innovation, and communication and collaboration (ISTE, 2014).

The ISTE standards (2014) state that the expectation for teachers is to be models of technology usage, engage students through technology, explore professional growth and

leadership in technology implementation and inspire students to learn with a technological device. Teachers must prepare for a change in their teaching strategies and style of teaching when incorporating blended learning as a means of meeting the technology standards (Abidogun, 2011; Gerbic, 2011). Teachers must address varied learning styles, different student capabilities, and the various instructional strategies required to integrate face-to-face and online instructional modes of learning seamlessly creating a BLM (Gerbic, 2011). To help meet the standards, Fox-Turnbull and Snape (2011) suggested that teachers should help students to increase accountability for their work, allow them to collaborate, and build digital citizenship by teaching students respect and empathy for others.

As teachers transition into a BLM, new strategies need to be developed. Oh and Park (2009) suggested that blended learning benefits students because it incorporates "instructivist and constructivist" (p. 331) approaches to content delivery. A constructivist approach allows students to take an active role in making meaning of their educational experiences (Kuo et al., 2013; Smyth et al., 2012) through collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. This constructivist approach is a new way of thinking about teaching. Instead of being passive learners, students need to take ownership of the work they produce, acquire responsibility through a choice of pathways, and engage in the learning process (Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). Teachers, meanwhile, have a more critical role than ever in the classroom but also face new challenges (Gerbic, 2011; Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). Teachers must find new strategies that allow students to gain choices in how they learn and take increased responsibility for making meaning of their learning (Smyth et al., 2012).

As noted, one necessary change related to blended learning is the shift from a lecturer-centered teaching style to a more student-centered approach, thus requiring teachers to develop

or adjust teaching strategies. Blau (2011) observed that teachers should be the "guide on the side" (p. 275) by scaffolding instruction and reducing their lecture time for more student-centered instruction. However, this mindset requires teachers to give up control and allow students to make decisions about their education (Horn & Staker, 2014). Teacher attitude and pedagogical beliefs, therefore, become critical issues facing teachers that necessitate a change in perspective among teachers.

Changing perspective. The Internet, information technologies, and academic standards are changing how education is viewed (Dodero et al., 2015; Oh & Park, 2009). An alteration of perspective on these domains contributes to the change in the situation and the choice of strategies used to deal with the transition (Schlossberg, 2011). This alteration in perspective is especially relevant for the teachers who are incorporating new strategies into a BLM (Oh & Park, 2009). For example, Inan and Lowther (2010) discovered that the more years of experience teachers have, the less likely they are to implement a technology-rich program. Along these same lines, Pegler et al. (2010) asserted that tenured teachers may have content and pedagogical knowledge but may lack skills in integrating technology. In contrast, newer teachers may have technology skills but lack the content knowledge of tenured peers. Teachers with more teaching experience may be hesitant to utilize technology (Civko, 2014), whereas pre-service teachers with technology experience may have a very different perspective on implementing a BLM (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Gao et al., 2010).

An element of risk exists for teachers taking on the challenge of changing teaching strategies. By creating environments where teachers are not afraid to take risks, principals are encouraging innovation (Gao et al., 2010). Providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate can also help to facilitate a change in each person's perspective (Pegler et al., 2010). Cox (2013)

suggested that "comentorship" (p. 215) is needed to utilize the skills of both tenured teachers and newer teachers in implementing technology effectively in the classroom. Comentorship combines the strengths of various experiences among teachers to redefine how teaching takes place in the classroom (Cox, 2013). By combining the veteran and new teachers' experiences alike, teachers may realize the benefits of a BLM and strategies to help overcome some of the barriers associated with the process.

Overall, teachers want to know how new programs such as a BLM affect student achievement. According to Civko (2014), for teachers to implement technology successfully, they must understand the importance of technology for students and the impact it has on student achievement. Yet, there is a lack of conclusive evidence supporting positive effects on learning outcomes and blended learning (Figlio, Rush, Yin, & National Bureau of Economic Research, 2010; Zacharis, 2015). The increasing demand to eliminate the one-size-fits-all teaching strategy is driving teachers to find more choices for students, thereby, increasing the students' control over their learning (Johnson, Adams, & Haywood, 2011). According to Kong (2011), the problem with blended learning is that it rarely taps into the cognitive process of the learner. Teachers have the opportunity to become the value-added piece to the BLM by utilizing screen capture software to engage students in a self-paced curriculum, created by them, rather than to rely on a third-party course delivery system (Smith & Suzuki, 2015). With the screen capture strategy, it is important to note that during a blended session, the online portion of the lesson is limited to an eight to ten minute segment (Greenburg, Medlock, & Stephens, 2011).

Teachers should be able to apply various strategies (Parette et al., 2010), as well as understand the pedagogy behind those strategies, to facilitate student learning in a BLM (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). This application of new strategies requires teachers to change

their perceptions of technology from one of discomfort to one of researching the most successful ways to integrate technology (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). When teachers understand how a BLM affects students and their learning, they are more likely to alter previous notions about technology and work to implement lessons that effectively use technology as a tool for learning (Li et al., 2014).

Lowering stress levels. As teacher expectations increase, so does stress; this can cause absenteeism, turnover, and burnout, all of which have deleterious impacts on teacher morale and student outcomes (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013). The demands of the curriculum and the everyday stress indicated by teachers can make them less likely to incorporate technology into the classroom, mainly due to the amount of time required to implement such a large change (Papaioannou & Charalambous, 2011). Blended learning is a new way of thinking about teaching and may create job stress, therefore lowering perceived job satisfaction among teachers (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Reilly et al., 2014).

Although some teachers express high levels of stress, stress alone is not indicative of failure. Bandura (1977, 1997) noted that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy reported fewer feelings of adversity. Other factors that contribute to a teacher's overall job satisfaction include, pedagogical beliefs (Fleck, 2012), feeling overwhelmed (Smyth et al., 2012), and other challenges and barriers that may affect the success or failure of a BLM. With the proper professional development and enduring support, teachers can implement a BLM with consistency and incorporate new strategies that may lessen the stress.

Barriers and Benefits

Integrating technology into classroom curriculum can be challenging, yet also rewarding. Many barriers such as a lack of time, a lack of confidence, teacher beliefs, a lack of resources,

and an overall resistance to change hinders the use of technology in the classroom (Cviko, 2014; Papaioannou & Charalambous, 2011). However, it is important to note the overall benefits may outweigh these barriers as some studies show that the benefits can lead to more engaged, motivated, and satisfied students when a technology or a BLM is integrated into the curriculum (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Rafool et al., 2012). These barriers are discussed more thoroughly below.

Time. Studies of the blended learning environment have cited lack of time for preparing lessons, learning how to embed technology into the curriculum, and dealing with technical issues as some of the most significant barriers for teachers (Caravias, 2014; Cifuentes et al., 2011; Kopcha, 2012). Caravias (2014) stated that the increased time commitment, the activities involved in designing a blended course, and the increased workload presented challenges beyond the regular classroom duties. Liu, Navarrete, and Wivagg (2014) discovered that teachers spend a significant amount of time learning how to operate iPods, locating apps appropriate for instruction, and developing lessons to incorporate the use of mobile devices. In addition to incorporating technology into lesson plans, teachers have to troubleshoot, synchronize, and update the technology, and all those skills take the time to learn and to complete (Gerard et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2014).

Integrating online and traditional teaching methods within a course or classroom may also be time-consuming (Finger & Houguet, 2009; Liu et al., 2014). One of the most frequent complaints about implementing a BLM is the considerable amount of time required from the teacher, usually in addition to regular work duties (Liu et al., 2014; McCown, 2009; Oh & Park, 2009). Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013) completed a study on nursing students in a blended learning course. The results of the study indicated that the challenge of finding time to prepare

and plan lessons involving blended learning and technology integration was one reason teachers shy away from implementing a technology-enhanced curriculum. Teachers may view technology as a burden on their time because it involves planning, teaching, and classroom practices that are not a part of their routine, thus creating a barrier that impedes implementation (Kopcha, 2012).

Blended learning classrooms require time to plan and have been shown to interfere with teachers' other duties (Liu et al., 2014). Because of the amount of time needed to create technologically enhanced lessons, many teachers have found it easier to use previously created materials that seem effective for students and are readily available. For a blended learning curriculum to be successful, teachers need the opportunity to utilize technology-enhanced materials in lessons, reflect on the practice and student products, determine whether the approach should be modified, and be ready to try again (Gerard et al., 2011).

A study by Napier et al. (2011) examined an introductory computing course in a small, public liberal arts college. Their findings suggest that the blended learning approach required many faculty to spend additional time outside class helping students who were struggling or having technical issues. In other words, the faculty discovered the need to redesign the entire course required considerable time. Similarly, Finger and Houguet's (2009) study of technology integration indicated that lack of time was a challenge for both teachers and students. Teachers required more time to embed technology into the curriculum so that students could learn and experiment with it, requiring extra time for the teachers. Finger and Houguet (2009) suggested that "change takes time; therefore, time should be allowed for teachers to implement technology at their own pace" (p. 330).

Technological barriers. Moreover, technology creates many challenges of its own for

teachers. These challenges included learning to manage the autonomous role of students learning at different paces, becoming a guide and facilitator, helping students to interpret and understand data, and overcoming technical issues in the classroom (Gerard et al., 2011; Varma, Husic, & Linn, 2008). As Elgali and Kalman (2010) noted, "the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) into educational systems is one of the greatest challenges faced by educators and policymakers" (p. 281). These challenges are often present because inadequate technological devices and support are some of the significant barriers facing teachers who want to implement a blended learning program (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Liu et al., 2014; McCown, 2009).

One concern outside of the teachers' control is the amount of bandwidth required to operate a school district's technology resources and the infrastructure needed for the school's devices (Liu et al., 2014). The bandwidth issue may pose problems due to poor connections that prevent students from moving through the curriculum (Gecer & Dag, 2012; Smyth et al., 2012). A loss of wireless communication capacity for the use of multiple devices will add to the frustrations of the implementation process (Liu et al., 2014).

McCown (2009) discovered that schools with inadequate hardware, students who cannot access the Internet at home, and the lack of web-capable devices all contributed to the difficulties surrounding the implementation of blended learning environments in school settings. Gerard et al. (2011) suggested that unexpected technical issues related to Internet connectivity, outdated software and hardware, Internet privacy blocks, and unknown technical bugs all work to place a strain on technology use in the classroom. When teachers are not adequately equipped to use technology in the classroom, an implementation may be problematic and will produce undesired results (Msila, 2011).

Teachers' challenges. Having students transition into the role of self-directed, autonomous learners in a blended learning environment creates unique challenges (Gecer & Dag, 2012; An & Reigeluth, 2011; Poon, 2013; Shivetts, 2011), as each student will have his or her level of knowledge concerning technology. The same unique challenges may apply to teachers. Teachers commonly use technology for administrative teaching duties such as typing papers or creating spreadsheets, but teachers should also consider using technology as a tool to facilitate learning (Yu, 2013). Many teachers fear technology will replace them (Abidogun, 2011). When actually, their roles become more important as courses are designed and implemented using a BLM (Gerbic, 2011; Snape & Fox-Turnbull, 2013). Napier et al. (2011) explained that one challenge for instructors is to set a pace for students that challenges them academically but does not lead to frustration. Gerard et al. (2011) suggested that a teacher must be able to manage student learning at different paces and help students to become autonomous learners.

As previously explained, teachers cannot simply take the same teaching style from face-to-face teaching instruction to blended learning. Many teachers found that changing their teaching style and delivery methods was a difficult task (Finger & Houguet, 2009). Students accustomed to teacher-led instruction were also reluctant to embrace the change in style (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013). However, the change in teaching style also gives educators an opportunity to create a new type of learning relationship with their students (Gerbic, 2011). According to Rigby et al. (2012), the challenge for students is to become self-directed learners as a way to maximize their learning potential. A student who has learned primarily through lecture-based approaches needs support from the teacher to navigate the shift in the learner's role (Francis & Shannon, 2013; Snape & Fox-Turnbull, 2013) and a student-centered classroom (Abidogun, 2011; Li et al., 2014).

Wachira and Keengwe (2011) stated that "teachers generally teach the way they were taught and infusing technological tools into instruction poses unique challenges to instructors who lack the technology or don't have the knowledge and skills to teach with technology" (p. 24). Gerard et al. (2011), who studied the instructional challenges facing teachers in their first year of incorporating technology into science learning goals, agreed with the work of Wachira and Keengwe (2011) but took their findings a step further when identifying how classroom management and technical issues affected the blended learning environment. Gerard et al. (2011) noted successful implementation tended to increase when long-term professional development and technical assistance supported teachers. Lack of resources and professional development that meet teachers' needs and lack of technological knowledge are the most prominent challenges for teachers (Finger & Houguet, 2010; Wachira & Keengwe, 2011). For teachers to be successful with technology in a blended learning environment, they must reevaluate attitudes, embrace the use of technology, and change their pedagogical beliefs to embrace the benefits of a BLM (Ertmer et al., 2012; Yu, 2013).

Benefits. Although various challenges existed with the use of technology and blended learning, one of the advantages of a BLM is that it has the potential to provide unique learning experiences for students (Smyth et al., 2012). Blended learning environments have the potential to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Fleck, 2012). Student achievement may improve in a BLM through collaboration, the sharing of ideas and opinions, and by learning to respect cultural and geographic voices of difference (Fleck, 2012; Smyth et al., 2011). Napier et al. (2011) recognized that blended learning creates opportunities for students and educators by allowing flexibility regarding when and where the learning takes place. In a blended learning environment, the pace and location where students learn create flexible learning spaces. For

example, Dzakiria, Wahab, and Rahman (2012) studied business communication students and found that blended learning was a flexible alternative to traditional teaching and that it created lifelong learners who could study anytime and anywhere. Flexibility alone does not increase the learning of students, but it does provide extra opportunities for students to engage in learning.

Another benefit in a BLM is the choice of the path a student may choose to learn a concept. Learning in a BLM is not limited to the pedagogy used by the teacher, as the BLM relies on student self-efficacy for instruction (Horn & Staker, 2012). Because many districts are focusing on the implementation of 21st century skills, teachers must be ready to use teaching strategies that encourage self-directed learning in students (Ertmer et al., 2014; Overbay et al., 2010). The choice that many districts are using to meet the goal of self-directed learning is a BLM, as it allows students to become self-directed learners by taking ownership of their learning (An & Reigeluth, 2011; Horn & Staker, 2012).

Finally, the development of higher order thinking skills is a direct benefit of a BLM. According to Smyth et al. (2011), co-researchers in blended learning indicated that the approach provided them with both autonomy and flexibility that enabled them to develop problem-solving skills. These skills helped students to apply learned knowledge and incorporate knowledge into practice (Smyth et al., 2011). Liu et al. (2014) corroborated these findings by stating that mobile devices in the classroom encouraged teachers to create a learner-centered environment and allowed students to become independent. Oh and Park (2009) reported that teachers described the advantages of a blended approach as one that allowed students to test the limits of their abilities by experiencing uncertainty while working through the curriculum. By creating authentic learning experiences through the BLM approach, teachers can empower students to become self-motivated and self-directed lifelong learners (McCown, 2009; Rigby et al., 2012;

Snape & Fox-Turnbull, 2013).

Summary

Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) theory explains the transition process. Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) Transition Theory helps provide insight into how the process of transitioning relies on a person's perception of the transition, ability to cope, how it affects them personally, the support available, and what strategies a person possesses to help them through the transition. This theory becomes the main theoretical lens through which to examine how teachers transition from the FTFM (also known as the traditional teaching model) to the BLM As technology has advanced, its integration in the classroom has grown in popularity (Horn & Staker, 2012, 2013). Teachers must understand that neglecting to utilize technology as a tool for instruction and learning falls short of contemporary best practices (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). The extant literature on the topic indicates that utilizing technology as a tool in the classroom requires stakeholders to undergo a shift in role and situation (Kuo et al., 2013; Mills, 2007). A teacher's beliefs, pedagogy, and self-efficacy play a critical role in how the teacher embraces the use of technology in a BLM setting (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Ertmer et al., 2012). Research also suggests that supports, such as ongoing professional development and learning communities, contribute to the overall success of the transition (Gerard, 2014). With proper strategies to mediate the change, teachers will have lower stress, which in turn should help them navigate through the challenges and barriers to achieving a tangible benefit for students in a BLM.

While much research exists on higher education and student perceptions of the blended learning model (Gecer & Dag, 2012; Gerbic, 2011; Harvey, Greer, Basham, & Hu, 2014), research on the experiences of teachers transitioning from one model to the other is limited

(Cilesiz, 2011). To develop strong academic programs and create a catalyst for changes in teaching practice, we must seek to understand the challenges of a BLM more fully, especially in the transition process of teachers (Gerbic, 2011). Further, the literature reports a need for additional studies that identify and evaluate the experiences of teachers transitioning to a BLM (Cilesiz, 2011). The present study examined teachers transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM in a middle school setting. The current research project will add to the literature by increasing understanding of the experiences and changes that teachers undergo when transitioning to a BLM via the lens of Schlossberg's (1981, 2011) Transition Theory.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore teacher experiences of transitioning from the traditional FTFM to the BLM in a middle school environment. This project sought to uncover a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and the influence of teachers who experience it. This chapter discusses the methodology of this study, including the design, research questions, co-researcher information, setting, procedures, researcher's role, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Design

Investigations into blended learning in a middle school setting is a relatively new topic of investigatory endeavor. Most research in this area has primarily looked at students' perceptions of blended learning environments in the higher education setting (Gerbic, 2011; Harvey et al., 2014). This study explored teachers' experiences of transitioning between the traditional FTFM to the BLM in a middle school setting through individual interviews, focus groups, and blogging activity. The limited research on experiences made this study timely because blended learning in the K-12 sector is on the rise and there is a need to explore the transition process for teachers. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), when conducting qualitative research, if people are to understand an experience, provide information in the form of which they have had experience.

When a problem or an issue needs exploration, a qualitative study is appropriate (Creswell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) believed in a "naturalistic approach" to research (p. 3). A naturalistic approach refers to researchers creating a comprehensive study comprised of various data collection methods allowing the experiences of the co-researchers to surface (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A transcendental phenomenological design was the

best fit because this form provided an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the shared experiences, thereby giving voice to the co-researchers who provided meaning to the study.

When deciding the type of methodological designs to use, several possibilities were considered; the first was grounded theory. Grounded theory is a design that is concerned with forming a new theory by looking past the description of a phenomenon to determine the process or action that explains the common practice of research co-researchers (Creswell, 2013). Given that the current study did not involve the construction of a new theory, a grounded theory approach was not appropriate. The second possibility considered was a case study. A case study is essentially an investigation within a limited system where the researcher explores a case or cases over time and provides descriptions or themes of the system as a whole (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This design was also inappropriate for the current investigation, as there were no clearly defined boundaries within the scope of the data collection. The third and fourth possible techniques considered were narrative analysis and ethnography. In the narrative analysis, individual experiences may provide insight on the "identities" of each participant (Creswell, 2013, p. 71); whereas, ethnography focuses on developing complex descriptions of social behavior and the culture of a group. Both narrative analysis and ethnography are anthropological in nature (Creswell, 2013). The current study, not rooted within the discipline of anthropology, allowed for the rejection of these two possibilities. Because this study attempted to describe the experiences from the view of the teachers' perspectives as they transition from a FTFM to a BLM, the previously mentioned types of studies were inappropriate for the current research questions. As such, phenomenology was the optimal technique for the current research project.

Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences that several individuals share to arrive

at the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). The essence of the experience includes detailed textural and structural descriptions of the "what" and "how" individuals experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2015; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990). As Patton (1990) noted, the methods used in a phenomenological study capture people's experiences of the world and focuses on the "essence of the shared experience" (p. 71).

Moustakas (1994) based his ideas of phenomenology on Husserl's (1931) reflections. According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenology attempts to expel any prejudgments and relies on the reflections of the researcher. Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to put aside any preconceived notions related to the phenomenon studied through a process called bracketing or epoche (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas (1994), epoche allows the researcher to disclose their experiences and feelings related to the phenomenon. Epoche disclosed the researcher's perceptions of the experiences of transitioning from a traditional style of teaching to a blended learning style of teaching, thereby providing an opportunity to avoid judgment and biases based on the researcher's experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher, therefore, endeavored to set aside her personal experiences and ideas during the research process so that she would gain an understanding and look at the phenomenon of transitioning to a new teaching style "freshly, as for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34).

Through this methodology, the researcher strived to capture the voices of teachers who experienced a transition from a FTFM to a BLM. Although the primary researcher had experienced transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM in an elementary setting, she was not able to assume what it was like to teach middle school or understand the pressure associated with the transition. Bracketing out of the co-researchers' experiences allowed for a deeper understanding of the teachers' experiences and increased the objectivity of the project. The study represented

different perspectives of teachers as seen through their multiple realities (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Schlossberg (1981a, 2011), transitioning is a process defined by a person's support, strategies, self, and situation. With this idea in mind, this study allowed teachers to provide insight into their role in the implementation process, challenges, and strategies to help overcome the challenges and the supports that helped them through the process. Finally, a goal of this research was to add to the literature and contribute to the gap in understanding of the experiences that teachers undergo when transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM (Cilesiz, 2011).

Research Questions

The central research question for this study was: What are the shared experiences among teachers transitioning from a traditional FTFM to a BLM in a middle school setting? The sub-questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do teachers describe their situational role changes throughout the transition from a FTFM to a BLM?

RQ2: How do teachers' personal and professional self-efficacy influence the transition from a FTFM to a BLM?

RQ3: What influence, if any, does professional development have on transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM?

RQ4: What strategies, if any, do teachers use to transition from a traditional FTFM to a BLM?

Setting

The setting for this phenomenological research study was a school district in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2011), the population of the county was 203,922 in 2010, with an unemployment rate of 10.9%. There were 51 schools in

the district, with 29 elementary schools, 11 middle schools, and 11 high schools. Over 40,000

students comprised the district with 52% being economically disadvantaged qualifying free or

reduced lunch. There were 2,606 teachers employed in the district including 512 males and

2,107 females. The experience of the teachers ranged from less than 1 year to more than 30

years, with the median at 1 to 10 years of teaching experience. Teacher ethnicity was 25%

African-American, 71% White, 1% Hispanic, 1% Asian, less than 1% Native American, and less

than 1% multiracial (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

The district's central office housed the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent,

instructional coordinators, and other support staff. The Board of Education consisted of five

elected members and provided assistance in all educational policies within the district. Each of

the 51 schools housed a principal and at least one assistant principal. The three middle schools

had two assistant principals to help carry out policies and discipline procedures. The schools

also had leadership teams where lead teachers helped implement and organize county initiatives.

The research county introduced the blended learning model during the 2013-2014 school

year with implementation occurring in a two-school pilot study. The choice to do research in

this location rested on the fact that this county had a large, diverse population of teachers and

students. Also, the superintendent provided schools autonomy to define who they were through

a school redesign initiative. Of the three schools chosen, two were cohort schools, and although

the third school was not a cohort school, it had incorporated a BLM as an option for students.

Cohort schools had gone through an application process where the cohort schools applied for a

grant to fund and support their efforts. Schools selected to go through the cohort process had

access to external consultants, funds to begin implementation, and the autonomy to incorporate

different instructional practices in the schools. The concentration of each school having

autonomy to define learning experiences unique to their learners allowed the researcher to seek

varying experiences of teachers transitioning to a BLM. Each of the pilot schools represented

the blended learning model with a different view. One middle school allowed students to use

two hours daily in school to learn material online with the rest of the day to work with teachers

and each other on projects. The second school defined their blended model as one that provided

online content instruction while students had classroom opportunities through on-campus support

systems. The third school incorporated a BLM, not as a current cohort school but wanted to

provide opportunities for students to learn through online instruction and a variety of other

instructional practices.

Before the 2013-2014 school year, blended learning did not formally exist in the school

district's history. Co-researchers involved in this study previously taught using the traditional

FTFM. Teachers selected for this study had less than three years of experience teaching middle

school in a blended setting. Data collected through individual interviews, focus groups and blog

activity allowed the voices of the teachers to describe the experience fully, resulting in a thick,

rich description of their experiences.

Co-Researchers

During a phenomenological study, the researcher and participants are dependent on one

another, but neither one is effective without the other, thus making them co-researchers

(Moustakas, 1994). Co-researchers provided rich descriptions of their lived experiences while

the researcher sought to understand and report the experiences. Criterion sampling helped

determine the sample of co-researchers. Creswell (2013) defined criterion sampling as when all

cases have met a predetermined criterion to improve quality assurance.

For the criterion sample, a requirement for each co-researcher was to have experienced or

been experiencing the transition from a traditional FTFM to a BLM. Additionally, to help ensure

maximum variation, the perspectives of the co-researchers represented a variety of views

including sampling from both genders, different ethnicities, and levels of experience. Maximum

variation helped understand the phenomena through the researcher seeking individuals with

different perspectives, but who shared a knowledge of the same phenomena (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). Each co-researcher brought a unique view of the transition experience by providing

transferability among teachers and subjects that they taught.

Finally, the co-researchers had to have a minimum of five years of teaching experience,

even though each co-researcher had less than three years of experience specifically teaching in a

blended setting. Having this level of experience was imperative for the study because new

teachers, for the purposes of this study, were those who had less than five years of teaching

experience.

The researcher strove for maximum variation by using a pool of possible co-researchers

through a survey of teachers utilizing the blended learning environment. The pool of potential

co-researchers provided an anticipated sample size between 5 and 25 as recommended by

Polkinghorne (1989). After reaching thematic saturation, sampling ceased, meaning the answers

to questions became repetitious and provided little new insight into the experience (Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). In qualitative research, data saturation can be achieved by the inclusion of the first

six individuals in a study (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), although between six and twelve

individuals is considered optimal. Co-researchers participating in the study taught varied

disciplines, had at least five years of teaching experience, and represented mixed genders. Table

1 illustrates the information capturing the construction of a demographic profile for each of the

co-researchers.

Table 1

Demographics of Co-Researchers

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Years of Teaching Experience	Level of Education	Disciplines	Years Teaching in a BLM
Ann	F	W	5-10	M Ed	Social Studies	2
Brandy	F	W	21-30	Ed D	ELA	2
Brooke	F	W	11-15	Specialist	English Language Arts/PL Coach	3
JP	M	W	11-15	Specialist	Health and Physical Education	1
Karen	F	B	11-15	Ed D	English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Mathematics	3
Joan	F	W	16-20	M Ed	ELA	2
Martha	F	W	11-15	Specialist	Earth Science	1
Seymour	M	W	16-20	Specialist	Social Studies	1
Tara	F	W	11-15	Bach	Mathematics	3
Taylor	F	W	11-15	Bach	ELA	2

Procedures

Before collecting data in this study, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University approved the study (see Appendix A). The school district required an Application to Conduct Research to inform the district of the project and gain approval. As a part of the IRB

process at Liberty University, district approval was necessary to proceed. According to school district policy, the principals had the final authority of whether or not to allow research in their schools. The assistant superintendent of the district agreed to help contribute to the pool of possible co-researchers, and an email sent to the principals of each school asked for consent for teachers to participate in the study. After obtaining approval from the principals, the principals or assistant superintendent provided emails of potential co-researchers for the study. An email sent to each potential co-researcher explained the study and asked them to participate.

After IRB approval, a small sample of individuals piloted the interview questions to ensure the clarity of the questions and wording. The data collection process occurred in four steps. Step 1 was the administration of a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D) to gain relevant demographics of respondents. Step 2 was the individual interviews (see Appendix F for interview questions), and Step 3 was the focus group interview (see Appendix E for focus group questions). Finally, Step 4 was the reflective blogging activity. An audit trail maintained throughout the data gathering process of working with co-researchers, collecting data, analyzing data, and reporting the data added to the understanding of the experiences of teachers transitioning to a BLM. After the initial data collection, the interviews were transcribed, followed by an analysis of all of the four forms of data. In Chapter Four, Moustakas' (1994) data analysis procedures were followed, including the epoche of the researcher's experience, horizonalization, analyzing the establishment of themes within the data, using textural and structural descriptions for rich detail and then ultimately resulting in the essence of the phenomenon.

The Researcher's Role

For this transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher's key role in the study

was the human instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), by becoming the human instrument, the researcher was able to gather the data and interpret data obtained from the co-researchers. According to Moustakas (1994), the researcher's role includes preparing and organizing documents and then analyzing them for themes using coding and creating thematic labels. Themes provide valuable information to construct the meanings of the essence of the experiences of the phenomenon of teachers transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM. The condensed themes allowed for analysis of the relevance of each co-researcher's experience and helped construct structural and textural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

My teaching career spans over 14 years, and I have taught a variety of classes from Early Intervention Program (EIP) to Special Education. I served on the leadership team for 8 years and was the professional development coordinator for my school. As a teacher, my experiences consist of constantly changing program after program without receiving targeted training. Our district is on a path to becoming a personalized learning district by 2020, and I believe that training is essential to help teachers transition from the FTFM to the BLM. All schools within the county are required to implement personalized learning to some capacity by 2020.

It was important to choose co-researchers from other schools within the district where I had no authority over their programs, making sure to keep the study unbiased. I bracketed my personal experiences because of my prior experience utilizing a BLM in the classroom. In 2013, my principal allowed me to implement a blended learning environment for my mathematics class. It was important for me to understand what a blended learning program looked like in a classroom and how to incorporate it successfully. To this end, I undertook the necessary steps to gather more information on blended learning. After reading a book by Bersin (2004) and researching several successful ways to implement the model, I became comfortable applying

what I learned to the curriculum. It took me three months to redesign not only my math class structure but also my whole perception of my role as a teacher. I created a web page, organized the curriculum based on the CCSS, and created instructional maps for my students to follow.

Over the course of the year, there were successes and many failures. Unfortunately, I did not have anyone to bounce ideas off or to ask for suggestions when I became frustrated. I had to redesign the course more than once due to multiple reasons, and it became a trial-and-error process. If I would have had the opportunity for professional development and support, I may have been less likely to make some of the mistakes that I made throughout the year. One struggle for me was the ability to release control of my students and allow them to become self-directed learners. However, as the year progressed, I came to understand the power of allowing students to become self-motivated and take control of their learning. The community of learners developed beyond anything that I could have created as a traditional-style teacher. I believed my experiences added to my knowledge of the process of transitioning to a BLM.

Data Collection

The triangulation of data aided in a full, rich description of the experience obtained from the co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994). Data collection occurred in four steps: (a) initial questionnaires, (b) individual interviews, (c) focus group interview, and (d) a guided reflection blog. A combination of the questionnaire, interviews, and blogging activity led to the saturation of data. According to Van Manen (2014), saturation occurs when the researcher continues collecting data until no new information transpires. The saturation of data took place when the co-researchers' answers were repetitious, which was of 11 respondents. The saturation of data allowed for an establishment of the full picture of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Step 1: Demographic Questionnaire

During Step 1, the pool of potential co-researchers received an email. This email contained a link to the electronic initial demographic questionnaire. The email also provided general information about the study and instructions for completing the demographic questionnaire. After reading the consent form to participate and after providing an electronic signature on the consent form, co-researchers consented to participate in the study. After clicking on the link in the email, co-researchers needed to click on electronic consent statements (see Appendix C) agreeing to be co-researchers. The questions from the questionnaire (Appendix D) helped determine qualifying criteria for the study through demographics, years of experience, and disciplines taught.

The questionnaire helped identify preliminary information of individuals that may have led to a further investigation as a part of this phenomenological study. Questions 1 through 7 of the questionnaire provided basic information about potential co-researchers that meet specific criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Individuals needed to agree that a transition had occurred before they could speak about specific experiences. Question 8 determined whether the co-researcher felt a transition had taken place in their teaching practices (Moustakas, 1994; Schlossberg, 2011). Teachers exposed to ongoing support tend to sustain the transition to their instructional practices. Questions 9 through 11 helped provide insight into how the transition was affected by the support the teacher received (Gerard, 2014; Poon, 2013).

Step 2: Individual Interviews

Conducting one-on-one interviews allowed co-researchers the opportunity to express their thoughts freely (Yin, 2011). The researcher used a series of semi-structured questions (see Appendix F) as a guide for the interview process to maintain the integrity of the topic and to

ensure thoroughness in the discussion. Rubin and Rubin (2012) discussed the importance of

flexibility in the sequence of research questions, as flexibility allows the interjection of other

questions related to the phenomenon. Thus, the limited use of icebreakers or emotional thoughts

kept the interview from detouring off topic (Creswell, 2013). Audio recording equipment was

used to record co-researchers' experiences, and a backup plan in case the original audio

recording device failed to work properly was in place. Audio recording equipment was used to

record the interviews and transcription of the co-researchers' statements occurred after the

conclusion of the interviews.

The goal of the individual interviews was to discover commonalities between the

experiences of educators transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM. By collecting data and

organizing the information into themes, the researcher was able to develop a composite

description of the essence of the experience. The essence of the experience included what and

how the individual experienced the phenomenon and added to the textural and structural

descriptions of the essence (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher continued the interview process

with the co-researchers until the saturation point, which was when the co-researchers no longer

added new information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher used the questions in the

Individual Interviews (see Appendix F) to direct the conversation.

Item analysis of individual interview questions. The interviews in this study were the

primary data collection mode. The purpose of the interview questions was to focus on

transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM in a middle school setting as a way to gather information

about personal experiences, strategies, supports provided, and coping skills of teachers making

the transition. According to Vygotsky (1978), past experiences construct meaning in future

experiences. The co-researchers' responses to Questions 1 through 4 established teacher

experiences and how they affected the transition (Ertmer et al., 2012; Yu, 2013). Questions 5, 6, and 7 identified personal or professional strategies that provided a resource to help the educators make the transition to blended learning. Questions 8 and 9 determined the types of support available to teachers and the effectiveness of the support (Banister & Fisher, 2010; Finger & Houguet, 2009; Gerard, 2014; Poon, 2013). Research has indicated that purposeful professional development is necessary for transitioning teachers to a new program (An & Reigeluth, 2011; Avidov-Ungar & Shamir-Inbal, 2013; Gerard et al., 2011; Gunn & Hollingsworth, 2013). Continuing professional development is effective when transitioning to a different style of teaching. For teachers, administrators, and policymakers, positive impact on students is the ultimate goal of changing or developing a new program, but the quality of instruction should remain intact. Napier et al. (2011) discussed the concern of the impact of blended learning on students and the quality of instruction. Poon (2013) discussed blended learning as a way of encouraging active learning and enhancing student learning experiences in the classroom. Thus, Question 10 allowed teachers a chance to explain personal experiences and the effects on students.

Step 3: Focus Group Interview

Focus group interviews provided opportunities for teachers transitioning from a traditional teaching model to a blended model to speak freely and collaboratively. This focus group allowed others to listen to one another's experiences, thereby promoting a memory or shared information imperative to the understanding of the experiences. Participation in the focus group was voluntary, and the location of the focus group remained flexible to fit into the co-researchers' schedules. The focus group included open-ended questions (see Appendix E), allowing for conversations between the researcher and interviewees to occur (Yin, 2011). Rubin

and Rubin (2012) suggested that the researcher must listen to hear what the co-researchers are trying to say. Audio recording equipment recorded co-researchers' experiences and in case the original audio recording device failed to work properly, a backup plan included an additional audio recording device. Transcription of the co-researchers' statements occurred after the focus group interview.

The focus group questions required co-researchers to engage in open discussions. The focus group lasted approximately 30-60 minutes, and as the moderator of the group, the primary researcher provided little interjection about the subject matter. Caution was used to avoid giving any preconceived ideas to the co-researchers. Utilizing this method allowed the researcher to look for key themes between co-researchers, as well as insight into their needs and concerns. The questions used in the focus group (see Appendix E) also served to direct the conversation and keep it concentrated on the phenomenon.

Item analysis of focus group questions. The first question was an icebreaker used to create a "conversational partnership" with the co-researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 79). The purpose of Question 2 was to establish how co-researchers saw the impact of the BLM on their school. Each school environment may have different factors contributing to the overall learning environment. Question 3 established the supports in place for the use of professional development or ongoing training. As Napier et al. (2011) noted, "proper training is necessary for a faculty member to transition from teaching traditional courses to a hybrid [blended] course" (p. 30). The purpose of Question 4 was to ascertain teachers' overall reactions to the transitioning from the FTFM to the BLM. Studies have indicated that blended learning models are enjoyable, flexible, and a motivator for students (Guzer & Caner, 2013). However, limited research has looked at the factors that create a positive experience for teachers. Questions 5 and 6 provided

insight into how the transition influenced a teacher professionally and personally.

Step 4: Reflective Blog Activity

Creswell (2013) advised researchers to use "innovative data collection" (p. 161) by using creative ways to gather data. After the focus groups and individual interviews, the researcher sent a Wordpress link to the co-researchers with passwords that provided them the opportunity to reflect or add to the interview portion of the study. By conducting interviews before sending out the blog link, co-researchers had time to reflect on conversations and prior discussions. The purpose of the blog was to allow co-researchers an opportunity to add additional comments or experiences they were uncomfortable sharing in the interviews or to provide simple ideas they left out and wanted to add. Co-researchers completed all blog activity within a two-week period. The co-researchers answered questions with their pseudonym to conceal the identities of the individuals. After submission, the primary researcher printed the blogs and kept them in a locked filing system. At the conclusion of the study, the deletion of the blog added to the security of the study.

Item analysis of blog questions. The co-researchers answered three separate blog questions and an email with a link served as a reminder to complete the blogs (see Appendix G). Question 1 provided co-researchers the opportunity to describe their individual transition process to a BLM (Poon, 2013). Question 2 helped identify how their perception of the transition process had affected students (Lu, 2009; Reinhart et al., 2011). Question 3 provided the co-researchers the opportunity to add any other experiences they felt was pertinent to the whole transition process (Ertmer et al., 2012; Yu, 2013).

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative study includes "a rigorous approach to data

collection" (p. 54) through multiple data gathering and analysis. The first step in the systematic approach to analyzing data in this qualitative phenomenological research study was to create an audit trail to ensure accuracy and follow analysis procedure methods outlined by Moustakas (1994). Survey Monkey is an online survey program used to provide preliminary demographic data from the demographic questionnaire. Survey Monkey's software organized the co-researchers' information according to how they answered questions. Descriptive, demographic questions included age, gender, grade level taught, role in the school, years spent as an educator, race/ethnicity and teaching experiences in a BLM. Moustakas (1994) believed co-researchers should have knowledge of the phenomenon and have a shared interest in understanding its significance. The questionnaire identified a possible pool of co-researchers who experienced transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM and expressed an interest in understanding the phenomenon.

As described by Moustakas (1994), in a phenomenological study, it is important to epoche an experience to avoid prejudgments of the phenomenon. Moustakas explained that epoche would "orient us toward looking before judging, and clearing a space within ourselves so that we can see what is before us and in us" (p. 60). In alignment with procedures outlined by Creswell (2007), after data collection and use of epoche, the primary researcher organized, prepared, and transcribed the data. The researcher transcribed the digital audio recordings verbatim after verification through member checking to maximize the accuracy of the data reported. After transcribing, a review of the text multiple times aided to correct any errors or mistakes. For this study, Moustakas's (1994) outline of systematic data analysis procedures in phenomenological studies was utilized. This process involves horizonalization, clustering or creating themes, textural and structural descriptions, and finally revealing the essence of the

experience. The following explains the data analysis procedure.

Horizonalization

After analyzing the data through the process of horizonalization, the list of statements

provided from the co-researchers was separated and treated equally in value (Creswell, 2013;

Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) recommended a reduction or elimination to test each

response through the asking of two questions: (a) Do the statements contain information that

helps explore the experience and (b) Should the statement be labeled or categorized? The

responses from the interviews and blog were organized and subdivided into categories related to

the phenomenon. A list of no repetitive, no overlapping, organized, and analyzed statements was

completed. This process was used to document and explore "the meaning or meaning units"

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 118) for connected themes between co-researchers.

Coding and Themes

According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), "coding involves labeling concepts, themes,

events, and topical markers" (p. 207) systematically, thereby allowing the retrieval of themes

from the data. A word frequency analysis, completed in ATLIS.ti7, helped determine main

themes in the interview data, the focus group data, and the blog data. The use of coding

provided opportunities to recognize meaningful units or themes and to cluster together

statements contributing to the overall thematic label as a function of data source (i.e., the

interviews first, the focus group data second, and the blogs third). The clustered information

ultimately represented the core themes or categories (Moustakas, 1994). After constructing

themes from each type of data gathered, a comparison analysis of themes from all data sources

occurred. In other words, all pieces of evidence collected contributed to the analysis and allowed

themes to emerge from all sources of data as a way of drawing conclusions (Yin, 2015).

Textural and Structural Descriptions

The textural and structural descriptions offer a composite of what and how a co-researcher experienced the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) proposed a systematic procedure for analyzing textural data from a variety of sources including co-researchers' experiences and perspectives. Experiences of the co-researchers as they transitioned to a BLM provided a detailed textual description. In-between textural and structural descriptions, the process of imaginative variation provided the researcher a way to find meaning through imagination, deferring the frames of reference, and utilizing different perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) explained that the major reason behind the process of imaginative variation is to describe, "the essential structures of a phenomenon" (p. 98). Using this process allowed for experiences from different perspectives to be viewed as a way to allow the co-researchers to experience the phenomenon, leading to a structural description.

Creswell (2013) stated that a structural description would take into account the "conditions, situations, or context" (p. 80) in how the co-researchers experienced the phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), a structural description provides a "vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, the themes, and qualities that account for 'how' feelings and thoughts are connected to the phenomenon" (p. 135). The structural description contributed to the rich description of the experiences of educators transitioning from one teaching model to another. The combination of the textural and structural experiences of the educators lead to an inclusive essence of the experience.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this study addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability; each is of equal importance in gauging the worth of the study (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). The focus of this study was the experience of teachers, but it was also important to gain the trust of my co-researchers. Maintaining credibility through triangulation, member checks, and audit trails allowed for the growth of trust. Transferability and dependability provided rich, detailed information about data collected and analysis. By presenting the findings in a detailed way, the replication of the study is possible. Peer debriefers provided confirmability to the study by proving feedback through the data collection process and data analysis.

Credibility

In a phenomenological study, multiple realities exist, and the researcher attempts to understand each reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, according to Moustakas (1994), perceptions are primary, and they include the perception of other experiences through lived realities. For a researcher to rise above personal misconceptions and realities, credibility becomes critical (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility tests for the internal validity of the study by using processes such as member checks, triangulation, peer debriefing, and consulting with experts in the field of qualitative research. The utilization of member checking solicited co-researchers' views on the credibility of the study. Member checking added to the credibility of the study by allowing the co-researchers to review all transcripts from the focus groups and interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Co-researchers in this study reviewed all transcripts and themes. Feedback from co-researchers ensured alignment with the results and their contributions.

The definition of triangulation is the use of multiple and different data collection sources to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that the credibility depends on the richness of the information gathered from the data. Data collection included the initial demographic survey, focus groups, individual

interviews, and the reflective blog activity. Providing multiple sources of data facilitated a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) via the process of triangulating together results from the various sources of data. Throughout the data collection process, thematic saturation provided validity to the study and helped ensure that no new information resulted from the process (van Manen, 2014). Peer debriefing, committee members, editors, and an expert in the field supplied professional feedback as a way to increase the validity of the study.

Dependability

Dependability of research refers to the ability of others being able to replicate a study and find similar results. Rich details describe the context and setting of the study as well as keep the study unbiased (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail, as well as detailed records of the data collection process and analysis procedures ensured dependability. Memos and notes used through the coding process and analysis stages were kept under lock and key with other paper printed information from the study (Yin, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability provides a thick and rich description of the phenomenon so that the study has sufficient detail that can transfer to other settings, situations, and groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A thick description of the procedures increased transferability. The transferability included the maintenance of detailed notes and a clear description of the findings. Thick descriptions allow others to compare results from this study to similar future research.

Confirmability

Confirmability of a study ensures that data collected is an accurate representation of the voices of the co-researchers and not of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All researcher

biases, motivations, or perspectives must be set aside to make sure accurate interpretations reflect the data and that the findings support the themes. The primary researcher provided a detailed epoche of personal experiences with blended learning, adding to the confirmability of the study (Moustakas, 1994). The audit trail also served as an additional way to increase confirmability within this study.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research, ethical concerns such as informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, and when utilizing human co-researchers, protection from harm is crucial (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Before conducting any research, Liberty University's IRB, the school district, and all of the teachers participating agreed to the study. The informed consent collected from co-researchers highlighted the purpose, procedures, and the risks and benefits of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to the voluntary nature of this study regarding participation, co-researchers could cancel or withdraw their participation at any time.

Locking file cabinets ensured data confidentiality and that files stayed secure. Digital media was password protected and maintained with a password known only to the primary researcher. The main focus of the phenomenological study was to conduct a safe study, which included protecting the identities of the co-researchers. Pseudonyms were assigned to all co-researchers, schools, and the school district as a way to maintain anonymity. Although focus group members were encouraged to express personal thoughts on the subject of blended learning, the role of the primary researcher was that of moderating the conversations and keeping the group focused. During all phases of the study, the primary researcher ensured the safety, security, and confidentiality of all co-researchers.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to investigate the experiences of teachers who were transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM. Co-researchers included middle school teachers from a school district in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. For the first step of the data collection process, an electronic questionnaire sent to potential co-researchers provided demographic and preliminary information. An invitation to participate in the study was extended only to teachers who had experienced a transition from a FTFM to a BLM. Individual interviews conducted provided a way for the primary researcher to gain a rich description of each co-researcher's experience of the transition. The interviews continued until saturation of data was thoroughly met and no new further information presented. The third step involved a focus group interview. Finally, co-researchers engaged in a reflective blogging activity to complete the data collection process. Data analysis occurred in several phases such as epoche, horizonalization, determining themes, creating textural and structural descriptions, and arriving at the essence of the experience. The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Ethical considerations such as data confidentiality lend to the trustworthiness of the study. Findings from the research will follow in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers transitioning from the traditional FTFM to the BLM in a middle school environment. The co-researchers' profiles introduce each of those participants who completed the demographic survey, individual interview, focus group, and blog. The findings generated by the data analysis of the demographic survey, interview, focus group and blog resulted in themes stemming from the data analyses yielding explicit answers to the research questions. To gain insight on the experiences of teachers that transitioned from a FTFM to a BLM, the central overarching research question was: What are the shared experiences among teachers changing from a traditional FTFM to a BLM in a middle school setting? The sub-questions are as follows:

RQ1: How do teachers describe their situational role changes throughout the transition from a FTFM to a BLM?

RQ2: How do teachers' personal and professional self-efficacy influence the transition from a FTFM to a BLM?

RQ3: What influence, if any, does professional development have on transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM?

RQ4: What strategies, if any, do teachers use to transition from a traditional FTFM to a BLM?

The presentation of the findings allows the voices of the co-researchers to come through as rich, detailed descriptions, which is a mark of qualitative phenomenological research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and includes the composite textural, structural, and essence descriptions of the co-researchers as they transitioned from a FTFM to a BLM.

Co-Researchers

A demographic questionnaire link was sent to over 40 possible co-researchers, and 27 people filled out the questionnaire. Out of the 27 individuals who completed the questionnaire, 15 people were identified as potential co-researchers. Out of the 15 co-researchers, 11 selected co-researchers participated in this study. Each of the 11 participants had taught more than three years and had experienced a transition from a FTFM to a BLM in a middle school setting. In Chapter Three, see Table 1 for the demographic information of co-researchers.

The co-researchers came from varying backgrounds and possessed different characteristics concerning age, ethnicity, content specifics, grade levels taught, and the number of years in education. Two co-researchers were male; nine were female. Despite the variety of diverse characteristics, the co-researchers shared many commonalities. The data from the interviews, focus group, and blogging activity indicated that each person sensed a pull toward education early in their careers. Many of the stories the co-researchers told recalled playing school at home as a young child or having generations of teachers in the families, and as a result expressed the call to do something greater. See below for a brief profile of each co-researcher; however, the personal information has been minimized to maintain a sense of anonymity. It is also worthy to note that many of the co-researchers used conversational spaces (e.g., you know, um, like) throughout the interviews and focus group. Spacers have not been included in the actual quotes to increase readability of the data.

Ann

At the time of the interview, Ann had been teaching more than five years but less than ten. In her first years of teaching, she taught using a traditional style of instruction. Over the last few years, she has transitioned into a blended learning style of teaching. In sharing her story,

Ann offered some insight into why she became a teacher, beginning from when she was a young child.

> I played school ever since I was a child and four years old. I had my own little chalkboard and just always had a passion for educating others. And, it's just always been my calling. I chose to become a teacher to try and change the lives of the young people who will one day be leading our world, as cheesy as that may sound.

Brandy

Brandy came from a family of educators, and she believed that she became a teacher because "It was probably in my DNA." Although Brandy began as a successful journalist, she did not feel fulfilled and turned to her roots as an educator. Brandy used her love for writing and language arts to become a certified middle school teacher, teaching various grades from 6th to 8th. Brandy explained that after transitioning to a blended learning style of teaching, she expressed she had grown as an instructor.

> I feel like I need to write a letter of apology to every student that I ever worked with in the previous 20 years. In a traditional environment, now that I look back on it, I thought the rigor was there. I thought people would probably walk past the room and say "oh wow, good you know, good stuff going on in there" but it was me doing all the talking, it was me doing all the learning. And looking back, it was just superficial and in the blended environment, kids can really dig deep into their learning.

Brooke

Brooke taught in a traditional teaching environment for 13 years and then transitioned to a blended learning style of teaching. Brooke chose to become a teacher because she knew it was her purpose in life from a very young age. Brooke enjoyed being creative and providing an

engaging atmosphere in which her students could produce authentic work. She constantly sought new ways for her students to learn through real-world experiences. If one strategy did not bring about full understanding, Brooke would search for or provide another strategy, often using the kids' ideas as springboards for new lessons. As she transitioned into a blended setting, Brooke found herself having to "let go a lot of control and learn that it is ok for students to be in different spots." She indicated letting go of the control was a huge challenge and felt charged with helping other teachers come to that realization.

JP

JP was an enthusiastic, reflective educator who brought a wide scope of experiences to the discussion. He had worked as a teacher, coach, athletic director, and counselor in his previous schools. His experiences encompassed varying age ranges from elementary to high school. At the time of the interview, JP was transitioning to a blended learning style of teaching. His background and knowledge prepared him to take on the task of educating students from 6th grade through 12th in the blended setting. JP considered his time as a business technology teacher the first experience he had with transitioning to a blended environment and reflected on that time.

> Even before that, [current position], I was a business technology teacher at (my previous school), but I was starting, I didn't realize what I was doing, but I was starting to do some blended education in the traditional classroom. Students were working at their own pace. They would have different options of what assignments we were going to do to cover a standard or each objective task. I was starting to do some of that, but I still considered that traditional classroom with a little touch of Blended-ness.

Karen

Karen's passion for education began long before she knew she was going to be an educator. She told a story about being a little girl and playing school. "The teaching has always been there. I remember when I was a little girl I would line up all of my dolls, and I would teach, teach, teach away for hours at a time." This playtime was only the beginning. Karen wanted to get into education because she loved coaching; however, over time, it had become a greater passion.

Karen began her 15-year career teaching high school where she coached basketball and track. When this study occurred, she was teaching 7th-grade special education students in a co-taught personalized learning environment. The first half of her career was spent teaching in a traditional setting, but she was the type of teacher who always looked for new strategies for her students. When she moved to the middle school, she transitioned to a blended learning style of teaching.

I became a teacher because I am passionate about changing the lives of students. I thought what better place or what better opportunity can I have to better impact those students and meet them where they are. Customize their learning so that we can better, not only keep them motivated with learning but also meet them where they are and [progress] them through the learning process so that they can meet their goal.

Joan

Joan was a veteran teacher with over 16 years of teaching experience. She fell in love with teaching at an early age and recalled a childhood memory of playing school. "I always wanted to be a teacher, ever since I was little playing school at home, there's [not any] teachers in my family, so I just think I fell in love with school in elementary, and that was it!" Joan began

her teaching career as a traditional face-to-face teacher in a co-taught setting. Over the last three years, Joan transitioned into a blended learning teacher in a co-taught environment. At the time she applied to work at her current school, the teaching environment consisted of two sides: blended and traditional. Initially hired to work on the traditional side but quickly moved to the blended side as she accepted the challenge. Joan indicated an initial feeling of urgency to understand and learn as much about blended learning as possible because she "was thrown into it at the last minute." Through her perseverance and determination, she discovered how quickly a teacher can become a student and what that realization meant for her moving forward.

Martha

Martha began her teaching career in a mostly traditional, face-to-face teaching environment. Last year, she transferred to her current school as a 6th-grade science teacher and experienced a transition into a blended learning environment. Her enthusiasm for students and passion for teaching showed through in her interview session. She explained the importance of needing a change and deciding to move to a different school, knowing she would have to transition into a new style of teaching.

> The whole reason I chose to come here was because it was so different. I felt like I was approaching burnout and I was bored [of] teaching the same thing for ten years. Now I feel professionally challenged like it's fun trying to figure out what I am going to do next with the kids. It's so different, and it's challenging. I feel like have to be on top of my game and figure out where I am going.

Sara

Sara finished her undergraduate degree in Foreign Language Education and her master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction technology. For 26 years, she has educated students with

the goal to teach them some basic skills of life while supporting them through their middle and high school years. Her wide range of teaching experiences included foreign languages, skills for adolescences and business tech. As a mother of three boys in the current school system, she was passionate about making sure all students obtained meaningful educational experiences. She strived to make a difference in the lives of the youth, personally and academically. Sara believed, "Students don't care to know how much you know until they know you care." She embodied the spirit of a true educator.

Seymour

After serving in the Air Force, Seymour was "looking for something that gave me the same feeling every morning as being of service to my fellow man. [Where] I was doing something that was honorable and noble." After careful consideration, he found teaching, and it fulfilled his criteria. At the time of the interview, he had transitioned to middle school from previously teaching in an elementary co-taught setting. His more than 16 years of teaching service prepared him for educating a new level of students in grades 6th through 8th, but he had to get used to some things as he transitioned to a new teaching style.

For me, of course, it was going from elementary to middle, and I had to get used to that. I was teaching three grade levels, which is not an uncommon thing in our setting. So I had to get used to some new curriculum and had to adjust to classroom management... [for] different grade levels. And I would see all three of them throughout the day. So, I had to use different techniques with my 6th graders than I definitely did with 8th graders. Because there is a big difference between those two, there's a big difference between those two age groups.

Tara

As a champion and advocate for students with special needs, Tara exhibited a strong love for teaching and learning for all students. Tara previously taught multiple levels of students with disabilities at a local elementary school. Understanding students and their needs helped her connect with all students on a deeper level, and this connection carried with her as she moved forward to her current position. In her elementary position, professionally, Tara expressed a feeling of being "bored" and she needed a change. She explained that, in her new role as a blended learning teacher, "you're going to get to know those kids better, you are going to teach more kids and know them better than you ever did before." When this interview occurred, Tara's personal child with special needs moved to middle school, and Tara indicated the need for a change and began her journey of transitioning to a new style of teaching.

> Well for me, my son started at the same time I did. So personally, that's all wrapped together. So to watch my son all of a sudden grow into this independent student and then have the ability as a teacher to see other kids do that, that was [what] impacted me more than I can ever describe.

Taylor

At the time of the interview, Taylor was a 6th-grade middle school language arts teacher. Her goal was for every student to grow in the areas of reading and writing through best practices. When she chose to move to her current school, Taylor was looking for a fresh start. Taylor came from a more traditional school and transitioned to a blended learning style of teaching. She found herself trying to keep an open mind and wanting what was best for her students

> I was leaving one school, leaving a bad situation that appeared hopeless and that school was still pretty much 95% traditional. So going to blended learning, I made up my mind

that I was going to embrace this. I was going to get on board. I'm going to do what I can to learn and to be a part of this. And, it was difficult at first, because the school had not yet really polished the program, so to speak.

Results

The results of this study were identified through analysis of a demographic questionnaire, individual interviews, a focus group discussion, and the review of answers to blog questions. Thematic saturation occurred early in the data collection process. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), sampling should cease after answers become repetitious with no further insight into the phenomenon. Each of the co-researchers repeated many of the same experiences throughout the individual and focus group interviews. Each school had the autonomy to define blended learning for their location. However, the similarities in the descriptions of the co-researchers' experiences coincided with one another. After meeting thematic saturation from the data collected, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The primary researcher bracketed personal experiences and thoughts surrounding blended learning and then analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) method for qualitative analysis. The researcher uploaded all primary documents into Atlas.ti© to create an initial generation of codes. The software platform provided a place to upload multi-page documents, including individual interviews, focus group interview, and blog transcripts. Further, uploading the documents into Atlas.ti© allowed for easily identification and extraction of all initial codes. After the initial coding, sessions using Atlas.ti©, the codes were printed and manually cut apart to look at each statement individually and equally to determine its importance to the experience of transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM. Each of the relevant statements was categorized and labeled according to the research questions. Next, removal of any non-essential statements that did not relate to the experience occurred, and then reorganized

codes and entered into Atlas.ti© as a way to code the primary documents through multiple

coding sessions. The merged codes resulted in connected meanings and identified the themes

related to the four research questions. Table 2 shows the enumeration of the codes, organized

and detailed by themes.

The further review of the initial data collected helped determine if any further

information would be valuable to the themes. Finally, the co-researchers received their

individual transcripts and the list of generated themes through email as a way for the co-

researchers to review the transcripts for the authenticity of and examine the themes. The co-

researchers agreed that the transcripts and themes accurately represented their responses. The

data analysis helped provide answers to this study's research questions through the data analysis

of individual interviews, a focus group discussion with five co-researchers, and a review of the

replies to the blog questions. The themes and the co-researchers' quotations provided support

and evidence to answer the research questions, explaining teachers' experiences as they

transitioned to a BLM. The theoretical framework for this study, i.e., Schlossberg's Transition

Theory, framed the rich and descriptive nature of each research question.

Table 2

Enumeration of Open Codes

Open Codes	Enumeration of open code appearance across data sets	Themes
How it affects students	48	Evolving teacher practices
Adjusting Teaching Strategies	27	
Frustration with the transition	16	
Changing of the roles	16	
Navigating student pace	9	
Takes more time	7	
Helping students take ownership	3	
Changing the mindset of students	3	
Transition for Gifted students	2	
Students with disabilities-	2	
Relationship with students	1	
Willingness to try new things	27	Reliance on self-efficacy (Personal and professional)
Not afraid to fail	18	
Having to be flexible	15	
Manage stress	7	
Ability to figure it out	7	
Reflect and adjust	2	
Leaning on each other	35	Creating a community of learners
Administrative support	11	
Lack of professional development	10	
Unrelated professional development	9	
Collaboration among peers	3	
County support	3	
Collaboration with parents	2	
Collaborate for advice	2	
Learn from each other	1	
Collaboration for a better plan of action	1	
Venting and expressing	1	
Doing research	10	Lifelong Learner Attitudes
Relied on prior knowledge	9	
Reflecting	4	
Seeking support	3	
Finding apps and websites	3	
Looking for training	1	

Note: Open-codes were analyzed using Atlas.ti©, to identify the themes (Friese, 2014).

Research Question One

The first research question "How do teachers describe their situational role changes throughout the transition from a FTFM to a BLM?" detailed co-researchers' personal descriptions of their experiences transitioning from a FTFM to a BLM. Co-researchers' responses aligned with the individual interviews (see questions 1-4) and the focus group interview (see questions 1, 2, and 4). The data analysis yielded four sub-themes centered around whether or not they saw the transition as positive or negative, how it changed their role as a teacher, and ultimately what effect the transition had on students and student achievement. Each of these elements was also present in the blog data. Consequently, the data analysis showed one central theme to describe the co-researchers' situational role changes as teachers transitioned to a BLM—evolving teacher practices. The theme of evolving teacher practices emerged primarily from the individual interviews and focus group; however, some co-researchers' on the blog questions affirmed the responses. For several of the co-researchers in this study, a shift occurred in their practice when the role of the teacher changed from a deliverer of knowledge in a FTFM to one who mediated between the learner and knowledge in a BLM (Abidogun, 2011). As this shift occurred, three co-researchers expressed initial feelings of frustration, excitement, and confusion as they described the transition as a "learning process" (Seymour, Martha, & Tara, personal communication, 2016).

Frustration with the transition. Each co-researcher experienced some sense of frustration or stressor related to the transition from a FTFM to a BLM and was evident throughout the individual interviews, focus group, and blog. The ability for individuals to navigate through a transition successfully had a lot to do with the capacity of the person to view the transition as positive or negative. It was also important to note that stress was a factor

concerning whether or not the transition was a positive or negative experience. Finally, whether or not the transition was a choice also played a role. Interwoven within the data was an expression of frustration during the beginning phases of implementing a BLM and throughout the process. Most co-researchers agreed that these were an initial factor. As JP explained in his individual interview,

> The transition to a blended learning environment has a tendency to make you feel like you are spinning out of control. My transition was no different. I felt like I was constantly multitasking and it was difficult for me to get a game plan because of all the moving parts.

Ann reiterated some of JP's thoughts as she explained:

> The first year in the blended learning program was intense, and we learned every step of the way. It was exciting to see my role as a teacher change from being the stand and deliver type to more of a guide and facilitator.

> Taylor, having been through an administration change at the time the shift in practice also occurred, expressed some of the same feelings of frustration when she stated at first it was "interesting and exciting, but quite challenging in that it was rather confusing." Taylor continued to say that she was still in the process of working through the transition by being supportive of her administration and their vision. However, she worried that the new approach [of blended learning] might lead to the elimination of teacher positions, and this concerned her and therefore added to her stress and frustration.

> Ann and Joan expressed some frustration when their transition was not a choice. Ann explained that "It was not a gradual change at all, it was a sudden shift in teaching styles from

one year to another, the next." Mimicking some of the same feelings, Joan explained her

frustration in her individual interview revolving around the fact that

> for me personally, I was thrown into it last minute. I was supposed to be on the
>
> traditional side [FTFM] that year, and then he needed another teacher for the academy
>
> side, and I was willing to do it, but there was really no sense of like training.

Ann and Joan agreed that being "thrown" into the process might have added to their frustration

or stress, but that they overcame some of the frustration through collaboration and figuring

things out for themselves. The individual interviews provided insight into the different

frustrations some of the co-researchers experienced, and they surfaced again in the focus group

and blog.

Seymour, JP, Martha, and Tara experienced frustration when trying to fit old practices

into new teaching practices. Often, they found it was a struggle, and they had to reinvent the

way they thought about teaching. Martha added to the conversation on feelings of frustration

and explained, "It takes a while to move out of the old teacher-centered mindset and to figure out

how to make blended learning work for all of the students."

Challenges. Shifting mindsets were not just the initial feelings but also trickled down to

planning differently, how to change a student's mindset, and figuring out how to meet the needs

of all students through understanding a new way of teaching. All of the teachers expressed

experiencing different obstacles; they indicated planning to be one of their biggest challenges. In

an example, Karen stated:

> Planning was another big obstacle in the blended learning environment. You have to
>
> plan like you're planning for…25 students in your classroom. In a blended environment,
>
> you have to really plan for 20 different lessons because each student is at their own pace.

Karen discovered she had to change the way she planned and determined another way of showing she was meeting the needs of her students. Karen's determination led her to a new way of structuring her lessons, but it was ultimately a challenge. Martha reiterated the same feelings as Karen in her individual interview with pacing her students as she explained what she had to consider throughout the planning process:

> The biggest one [challenge] was trying to figure out how to get everything accomplished with students being in different spots and even different units, all at the same time and how to manage that and stay on task with whether or not they were actually learning it when they were in 15 different spots.

> Both Martha and Taylor, in two individual interviews, explained the challenge planning more based on having to design new units because they were always trying to stay a step ahead of their students. Martha said that although she was planning more, she was encouraged by her student's' actions of "actually taking charge of how they learn the material;" whereas, Taylor indicated that the planning made the transition harder and more challenging. She spent a considerable amount of time preparing lessons by looking at data, finding different resources for students, and providing opportunities for remediation and acceleration. The time spent was on top of making sure students were working at their own pace, which brought an entirely new set of challenges.

As the focus group co-researchers became more comfortable with one another, they discovered shared experiences with the challenges of student pace. Karen, Martha, and Tara each indicated that "students working at their own pace" was something they needed to adjust for in their planning to be prepared to move students forward, even if other students were not in the same place. This change in mindset was a challenge and led the teachers to the realization that

their most important commodity also must be to change their thinking, as it would be their job to help students learn a new way of learning content. Martha said, "It was very challenging trying to stay one step ahead of the students who were moving through the curriculum at a faster pace." Tonya agreed with Martha and Karen as she explained that at her school, all students worked at their own pace and on different concepts, which was an extreme challenge.

The new way of educating students left Tonya, Karen, and Martha trying to find ways to not only work through the challenges as a teacher but also help their students manage the new way of learning. In a separate individual interview, Joan affirmed Martha and Karen's sentiments from the focus group when she told her story of how her students displayed frustrations with not only pace but the platform and how she had to help them work through the process:

> It's been a huge shift for them. I know my first year, half the school did the [platform] so by the time the second year rolled around the kids were like, "I don't want to do [the platform]," they wanted to protest, they didn't want to do it, and they really fought it.

> Martha experienced some of the same experiences with her students as Joan indicated.

She went through many growing pains because of changing teaching styles. After having worked through some of the initial frustrations with students such as being on the platform lengthy amounts of time and grading policies, the experiences helped shape future lessons for Martha regarding a mindset shift with her students. As she noted in her individual interview, she had more choices and not with just different platforms, and that the students really seem to "enjoy it this year" because of their options and being able to move at their own pace.

How it affects students. How a practice affected students and their achievement was the key concern for the majority of the co-researchers. During Taylor's individual interview, she

indicated, "it should be about what's best for students." When answering the blog questions, Ann expressed, "Student achievement is the most important." When teachers see positive results for students and student achievement increases, the potential for teachers to adopt the new strategy may increase. Some of the co-researchers made a point to express how blended learning affected their students and student achievement. Martha looked for a better way of reaching all of her students. She explained why blended learning intrigued her.

> Student achievement was the main thing that piqued interest in transitioning to a blended environment. I noticed that [before blended] there were always students within my classroom who I felt I was holding back because they caught on so quickly. On the other hand, there were always students who I felt I was pushing through the curriculum too quickly because I had to make sure I covered all of the standards.

Martha continued her thoughts on student achievement and expressed that it depended on how "you define student achievement." For her, if the activity was truly personalized for each student, then achievement reflected the "goals that the student sets for themselves." Blended learning helped Martha reach her students, but she still felt it is a work in progress.

Positives. Four co-researchers shared experiences with students taking ownership of their learning and taking responsibility for their work, describing it as a positive result of using a BLM. At different times in the data collection process, Martha, Brandy, Ann, and Karen discussed how students are used to "doing school a certain way." Students had to learn how to "jump through some school hoops" and sit through their education instead of being an active participant in their learning (Brandy, personal communication, 2016). As Martha's students engaged in the BLM, her "opinion on what I think students can do" changed as she moved further into the transition process.

Over half of the co-researchers expressed how students struggled at first, but after some growing pains, they saw a change in their students' habits (Brooke, Tara, JP, Martha, Brandy, & Karen, personal communication, 2016). The positive changes came in the form of student engagement, taking ownership of their learning, communication, and management skills. Brooke explained that "once I saw how engaged the students were, and independent they were, it really helped me see this was the best model even though it was difficult."

Martha acknowledged that she went through the experience of having to "teach them how not to rely on me so much." She explained that she had to

Mak[e] sure they took the time to really look at the rubrics that were given to them. Make sure they understand the course. And not only that but teaching them how to look at their pretest results to see what portions of the units they've actually mastered. So that when they sit down with me, they can say, "I already have a good understanding of this so I can move on to this."

Martha discovered these were essential in helping students become successful but were a transition in the way she thought about teaching. As a result, students provided input into their educational experiences, and she began to see the potential of a BLM. Karen noticed, "For your high achievers, it's let's take this, I can roll with this, I can get through this fast, I can create my own learning pathways." Brooke's blog responses agreed with Martha, and she noted that "the ones who were able to move slower through the content were not as frustrated, and they actually did the work rather than just taking a zero and moving on." Brooke further explained her thoughts about her students in her individual interview and stated that

They truly felt like what they were doing was meaningful, it contributed to what they wanted to do for their future careers, they were able to be more creative, they were able to excel when they in the past weren't able to do that, so it made a huge impact on them.

In one school's BLM, students learned online but had the option of coming in if needed. Brandy, Tara, and JP agreed that students in their model showed improvement on management skills such as communication, organization, and working within different time frames. Brandy described her experience as one where

Blended learning allows teachers the opportunity to have conversations with students about their learning, either in person or virtually. Blended learning extends the school day beyond a Monday through Friday time frame. Because engagement increases and because time and space does not bind students and teachers, achievement increases.

Tara echoed these sentiments when she noted

They learn skills, really good skills about how to text your teacher, how to email and advocate for yourself, how to manage your time, how to make an appointment and stick with it. These types of [skills] they learn by jumping in the deep in and learn it, trial by fire.

Tara described how the success of the student depends on the student. For students who had organizational structures in place, it was a great transition for them; however, those who were not prepared often struggled. JP echoed their sentiments with the following statement from his individual interview:

Oh man, a lot of the students have learned some of those soft skills, like time management, that I didn't learn, or have to learn until college. When I see a 7th or 8th grader learning how to manage themselves with a to-do list with very little guidance,

when I see them getting to that point, that excites me, that leads to just a better

educational environment for them. I know they're really growing as an individual,

they're maturing, and they are going to get more out of their education because of those

things.

These skills are essential for the 21st Century learner. However, Tara discovered

something else that surprised her about her students in the BLM. Even though the personal skills

students learned were important, she found that the relationships she built with her students were

stronger than the relationship she had with students in a traditional FTFM. Tara's "ah-ha"

moment came when she realized she could work closely with one kid at a time. During the focus

group, she called it a "treasure" when students wanted to stay behind to get clarification on

content.

Co-researchers explained that frustrations did not disappear but changed because, in a

BLM, instructional practices are "more fluid," meaning it is ever changing into something

different (Martha, personal communication, 2016). Karen expressed her experience as one

where "In a blended learning environment, you have to relax; you have to realize it's more

student-centered, and this has partially allowed me to be a little bit more assertive in my

investigation of different learning platforms." Karen further explained in her interview that

opening up opportunities to take risks and having tried new platforms has allowed her to

"relinquish" all of her available resources to her students. Tara and JP discovered that creating

new opportunities including various learning strategies and new practices has allowed them to

come to understand it is not just thinking outside of the box. "There is no box; it's just a way of

life" (Tara & JP, personal communication, 2016).

Although many co-researchers saw the positive in a BLM, some were unsure if it was beneficial for all students and if it was too early to pass judgment on the concept (Karen, Seymour, & Ann, personal communication, 2016). Ann stated,

> We have seen growth from our first year of implementing blended learning leading up to now. However, through my experience, I will say that it is not for every student. Just as traditional style learning isn't for every student, neither is blended learning.

Karen agreed with Ann and explained in her individual interview:

> This is their [students] second year; they are finishing their second year in a blended learning environment. And I think they are really two more years away…[of] really grasping the benefits of a blended learning environment. The top 20%, these are your students that are soaring, these are some of your average students who are like, hey this is an opportunity.

Karen continued to say that, 20% of students had various resources readily available, and they could redo lessons, retake quizzes, and get help from the teacher when needed. However, Karen also said that as students shifted their mindset from a "traditional sit and get, to navigators of learning, I cannot fully say blended learning will benefit all students; specifically, students with learning disabilities." Seymour echoed that sentiment in his individual interview when he said, "I believe it is not for all students, but there are some students whose personalities just flourish with it."

Negatives. The negative effects on student achievement may determine whether or not a teacher indicated that a new practice, such as a BLM, is a success or failure. Some co-researchers experienced negative results related to student achievement. Joan, Ann, Taylor, and

Brandy all discussed the lack of student satisfaction with components of a BLM. As Joan explained in her blog responses,

> My first year of blended learning environment did not hold many changes other than having my students every other day in the classroom and students going to a lab to complete online assignments. During the school year, I taught the concepts, and students then would complete practices and quizzes on the [platform]. Many students did not even see the connection in class to the online program.

Ann agreed with Joan's assertion and described, "forcing students to sit in a computer lab for 2 hours at a time with 70 other students is incredibly difficult." Ann believed that for this to be an effective setup; students would have to be "very self-driven and focused in order to take their learning into their own hands."

Taylor estimated that 130 out of 140 students indicated a feeling of stress and feeling confused by the BLM. She stated, "We found that our students express far more frustration, less progress, and lower scores or grades." Taylor elaborated in how

> There are a handful, a small handful [of students] who feel that it is beneficial…there are a few that feel it is a new pathway to the future but again, few is the key word there. Many, many of the students feel it is stressful. I will say it's probably because it's still new to them.

Taylor and Ann agreed that student achievement was important to how they viewed the success of the BLM. Taylor explained that she wanted to be supportive of the initiative and vision of her school but indicated a feeling of pressure from her students to change her teaching practices. In her individual interview and blog questions, she stated her gifted students expressed some concerns

My gifted class are the students who actually cried tears, in my room, to their parents,

wrote letters to the administration, saying we just want our teacher. We don't want to be

forced to learn online. We want our teacher.

Adjusting teaching strategies. Several of the co-researchers indicated the teaching

strategies they used prior to a BLM adjusted because of the transition. While many of these

changes seemed to come naturally to the co-researchers, several individuals found they learned

more by doing and going through the process. Noted transitions included having to step out of

their comfort zones, teaching differently, and reinventing grading practices. The co-researchers'

experienced across all data sets indicated change had to occur to lead to successful classroom

experiences for students and teachers.

Stepping out of the comfort zone. Several co-researchers described the transition into a

blended learning environment as a change. Although it was "challenging and rewarding"

(Martha, personal communication, 2016), Tara, Karen, and Ann agreed that the transition

required them to be in an uncomfortable space at times. As Karen explained to the group,

I think we were very comfortable; I think to be, to do anything you have to be a little

uncomfortable you know. In a blended learning environment…we are constantly on

guard to try and figure out how could we make what we are doing, better.

Tara reported that in a traditional FTFM, she indicated a feeling of being "bored and

secure" as she saw her position as a job and not a career. When she transitioned to a BLM, she

stepped out of her comfort zone, and as a result, she was constantly growing, learning, and

building, so it felt more like a career. JP expressed, "I feel stretched. Which is a good thing. I'm

not scared to try new things. Whereas before, in the traditional setting maybe, I got used to the

routine," the repetition of knowing exactly what and how he was going to teach on any given day. In the BLM, he indicated he had to think outside the box.

Martha also expressed being bored in the traditional FTFM and stated, "The whole reason I chose to come here [her school] was because it was so different." She continued by saying after she transitioned to a BLM, she explained feeling challenged and less comfortable, but that it was not a bad thing. Martha had to find new ways to teach the content, but it was fun "trying to figure out what to do next with the kids." Several co-researchers expressed a renewed excitement for their teaching positions in a BLM that were not present in a FTFM.

Doing school differently. Five of the co-researchers realized their mindset on how they saw school had to change and often it was trial and error. Tara stated, "it's trial by fire, we jump in." Seymour acknowledged, "At first I wanted to try to use those same techniques we used in the regular classroom," but he quickly learned that the same techniques did not always work in a BLM. Co-researchers also realized many things had to change including the schedule they kept, classroom set up, and grading work policies. JP explained he had to accommodate his schedule around his students:

> I didn't realize this coming in [to a BLM]. I didn't realize my schedule, [my] kids need me more than traditional school hours for whatever reason and because they have access to me, and they are used to having access to me during school hours, they still have access to me in those other ways. So, a kid, I had a kid reach out to me at 10:30 at night.

Seymour indicated he had to go through a transition because he had to get used to the idea that students did not come to class on a set schedule as they would in a traditional setting. Seymour stated that he had to get used to the idea that students could set their schedules, and that "they don't have to come every day." Although Seymour taught in a model where students did

not have to come to class every day, he still adjusted to the process. Co-researchers in the other

blended models also expressed Seymour's feelings of having to think about scheduling

differently (Karen & Joan, personal communication, 2016). Joan's adjustments in schedule and

lessons changed and depended on her students:

> It's just so weird because it is just so different for every kid. We have six different
>
> groups. The first group I teach versus the second group I teach are night and day. The
>
> first group, they can lead the class, they wouldn't even need me, they depend on each
>
> other, they are just motivated, hard workers and then the ones who are not so motivated,
>
> it is a struggle to get them to do.
>
> Brandy stated, "I love the fact that our students, you know their school is not 180 days.

It's 180 days plus weekends, plus vacations, and they can access their course work and us,

anytime." Two co-researchers expressed surprise by the change in schedules as they transitioned

into a BLM. The co-researchers indicated many of the changes they were unprepared for and

caused stress, but it was nothing they could not handle.

Grading. Several of the co-researchers reported having to adjust grading policies to

manage the new classroom practices. Again, the transition to a BLM created a need to rethink

classroom design and organizational procedures, which included opportunities for obtaining

grades. As Martha said, teachers cannot teach "traditional anything anymore, if we are in any

way going to impact the students we have the luxury of serving every day."

The co-researchers implemented grading policies that allowed for repeated opportunities

for students to meet the standards and provided alternate assignments. The grading changed for

many co-researchers because it did not matter when students learned it throughout the year, but

that the students had the opportunity to learn it and to turn in the assignments throughout the year

(Tara, personal communication, 2016). As Tara expressed,

> I'm thinking on grading and how I had a grade book, and I put grades in a grade book and
> you [could] get a zero. And then we moved on, and hopefully, you made some hundreds
> later to bring it up. But now, our kids can, I mean even for first semester we might have
> closed that out, but they can go back and show competency in the first semester.

Brooke also acknowledged that the grading policies now allow students to "truly master the

material and move at their own pace, so they are not forced to move when the class moves."

This policy reached more kids with being able to remediate, accelerate, or use small group

interventions.

Tara reported that grading now consisted of looking at students' exams and determining

whether the exam grade could replace another grade that did not reflect mastery of the content

earlier in the semester, but by the end of the unit, they had mastered it. She also reported that

students indicated some relief because the grading policy allowed them to grow throughout the

year.

Although most co-researchers recognized a shift in grading practices, Joan acknowledged

that she still had

> to give them deadlines just to make sure they are working…to where I want them to be.
> But for the most part, half the kids you know, are finished before the deadline, some kids
> are finished at the deadline, and then there is still some kids that fall behind, and they are
> still working on the unit.

Deadlines were still important, but Brandy explained that she used to feel rushed in a

traditional classroom, and she did not see her students as often. In a BLM, students worked at

different paces, but that doing so allowed for "conversations about their work and learning."
Brandy went on to explain that she could dig deeper in the students' understanding by "having
the time to say, 'now, you picked this answer, tell me why you picked it or let's look at this
question?', that never happens in a traditional school." More time for discussions about
students' work and more opportunities for in-depth conversations resulted from the use of a
BLM.

Karen explained in the blended environment that she was able to get "immediate
feedback." She assigned quizzes to 30 students, previewed the quizzes to see who got items
wrong, allowed students to go back to redo a lesson, and then students took the quiz again for a
better grade. "These are the moving pieces that work well in a blended learning environment."
Karen described it as a way of catching students before they move on so they can gain a "better
understanding of the concept." Co-researchers had mixed feelings about the new grading
practices, but many ultimately found the changes to benefit students in a positive light.

Changing of the roles. Co-researchers explained that numerous things changed because
of the transition process, but the most noticeable difference was the role change. The quote
"Teachers should be a guide on the side, and not a sage on the stage" resonated with Brandy
because she believed that blended learning allowed this to happen. Karen, Joan, and Taylor
expressed some hesitation with the role shift. Karen acknowledged, "a lot of teachers were very
skeptical about the transition, relinquishing what they've done for 20 or 30 years to a more
technology side and given all the freedom to students" proved difficult for many. Many co-
researchers concluded that it is about the students. They wanted to make it work, so they had to
adjust to a new role.

It's not about me. Many of the co-researchers understood early on that blended learning was about the students and not about them. They had to adjust from "deliverers of information" to one who taught the students to take on their educational experiences (Ann, personal communication, 2016). "I was no longer spending my days following strict lesson plans, so I had to be okay with that" (Martha, personal communication, 2016). Brooke stated, "I had to learn to let go of control. I had to learn that it is ok for students to be in different spots." A quote by Joan summarized the point nicely:

It affected it [teaching style] majorly because I was used to being the center of attention and leading the conversations and doing everything basically, but now it's sort of in the hands of the students. Where they can prove to me, they've mastered a lesson, and they may not need it [further instruction].

Many of the co-researchers stated that the teacher became the facilitator of the classroom and not the provider of all things (Tara, Martha, Karen, Seymour, & JP, personal communication, 2016). Martha stated, "I had to adjust my role within the classroom in order to be able to facilitate every students' learning." Martha continued and noted that

Rather than me being in front of the classroom teaching them what I know, they are in charge of accumulating their information on their own based on activities and things I have designed for them, so it's more student-led…me being more of a facilitator than me as being the main instructor and information given.

JP described it differently but with the same meaning: "I see educators as more of a sensei. Like you have your pupil, and there's no cookie cutter way of doing what we do." Karen stated, "relinquishing that reign to students versus you, the teacher" is one of the greatest shifts in teaching practices as they transitioned into a BLM. Many co-researchers echoed Martha's

feelings when she said, "When I transitioned to a blended learning environment this past year, the biggest hurdle for me was trying to wrap my head around not being the center of student learning." Seymour expressed, "you take on that role of facilitator, but also at the same time sort of a cheerleader, and a coach, you know?" Becoming a facilitator also meant understanding the role of a facilitator. As Brandy discovered,

> I would always hear administrators say you know; you're the facilitator of learning. I always thought how am I the facilitator when I'm up at midnight making all this work, and then you only see them [the students] for about 50 minutes a day? With [my current school] it's amazing to see that they [the students] don't need you all of the time.

Three of the co-researchers found that students did not need them all of the time, but they needed them in a different way. Martha explained that students know themselves better and understand how they learn. She had to teach them how to become "more and more independent… relying less on me to tell them what I think they should do and or how they should do it." She continued to say, as the year progressed, that they became more self-aware, independent, and improved on collaboration skills. In contrast to Martha's statements, Taylor expressed concerns about student expectations and explained, "Middle schoolers cannot organize their clothes much less their time and calendar adequately." Karen stated, "it is a shift in thinking, a shift, in power" and it is about the personal development of the student and what they need to become 21st Century learners.

Takes more time. The time to plan for a BLM increased for several of the co-researchers. Taylor explained that when she transitioned to a BLM, she discovered planning was more tedious.

> I'm actually doing more work now than I was before. Because not only do I prepare my lessons and research the materials, and look at data, I have to apply what needs to be

taught as a new concept or skill or to reteach because of those that didn't get it or didn't master it. I am also having to put it into a format for them to access online. So I get everything together like I normally would and then I have to go several steps further to get it for the online part.

Martha also shared that she "planned more based on units and designing what I want them to learn." Joan and Taylor echoed similar sentiments when they shared how they are

doing a lot of work from home this year, just because we are creating units and project-based learning, personalized learning and trying to find more online activities. I think this year they've thrown a lot at us at once, and it's just become overwhelming, so I do find myself doing more at home just to try to find things to help and mostly the online part. (Joan & Taylor, personal communication, 2016)

While co-researchers expected that it would take the time to implement and change their practice, it was surprising that many of them were using "holidays, weekends, nights, and even summertime" to plan effectively for students (Tara & Taylor, personal communication, 2016).

The theme of evolving teacher practices suggested that co-researchers embraced best practices to meet the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement (Ann & Martha, personal communication, 2016). Many co-researchers highlighted frustrations throughout the transition to a BLM; however, these middle school teachers discovered, along with how the transition influenced students, adjustments to old teaching practices and a role change was necessary to be successful.

Research Question Two

Research question two, "How do teachers' personal and professional self-efficacy influence the transition from an FTFM to a BLM?", elicited from co-researchers' personal

characteristics that contributed to the transition process. Co-teacher responses aligned with the individual interviews (see question 5) and the focus group interview (see question 2 and 6). Co-researchers provided descriptions of their experiences of self-efficacy as related to the transition to a BLM and to Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory as it relates to *self*. Co-researchers overall stated that they relied on themselves, citing important characteristics such as the willingness to try new things, ability to figure things out independently, being flexible, and having the capacity to overcome and manage stress as a way to successfully transition to a BLM. The data analysis aligned with this question identified one theme to describe the co-researchers' self-efficacy influenced the transition from a FTFM to a BLM—reliance on self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a personal perception of one's level of competency to complete objectives (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2007). Personal experiences, the ability to use self-regulation and reflection on personal abilities shapes a person's self-efficacy (Bandura, 2007). For the co-researchers in this study, personal and professional self-efficacy played a key role in whether they considered the transition to a BLM successful. The theme of reliance on self-efficacy primarily surfaced during the individual interviews; however, the focus group and blog responses confirmed several of the statements. At one point in the process, all co-researchers used self-reliance to keep their head above water and "do what is in the best interest of our students" (Ann, personal communication, 2016).

Willingness to try new things. Co-researchers displayed confidence about trying new things and not being afraid to fail. This confidence fit hand in glove with taking risks to learn and be successful in a BLM. "Transition [to a BLM] can be described as throwing us in a pool without a life preserver" (Brooke, personal communication, 2016). As JP explained, "I'm not scared to try new things. Whereas before, in the traditional setting maybe, I got used to the

routine" and he did not feel comfortable in trying as many new practices. Brooke stated, "Don't be afraid to fail! An important lesson for me was to not be afraid of failure."

Each co-researcher shared their experiences with failure and their willingness to try new things, personally and as a school. Karen shared the process her school went through from the first year. The teachers realized what needed to change as they tried and failed. She explained

That next year, we were ready to roll, we went through all the bad things, we went through all the trial and errors, and we were able to learn from those mistakes and start better on a fresher start the following year.

Brooke had a similar experience in her school.

First semester we made a lot of mistakes, it was a lot of trial and error. By the second semester, we felt that we had drastically improved and had the hang of it, but it is always a work in progress.

Ann also indicated it was about the willingness to try new things and stated that they "collaborated and found out what worked and what didn't work…tried new things and it was kind of trial and error." Karen acknowledged, "I consider myself very open minded toward trying new strategies and tools, so I was open to the challenge of a blended learning classroom model."

Failure seemed to drive a few of the co-researchers to do more. Brandy added, "Think of blended learning on a continuum and make a commitment to move along that continuum. Don't think you have to make an 180-degree shift overnight." Brandy found it extremely difficult to learn how to build new content on technology; however, she also noted, "I enjoyed learning new tech skills required to do so." Seymour was also willing to try new ideas. "I've always been the

type of teacher that would try new things on the computer. I would try something new and say well that didn't work. I'd throw it away and try to see what else would work."

Some co-researchers reported "trial and error" as a way to becoming a successful teacher (Seymour, JP, & Tara, personal communication, 2016). JP advised, "Take it slow. Learn from those who have been doing it awhile. Don't worry when things don't work that is part of learning."

Figure it out. In addition to being willing to try new things, co-researchers used self-reliance to help make the transition successful. JP described self-reliance as "throwing you into the oven and figure it out while you bake." Tara, Seymour, and Ann indicated that achieving self-reliance was challenging. They had to be a problem solver when figuring out the new system, learning how the new system worked, and what was best for students (Tara, Seymour, & Martha, personal communication, 2016). The co-researchers conveyed a strong desire to keep their students first and determine what is best for them. They had to make it work for their students and waiting for someone to tell them what to do was not an option, so they just "figured it out" as they went (Ann, Seymour, Tara, Brandy, Martha, & Karen, personal communication, 2016).

Be flexible. While many of the co-researchers responded that having the ability to figure things out on their own helped in the transition, all of the co-researchers highlighted flexibility throughout the data sets as a necessity. Co-researchers indicated flexibility as a characteristic trait that served them well. Karen explained

> You know, when I was hired, my big thing was, I'm flexible…And the biggest thing was being flexible. When you initially start off, you have to be flexible. Flexible in your teaching, flexible in your preparation, flexible in your expectation for your students,

because it's a different way of thinking, we have to make an honest effort to teach our

students how to learn in a blended learning environment.

Many co-researchers pointed out that there was a need to be flexible, not only because the

altering of the teaching practices, but as Seymour explained it because it affects students.

I try to be flexible, I think that's one of the main things, you have to be flexible. Because

we have probably changed our schedule 5 or 6 different times, how students transition

from class to class and things like that to see what works best. In this setting, nothing is

the same from day to day. You don't even know which students are going to show up.

You really have to be flexible. So I attribute the things I have learned over the years to

adding to that flexibility.

All co-researchers reported a need to be more flexible, but for different reasons. In a

traditional model, it is mostly teacher-centered. Yet in a blended setting, Martha indicated a

change in that way of thinking because teachers need to "be flexible and allow for student input."

JP commented, "Learning to be more flexible was a must." Karen echoed these sentiments and

noted, "The transition was more of learning as you go and be flexible." She continued to say,

The advice I would give educators who are about to transition to a blend learning

program is to plan as much as you can, master one learning platform, and interactive

game, be flexible, collaborate often, and keep your school web page current.

To Ann and Sara, being flexible means not always having everything figured out 100% of the

time and having the ability to learn from mistakes (Ann & Sara, personal communication, 2016).

Manage stress. Co-researchers mentioned stress as a factor in the transitioning process.

The stress surfaced in the way of juggling all of the different components of a BLM and it

continuously adjusting and changing. Ann expressed feeling the stress but advised not to be

afraid to "sink a little" as you transition to a BLM. Martha acknowledged that it is important to manage the stress because

> It is definitely more stressful trying to make sure that you are effectively managing a lot of different things going on in your classroom every single day. Including [students] being in different spots in different labs and the stress of management is definitely more. And the stress of trying to stay ahead of the kids, so they are not always waiting for me to move forward that is definitely more stressful with this type of teaching.

Martha also mentioned that the managing stress came with being comfortable with not having all of the answers.

> It takes awhile to move out of the old teacher-centered mindset and to figure out how to make blended learning work for all of the students. I am only one year in, and I have made so many changes that my classroom now is completely different than it was at the beginning of the year. The plans I have for next year are even more different.

The other members of the focus group agreed that the differences in teaching in a traditional classroom versus teaching in a BLM caused stress and to manage the stress, steps have to be taken a little at a time (Karen, Martha, Seymour, Tara, & JP, personal communication, 2016). "It's kind of a lot of work in the beginning, but as you've done it a bit longer, it does tend to get easier" (Ann, personal communication, 2016). Ann also noted in her blog response that "as the years have progressed, we have become more proficient in utilizing the blended learning model." By not doing everything at once, teachers expressed more satisfaction with the transition and a way to manage stress more effectively.

The theme connected to research question two, reliance on self-efficacy, showed a connection in how the transition to a BLM relates to the *self* component of Schlossberg's (2011)

Transition Theory. Co-researchers relied on a belief in their own ability to move in, move through, and move out of the transition. As one co-researcher explained, "I was told to use my talents and my skills that I have developed in the best way to help students" (Seymour, personal communication, 2016). Seymour had to figure it out and used his ability to reflect and adjust. Joan agreed with Seymour when she stated she constantly had to go back and rely on her abilities; she advised, "Take it one step at a time. Don't expect everything to work the first time you try it. Revise and keep going."

Research Question Three

For the co-researchers, research question three, "What influence, if any, does professional development have on transitioning from an FTFM to a BLM?", centered on the professional support needed to implement a BLM effectively. For this question, the co-researchers' descriptions aligned to questions posed in the individual interview (see questions 8-10) and the focus group (see question 5). Co-researchers provided thorough descriptions of their experiences of professional development as it related to the *support* of Schlossberg's Transition Theory and transitioning to a BLM. The lack of professional development, going to unrelated professional development, and leaning on each other contributed to the overall theme of question three–creating a community of learners. The theme emerged from a combination of the individual interviews and blog responses, and the focus group corroborated the findings.

Lack of professional development. Co-researchers stated there was a lack of targeted professional development at the school or county level. Most co-researchers expressed that the professional development was non-existent, or the opportunities did not focus explicitly on their school. Brooke stated, "I had no professional development prior to transitioning to a blended learning model." Similar to Brooke, Ann explained, "Well the first year we did it [BLM], there

really wasn't any training. It was just; here ya go." Some co-researchers indicated that the professional development lacked a clear focus. "There is not clear perspective on this concept, and there's not enough support. Even the brand name people brought in; really do not provide clear guidance. Every day is trial and error" (Taylor, personal communication, 2016). However, professional development did not seem to be a concern for most co-researchers.

Unrelated professional development. Although the co-researchers expressed a lack of professional development on the BLM, professional development was available, but "the sessions don't really apply to what I need" (Brandy, personal communication, 2016). Brandy continued, "I went to one session, and it was little apps or technology things that were just really substitutions for worksheets, and that's not, I don't think that's what we need." Brandy's comment aligned with Taylor's thoughts:

> somebody might disagree with me, but I feel a lot of the times they say we are going to be learning about blended learning and we are just learning more about computer stuff. Programs, apps, and more data stuff. For one example, PBL, project-based learning, there is never a consistent answer across the board, on what is project based learning. They can show us all these videos of a place like New York and Detroit and wherever, California, and [say] this is project based learning. But they are all different; they are not the same, and then when you bring it down to our county, some of it just is not attainable, it doesn't fit into the culture we have here in our county.

Some of the co-researchers mentioned the opportunity to attend project-based learning professional development, and that it was helpful, but it did not provide a clear connection to blended learning. Joan stated she did not participate in any specific blended learning professional development, but she attended project-based learning training where they discussed

units but never connected it to a BLM. Martha mentioned participating in a project-based

learning training as professional development, "but in terms of like just focus on transitioning to

blended learning, there really haven't been any this year." Ann acknowledged,

> So that was my training, doing it as we went. But I have been and have traveled to
>
> different schools around the country to see different methods of like project-based
>
> learning schools and things in that type of environment and think about ways to
>
> incorporate it into blended learning model that we use. I've participated in the [PBL]
>
> training, so I've done a few things but the first year it was just figuring it out.

Two co-researchers expressed an interest in project-based learning and saw the value in the

teaching strategy but understanding how it worked with blended learning would be more

beneficial (Martha & Joan, personal communication, 2016).

Administration support. Not all co-researchers reported having a supportive

administration or county level support, but those that did discussed the impact on how they

experienced the transition to a BLM. Brandy noted the importance of her administration in how

she saw the transition. She stated

> The transition to blended learning was not difficult because I was working under the
>
> leadership of a principal who supported and encouraged efforts in that direction because,
>
> as he often said, "it's the right work for kids." In addition, I would refer to myself as an
>
> early adopter to changes like these.

Martha also shared that her administrators provided support through encouragement and

supplying any voiced resources she needed to implement a BLM. "If there's something we

really wanted to know more about and they can't help us" then they search for a solution.

Interestingly, Karen and Brooke presented a different view of support surrounding the culture of the school. Karen explained the impact of her experience:

> I think in our school you get rewarded if you are doing some amazing things. The principal is constantly letting people know, hey this is going on in this class, amazing things, if you haven't had a chance, go down and look at it. My first year here, they would take pictures [and put them] online and that would get teachers like envious like I need to go do something.

Brooke indicated she was comfortable "experimenting with different types of learning and teaching" because she expressed a feeling of being safe to make mistakes because that was the culture of the school. Brandy also experienced a positive school culture and the encouragement from her principal.

> I really don't think this transition would have happened if he hadn't been there or if someone else would have been there because he really…challenged us to start adding a blended component to our courses and he figured out a way to get the technology in there. So without that visionary, I don't know if [I would have done it]…he was such a leader, and I was such a person that whatever he said, I was right on board.

Leaning on each other. All co-researchers responded that collaboration, communication, and finding resources within each other contributed to the overall success of the transition to a BLM. Even though professional development was not high on their list of contributors, the collaboration seemed to have a lasting effect. "As we approached the start of the first year in the [program]…there was a lot of collaboration amongst teachers" (Karen, personal communication, 2016). One of the co-researchers, Ann, stated, "It was kind of just trial and error and a lot of collaboration." All co-researchers reported a need to collaborate through the process.

Working collaboratively as a team provided extra support and a place to find answers to solutions. Karen stated,

> We work collaboratively, each week with our content area. We do a lot of vertical planning as well, between all grade level contents, and I work closely with the special education teacher that I work with to help build lessons and modify lessons for students with disabilities. So we're constantly going over different types of training to help better our instruction heat we are currently given.

Joan also reported that collaboration and the ability to vent to her team often happened because they relied on each other. As she explained,

> I think if we are working as a content team it relieves some of the stress because we can bounce off ideas from each other. And we meet once a week on our content teams to build these units, and I think that helps relieve some of the stress because we know we are in it together, and we know we have each other, and we got to get it done because we have to start this new unit next week.

Although all co-researchers found collaboration a necessity, one respondent expressed concern with collaboration in a blended setting. JP stated, "I have found it difficult and more challenging because of space and logistics with the blended setting." He had some professional development opportunities but indicated, "a lot of the professional development takes place among peers that are collaborating and working together."

Communication. Four of the co-researchers reported communication went hand in hand with collaboration. For Karen, Tara, and Martha, communication was essential as compared to a traditional setting where they would just close their doors and teach. Karen explained how in her

first year we started the whole building in a blended learning model. Even the traditional

teachers were on board conversing with the [pilot teachers] getting what they need to

know, asking questions. You know that dialogue we never really had because, in a

traditional environment, you close your door, you're going to do what you are going to

do and I'm not concerned about what she's doing next door.

Tara showed agreement with Karen in her focus group session and stated that

we are just sharing. We constantly share whereas before we might have gone in and shut

our door and done our job, and now we're having to get out there and share, share

classrooms, and share space, and share kids, and it's much more an interactive

community, and I think the training comes from that.

One co-researcher expressed some frustration over communication. JP stated,

"Communication with team members becomes even more important in a blended learning

setting." He continued to explain he communicated a lot through email, but there had been

"miscommunication" with co-workers because when something is put in a text or an email, the

recipient cannot see the facial expression, so it is misinterpreted.

Relying on peers. Many of the co-researchers stated they sought out savvy individuals.

"Always look for a model to go by and someone who has experience. It always helps to work

with other teachers to get ideas and to create new activities" (Joan, personal communication,

2016). Brandy recalled a specific teacher that "worked as a summer school math teacher so she

was familiar with the nuisances of [the platform] and she helped guide me through that process

which was a big help." Martha contributed,

You learn who is more tech savvy in your peers. And who is the one that's always

researching new apps and websites and whom to go to when you have questions. So I

think we rely a lot on each other.

Karen expressed a need to learn from others "because you need something that's ready, been

proven reliable and get it and go with it." Martha and Karen agreed that finding someone who is

familiar with it because it could save time in the end.

Taylor reported the importance of seeking out others.

They [teachers] need to seek out teachers who are going, to be honest, and not simply say

things that are nothing more than fluff and false report. I know I gain so much from

teachers who are real with me and others about their experiences whether it is a success

or failure.

Each co-researcher explained, in their own way, that "surrounding yourself with like-minded

teachers" was critical in the transition process (Sara, personal communication, 2016). Ann

reported that leaning on each other helped her learn "what worked and what didn't work." Karen

also stated that learning occurred through visiting others' classrooms. "One teacher may have

been great at specific learning platforms, another supreme at data collection, another [at] parent

updates, and another [at] student incentives" all leading to a more successful experience.

The theme creating a community of learners centered on the personal and professional

support needed to implement a BLM consistently. The theme and the co-researchers'

descriptions of the co-researchers' experiences aligned with the component of *support* in

Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory. As the co-researchers moved in, moved through, and

moved out of the transition process, they assessed their support system. Support systems

consisted of minimal professional development. However, co-researchers learned to gain

support from each other by building a community of professional support. Taylor explained that because of the lack of professional development, seeking "out other teachers who are already entrenched in blended learning" was her way of making sense of the transition.

Research Question Four

The final research question, "What strategies, if any, do teachers use to transition from a traditional FTFM to a BLM?" focused on strategies teachers used to facilitate a transition to a BLM. Co-researcher responses aligned with the individual interviews (see questions 6-8) and the focus group interview (see question 2, 7, and 8). According to Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory, strategies are a person's ability to draw on coping mechanisms to help them move through a transition. Co-researchers relied on their lifelong learner attitudes to make the transition to a BLM successful and became the overall theme of question four. The ability of the co-researchers to take the initiative to use prior knowledge and research are the sub-themes identified for research question four resulting from data analysis.

Over half of the co-researchers stated prior knowledge and experience, along with the willingness to research, contributed to the success of transitioning to a BLM. Seymour explained, "I think it's just pieces I've learned over the years. My undergraduate training really helped me." Brooke acknowledged, "Because I am self-motivated, and I consider myself a life-long learner, I did the research myself. I found case studies. I found different research articles and blogs. I joined Twitter." She continued, "I had to research what I thought a blended learning environment was supposed to be like."

The research skills were a strategy JP used throughout his professional career. JP said, "Even before, I was a business technology teacher at my previous school, I didn't realize what I was doing, but I was starting to do some blended education in the traditional classroom" this

experienced helped him as he moved to a BLM. Karen discovered her prior research and experiences assisted her in adapting to the change. She understood the transition was not going to be easy, and she came to the school, "ready for a change. I came in ready to do anything necessary to promote my school's mission and vision forward, for the blended learning model." JP and Karen modified their situation by researching. Indeed, many co-researchers found themselves researching new platforms, materials, lessons, and activities to promote the BLM. As Ann explained, "For me, I don't really ever turn my brain off of my kids. I'm always constantly researching something for them to do or coming up with a different activity; work doesn't ever shut off for me." Karen expressed a need to always "make sure to research different platforms that are available and to have that information out there for the students." However, Taylor researched to "prepare for lessons" and find new resources for her students. The research was ongoing and continuous for most of the subjects, and prior experiences provided an anchor to help the research subjects figure things out for most of the co-researchers.

The sub-themes of using prior knowledge and research skills to adapt teaching strategies suggests these co-researchers valued available research as a tool to help implement a BLM with some consistency. Even concerning the need to understanding best practices to help educate others, Taylor explained her thoughts and said, "I have to, of course, be educated myself" on the new practices and concepts. Additionally, as Brooke discussed previously, teachers are life-long learners. In her words, "Be patient, do your research, and don't be afraid to ask for help."

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of middle school teachers as they transitioned to a BLM in a school district in a suburb of Atlanta. Using a demographic questionnaire and purposeful sampling, identification of co-researchers

occurred. These co-researchers represented three middle schools, all three grade (6-8) levels, and all four core subject areas (math, science, social studies, and English and language arts). The co-researchers represented a range of educational years of experience from five years to beyond twenty years of experience. Data analysis occurred by Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenology, comprised of epoche, reduction and horzonalization, imaginative variation, and the synthesis of textural and structural descriptions of the co-researchers to arrive at the meaning and essences of the experiences. ATLAS.ti© software provided the digital tool for initial codes and theme identification. The four research questions aligned with the themes identified. In order of the research questions, the themes included evolving teacher practice, reliance on self-efficacy, creating a community of learners, and maintaining lifelong learner attitudes. Within the framework of the four research questions, each theme identified occurred in the questions asked in the individual interview, focus group discussion, and the blogging activity. Using ATLAS.ti©, the individual and focus group interviews and blogging questions were linked to codes. The primary researcher individually coded statements derived from the correlation with each theme and research question. Codes were printed, organized, and categorized based on similarities and then connected to the research questions. The study indicated that middle school teachers' experiences of transitioning to a BLM evolved with each new experience and created a community of learners within each school. Middle school teachers desired to understand how a BLM affected students and achievement and utilized self-reliance skills along with prior knowledge and personal research skills to meet the needs of their students. Further, middle school teachers displayed frustration by the lack of perceived support and increased expectations that hindered the process. Middle school teachers transitioning to a BLM desired to continue

learning and implemented successful aspects of blended learning to master best practices and to

propel student achievement to the next level.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of teachers transitioning from the traditional FTFM to the BLM in a middle school environment in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia. All of the 11 co-researchers in the study represented both genders, all core middle school subjects, all three grades (6-8), and a range of educational backgrounds ranging from 5 years to over 20 years of experience. A demographic questionnaire, individual interviews, a focus group, and a blogging activity comprised the data collection for this study. Data analysis occurred using Moustakas's (1994) transcendental phenomenological model. ATLAS.ti© provided the tool to help code and identify themes by organizing the co-researchers' descriptions of their shared experiences with the phenomenon of transitioning to a BLM. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings as related to the four identified themes, relevant literature, and Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory that guided this study. This chapter also includes the implications of the research, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. A summary will wrap up the chapter.

Summary of Findings

As a result of collecting and analyzing data through the use of the ATLAS.ti© digital program for pre-coding, horizonalization, and finally, grouping by categories and ultimately by themes, four themes emerged. The four themes were (a) evolving teacher practice, (b) reliance on self-efficacy, (c) creating a community of learners, and (d) lifelong learner attitudes. An analysis of the themes occurred to discover sub-themes (see Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4). Although the co-researchers came from varying backgrounds, different schools, and offered different experiences when transitioning to a BLM, similarities emerged from the data that communicated

the essence of their shared experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Schlossberg's (2011) Transition

Theory anchored the four research questions that guided this study. The following information

discusses each of the research questions that informed the study.

The 11 co-researchers acknowledged across all data sets that a situational role change

occurred while they transitioned to a BLM. From their shared experiences, four sub-themes

resulted (see Figure 1) as the co-researchers provided detailed explanations of their evolving

teaching practices. Frustration with the transition was the first sub-theme to emerge. Based on

the findings, the changes in roles caused frustrations such as when the transition was not a

choice, how teachers' plans altered in a new way and trying to make old practices fit into the

new practices. When thrown into a BLM without a choice, the co-researchers shared a lack of

satisfaction, creating frustration on different levels, which resulted in negative feelings about the

transition. However, co-researchers who were further along in the transitioning process to a

BLM indicated feeling more positively about their role change and shifts in their teaching

practices. Co-researchers stated that allowing teachers to have choices in the transition to a BLM

as well as a voice to express concerns, aided in making the transition easier.

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Research Question 1: How do teachers describe their situational role     │
│  changes throughout the transition from a FTFM to a BLM?                  │
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                  │  Schlossberg's (2011)               │
                  │  Transition Theory- situations      │
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            ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
            │  Theme- Evolving Teacher Practice                 │
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 │ Frustration│ │ How it     │ │ Changing   │ │ Adjusting      │
 │ with       │ │ affects    │ │ roles      │ │ teacher        │
 │ transition │ │ students   │ │            │ │ strategies     │
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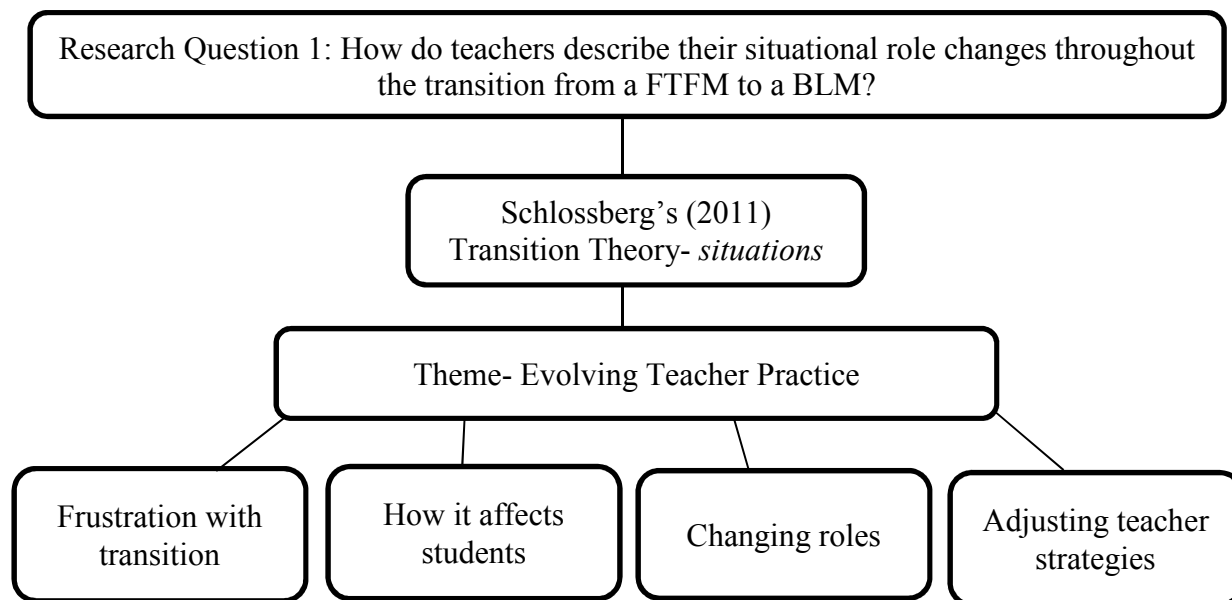
Figure 1. Graphic organizer depicting how the research question one related to Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory, the overall theme, and the sub-themes.

All co-researchers in this study expressed concern for how the transition to a BLM affected their students. Student achievement and satisfaction served as the foundation and support of how they perceived their role changes. Co-researchers shared several examples of how the transition to a BLM affected their students, both positively and negatively. They each expressed a strong sense of wanting what was best for their students. Overall, the majority of the participants described a BLM as positive; however, they also expressed it may not be for every student. One co-researcher, Taylor, explained that her students expressed concern about the new instructional practices and campaigned to make changes. She indicated students might not be ready to make educational decisions. The co-researchers suggested the importance of taking things slow to make sure students and teachers are comfortable with the transition to a BLM.

The third sub-theme that emerged from the study was changing roles. The co-researchers reported that the role shifts created unique challenges for students and teachers. Not only had the

co-researchers' role changed from a lecturer to that of a facilitator, but the students' role also changed to directors of their learning. A few co-researchers shared specifics about how the transition to a BLM required them to think about teaching differently. While the findings do not suggest that the role shifts negatively affected students, the findings do indicate some frustration as it took time for students and teachers to adjust to their new roles.

The final sub-theme that emerged from the first research question was adjusting teacher strategies. Changing roles required co-researchers to adjust teaching practices. Several co-researchers mentioned that while many of these changes seemed to come naturally to the co-researchers, several individuals found they learned more by doing and going through the process. Co-researchers explained stepping out of their comfort zones to determine best practices for their students was challenging. Additionally, teaching differently and reinventing grading practices contributed to some of the frustrations the co-researchers experienced. Overall, the majority of the co-researchers indicated a shift in practices had to occur to make the transition to a BLM more manageable.
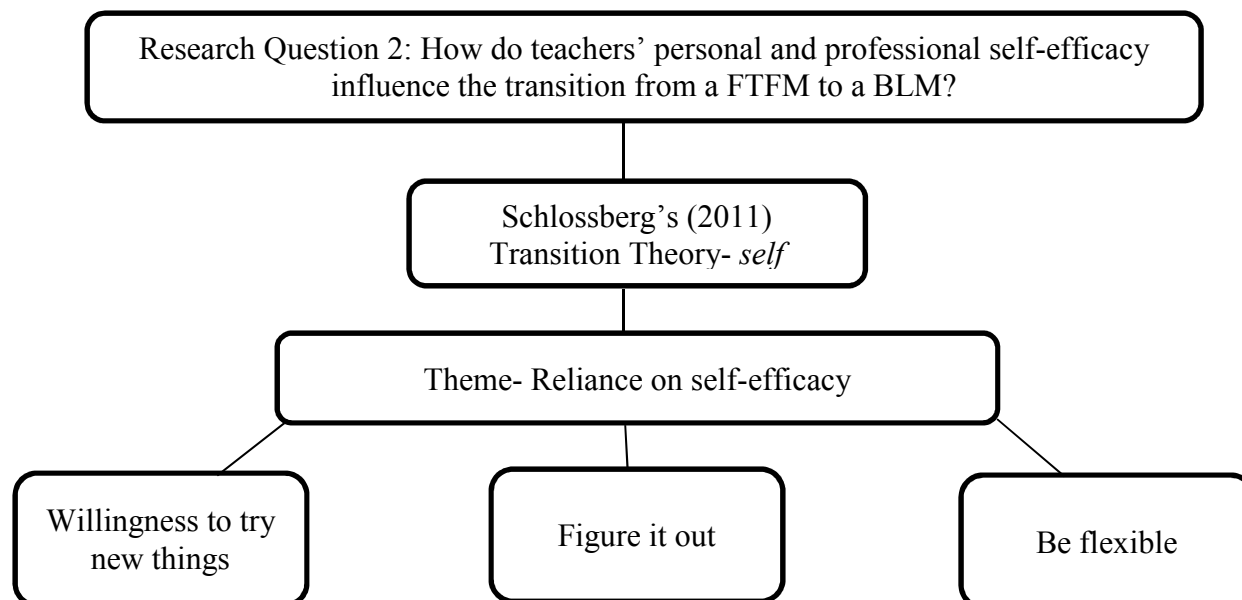
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│  Research Question 2: How do teachers' personal and professional  │
│           self-efficacy influence the transition from a FTFM to   │
│                             a BLM?                                 │
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                  ┌────────────────────────┐
                  │   Schlossberg's (2011)  │
                  │   Transition Theory-    │
                  │          self           │
                  └────────────────────────┘
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              ┌──────────────────────────────────┐
              │   Theme- Reliance on self-efficacy │
              └──────────────────────────────────┘
             /                 │                  \
   ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐
   │ Willingness  │    │ Figure it out │    │  Be flexible │
   │ to try new   │    │              │    │              │
   │   things     │    │              │    │              │
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Figure 2. Graphic organizer depicting how the research question one related to Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory, the overall theme, and the sub-themes.

Co-researchers desired to correctly implement a BLM that would truly meet their students' needs. The overarching theme for the second research question was the reliance on self-efficacy. When the co-researchers described their personal experiences, they viewed self-efficacy as a means to overcome the frustrations of implementing a BLM. Three sub-themes emerged from the shared experience (see Figure 2): willingness to try new things, figuring it out, and being flexible.   desire to try new things served the co-researchers well as they navigated the best possible plan of action to facilitate an understanding of a BLM. Furthermore, they had expressed a desire to discover what it meant to them and their students. A skill many co-researchers relied on was the trial and error mentality, meaning if at first success is not achieved, try something else. The co-researchers indicated a strong sense of it being acceptable to fail as long as lessons are learned from the failure and progress is moved forward.

Another sub-theme, figuring it out, resulted from the analysis of the data. A majority of the co-researchers believed they had the ability to determine how a BLM worked in their setting. Co-researchers desired to implement their school's vision of a BLM consistently and with

fidelity, so they relied on their self-efficacy. Therefore, they figured it out on their own. While others preferred to learn from those whom they perceived as already having figured it out, five of the co-researchers indicated that their students motivated them to figure out what was best practice in a BLM because the students relied on them. As JP explained, it was like, "being thrown into the oven and figuring it out as you bake."

The last sub-theme related to self-efficacy was being flexible. Interestingly, being flexible emerged across all data sets through the experiences of all co-researchers. Being flexible and having the ability to take risks were highly valued by most of the co-researchers as an important internal skill to possess to make the transition as smooth as possible. A few co-researchers shared having to learn to accept student input as a way to increase engagement in the lessons and to live with the understanding they did not have everything figured out. Furthermore, co-researchers discovered they had to be flexible in their control and allowed students to take the lead in their educational journey.

Research question three helped to explore the influence professional development had on the transition to a BLM. This question was addressed through the overarching theme of creating a community of learners. The sub-themes that emerged (see Figure 3) as the co-researchers described their experiences were that professional development was either lacking or non-existent, varied in levels of administrator support, and that the co-researchers ultimately had to lean on each other.
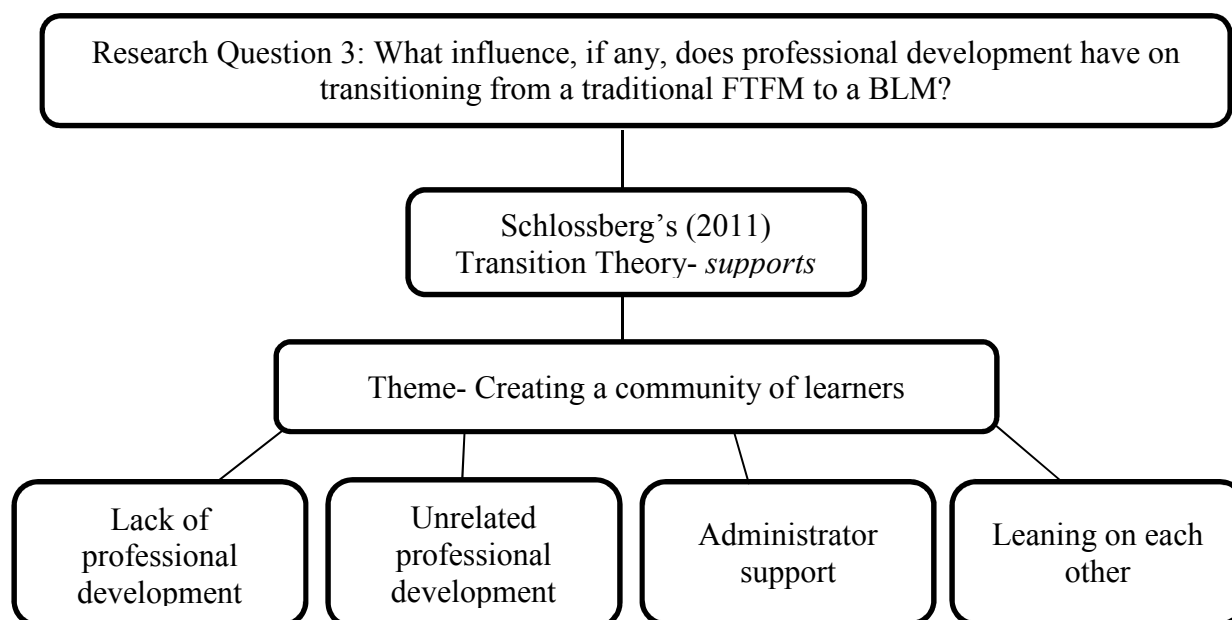
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Research Question 3: What influence, if any, does professional   │
│  development have on transitioning from a traditional FTFM to a   │
│  BLM?                                                              │
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Research Question 3: What influence, if any, does professional development have on transitioning from a traditional FTFM to a BLM?

Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory- *supports*

Theme- Creating a community of learners

Lack of professional development

Unrelated professional development

Administrator support

Leaning on each other

Figure 3. Graphic organizer depicting how the research question three related to Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory, the overall theme, and the sub-themes.

Several co-researchers noted the lack of professional development. Over half of the co-researchers stated there was a lack of professional development on blended learning at the school or county level. Most co-researchers determined the mandated professional development as an obligation and not a useful task. However, some co-researchers acquired bits and pieces of the professional development and incorporated it into their classroom, but most were not satisfied with the experience. Additionally, the co-researchers expressed a need to research on their own to determine how to facilitate their school's vision because of the lack of professional development.

Along with the lack of professional development, the second theme, unrelated professional development, occurred across the data sets. Most of the co-researchers indicated that since their school had autonomy with how they defined blended learning, any professional development opportunities outside of their school site were unrelated to their model. The co-researchers described specific instances such as professional development on project-based

learning or technology tools where they saw the value but unfortunately did not find a connection to blended learning. One co-researcher always tried to find how it all worked together, leaving her somewhat frustrated. Although most co-researchers cited a lack of or unrelated professional development during interviews, the majority did not express a strong correlation with their success and practice.

The third sub-theme that emerged from the data was that of administrative support provided to the co-researchers. Not all of the co-researchers indicated that they had support from their administration. However, those that reported having the support described the effects on their practices. One co-researcher indicated her administrator as supportive when he provided her resources she asked for, even when it meant going outside of the school. Two other co-researchers shared how they could experiment and fail without judgment, thus giving them an opportunity to try various techniques.

Finally, the sub-theme of leaning on each other was a reoccurring perception noted by all co-researchers but in different ways. Although the co-researchers recognized the benefit of professional development, they perceived a collaborative environment as the essential element of their schools to create a stronger base for their blended learning programs. Furthermore, a few of the co-researchers perceived true collaboration and communication among teachers as playing a crucial role during the implementation process of a BLM. In a school environment, several co-researchers indicated open and honest communication invited teachers to adjust instruction to meet the needs of students while providing opportunities to figure it out together creating truly collaborative learning communities.
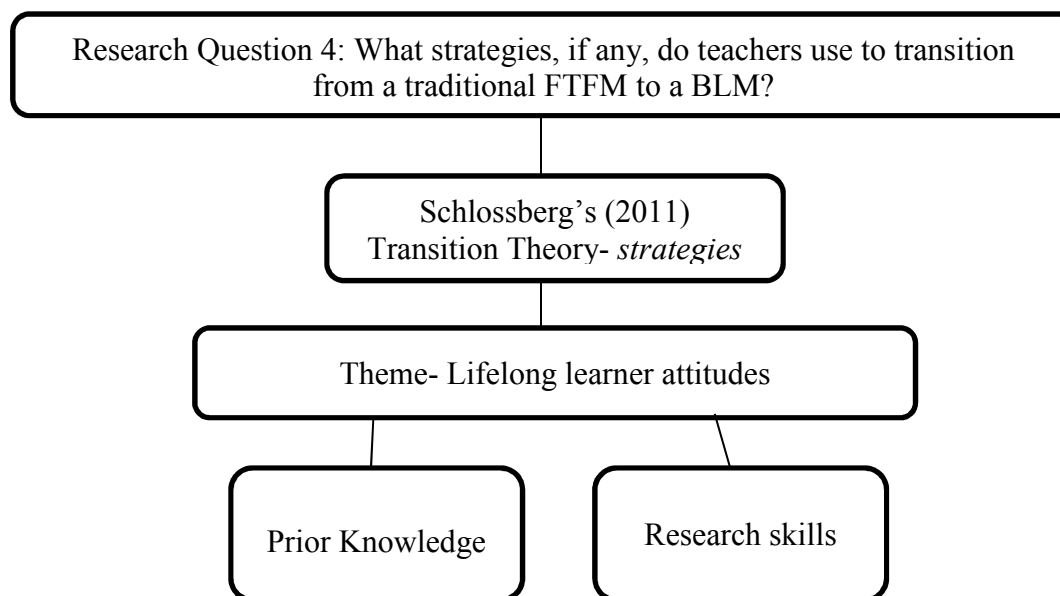
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Research Question 4: What strategies, if any, do teachers   │
│          use to transition from a traditional FTFM to a BLM?  │
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                              │
                ┌──────────────────────────┐
                │   Schlossberg's (2011)    │
                │ Transition Theory- strategies │
                └──────────────────────────┘
                              │
          ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐
          │     Theme- Lifelong learner attitudes   │
          └────────────────────────────────────────┘
               │                           │
     ┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────┐
     │  Prior Knowledge │        │  Research skills │
     └──────────────────┘        └──────────────────┘
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Figure 4. Graphic organizer depicting how the research question three related to Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory, the overall theme, and the sub-themes.

Research question four focused on the strategies that teachers used to cope with the transition to a BLM. The overall theme was lifelong learner attitudes. The co-researchers determined the need to seek information through relying on prior knowledge and researching skills to aid the transition to a BLM. The teachers indicated that blended learning changed the way teachers teach and how students learn. Although their local district provided some training, the co-researchers stated that the lack of targeted training on blended learning required them to go outside of the regular professional development sessions and research on their own. These teachers suggested two particular strategies that helped them cope (see Figure 4) with the transition to a BLM, the use of prior knowledge and investigation skills. The predominant strategy was researching. Several co-researchers utilized the Internet to search for classroom models, read articles and blogs, and looked for examples of blended learning and then applied what they learned in their individual classroom. Through many trials and errors and the support of their administrator, the co-researchers found embraceable classroom practices that worked for them. However, they still believed it was a work in progress.

Discussion

This discussion addresses the relationship between the study's findings, the empirical research, and the theoretical framework that is the basis for the study. Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory was the theoretical framework that underpins the study, as the findings relate to the four S components: situation, self, support, and strategies. The four S components are used by individuals to move in, move through, and move out of a transition. The four identified themes–evolving teacher practices, reliance on self-efficacy, creating a community of learners, and commitment of having lifelong learner attitudes–function as a guide to focus attention on the central elements of this research. The elements included how teachers coped with the situational changes, self-reliance, the available support, and strategies to improve their situation such as, seeking information and viewing the transition in a different light.

Evolving Teacher Practices

The *situation* component in Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory was useful for ascertaining the nature of the transition to a BLM and how the transition influenced teachers. Whether teachers saw the transition as positive, negative, or non-consequential, whether it was a choice, a change in role, or influenced by some other barriers, all contributed to the overall findings of this study. For the co-researchers in this study, certain practices resulted in frustration with different aspects of the change, as well as how the change affected students in the transition to a BLM.

Co-researchers provided feedback on what contributed to the situational role changes that occurred throughout the transition process to a BLM, both in terms of the positive and negative results. Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013) emphasized some frustrations teachers often reported, such as insufficient technical support, lack of collaboration, and the reluctance of students added

to the challenges involved in implementing a BLM. The co-researchers echoed these themes in the current investigation. Co-researchers communicated frustrations in adjusting to a BLM, citing that it initially took more time to plan, implement, and carry out. The increase in time commitment designing a blended course, and the increased workload, presented challenges that extended beyond the already abundant classroom duties, a finding that dovetails with the work of other scholars (Caravias, 2014; Liu et al., 2014; McCown, 2009; Oh & Park, 2009). Co-researchers also voiced their frustrations with how much time it takes to plan outside of school hours (Joan, Taylor, & Ann, personal communication, 2016). Because technology is a critical component to blended learning, co-researchers either expressed excitement for technology or an urgency to figure out the technology. This finding aligns with the work of Liu et al. (2014) who discovered teachers spent a significant amount of time learning how to operate digital devices to incorporate them into lesson plans. These points underscore the need for understanding the frustrations and challenges, which links back to the overall success of the transition process to a BLM. As Gerbic (2011) noted, to develop strong academic programs, the challenges of a BLM must be understood more fully, especially in the transition process for teachers.

Co-researchers, on two occasions, responded to specific questions about how the transition process influenced students and their achievement. Ultimately, several co-researchers found that student achievement influenced how they saw the transition process. Although many co-researchers in the study indicated that it was still too early to adopt any beliefs of the effects of BLMs on student achievement, they expressed that there were positive effects on students which were present (JP, Karen, Martha, Seymour, & Tara, personal communication, 2016). Over half of the co-researchers mentioned seeing a positive change in their students' responsibility habits. Although the co-researchers stated that many students displayed an

increase in engagement, the co-researchers indicated that it was still too early in the process to determine whether a BLM worked for all students. They also indicated an excitement when they witnessed students taking responsibility for their work; however, most co-researchers admitted it was still a work in progress. Two co-researchers mentioned students performed higher on classroom and state testing. A few of the co-researchers identified an increase in motivation when they stated students were more interested and sought help without encouragement from parents or teachers. These findings aligned with previous investigations which showed that interest among students and teachers will increase due to the positive results of BLMs on student achievement and the subsequent positive impact on learning environments (Chen, 2012; Mosca et al., 2010; Vernadakis et al., 2011). These studies also suggested that students in a BLM scored significantly higher in factual and conceptual knowledge, showed an increase in motivation, and took on an active role in their education. When teachers engage in new teaching practices, the influence on students and student achievement must be the focus to support teachers effectively as they move in and through a transition (Cilesiz, 2011). Additionally, when teachers see positive results for students and student achievement increases, the potential for teachers to adopt the new strategy may increase (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013; Rafool et al., 2012). However, if teachers see barriers or challenges, it is more likely that they will view the transition as negative. For example, Figlio et al. (2010) and Zacharis (2015) stated there is a lack of conclusive evidence supporting positive effects on learning outcomes in a BLM. Taylor expressed this concern as her students showed less progress, lower motivation, and asked for traditional practices to return. Consequently, the findings of this study supported the current research on teacher perception and how a BLM influenced student achievement.

In today's classrooms, teachers are making a role shift from an instructor to that of a facilitator of knowledge (Abidogun, 2011; Ertmer et al., 2012, Francis & Shannon, 2013; Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013). This shift emerged in the data for the current project. Co-researchers described discovering how to become a facilitator a challenging process (Ann, JP, Karen, Joan, Martha, Seymour, & Tara, personal communication, 2016). Work conducted by Comas-Quinn (2011) is salient here, as the success of a new learning approach relies on the success of the transition from one role to another. In other words, teachers have to find ways not only to transition their role but also to transition the students' role to that of a constructor of their knowledge.

Reliance on Self-Efficacy

The *self* component of Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory refers to an individual's personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources such as self-efficacy, optimism, commitment, and resiliency. Co-researchers in this study relied on their self-efficacy to cope with the transition to a BLM. A distinct contribution of this study's findings related to the determination among co-researchers in their confidence to figure things out and their comfort level of taking risks. Personal character traits relating to self-efficacy, such as not being afraid to fail and working to figure it out, flexibility, and the ability to manage stress appropriately surfaced throughout the data analysis process.

Co-researchers in this study referenced the necessity to rely on self-efficacy to be successful in a BLM. According to Bandura (1986, 1997, 2007), self-efficacy is a personal judgment about one's perception of the potential competency level, the ability to self-regulate, and reflect on personal abilities. Most co-researchers displayed high levels of self-efficacy when describing their experiences of transitioning to a BLM. The co-researchers in this study

highlighted the importance of willing to try new things and not worry about failing as they moved into a BLM.

Blended learning revolves around technology integration. Studies on technology implementation have indicated self-efficacy plays a significant role in the success of the teacher when incorporating technology in the classroom (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010, 2012; Sang et al., 2010). This point emerged from the current data analysis, as one co-researcher noted that a teacher should not be afraid of failure. Another veteran teacher in the study believed he had the ability to figure the out the components of blended learning. Figuring it out became a way of life for one co-researcher, a point that nicely underscores the nature of self-efficacy. Indeed, according to Celik and Yesilyurt (2013), self-efficacy significantly affects "computer supported education" (p. 156).

In the context of this study, the co-researchers suggested that to create a successful blended environment there needed to be a level of flexibility on the part of the facilitator. According to the literature, flexibility is necessary because a BLM creates opportunities for learning to take place in different locations and provides varied paces for students (Napier et al., 2011). One co-researcher stated that flexibility was the key component in her transition and in a blended environment; flexibility was a necessity and easily mastered (Sara, personal communication, 2016). Teachers transitioning to a BLM developed a shift in mindset that required teachers to release control and allowed students to make educational decisions (Horn & Staker, 2014). This flexibility with mindset highlights the importance of having self-efficacy believing students can make academic decisions that are right for them.

According to the literature, teachers have higher self-esteem, lower stress levels, a sense of confidence, and the ability to overcome obstacles may exhibit higher self-efficacy (Cullen &

Greene, 2011; Reilly et al., 2014). As teacher expectations increase, so does the perception of stress, resulting in absenteeism, turnover, and burnout, all of which affect teacher morale and student outcomes (Kipps-Vaughn, 2013). Co-researchers also indicated various levels of stress that occurred in a BLM versus a traditional setting and advised that teachers need to take the time to achieve goals. Blended learning is a new way of thinking about teaching and may ultimately cause stress, therefore lowering perceived job satisfaction (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Reilly et al., 2014), which is why time is necessary to avoid these outcomes.

For some of the co-researchers, stress surfaced in the way of figuring out all of the different components of a BLM. Several co-researchers expressed how it always changed and adjusted for students created more stress as they learned how to deal with the changes. The differences in teaching in a traditional classroom versus teaching in a BLM caused many co-researchers to learn how to manage that stress in different ways; they realized they had to be willing to fail and to start over to be successful (Karen, Martha, Seymour, Tara, & JP, personal communication, 2016). By making changes slowly and over time, many co-researchers expressed more satisfaction with the transition and a way to manage stress more effectively.

Co-researchers in this study indicated the need to have a strong self-efficacy as they transitioned to a BLM in their middle schools as a way of lowering stress. Most all of the co-researchers relied on a belief in their own ability to move in, move through, and move out of the transition. Seymour relied on his self-efficacy out of necessity, "I was told to use my talents and my skills that I have developed in the best way to help students." As teachers venture into a BLM, anxiety may be present because of lack of know-how or personal knowledge associated with the transition (McCown, 2009; Wachira & Keengwe, 2011). However, findings of this study suggest that leaders who utilized self-efficacy as a way of figuring out challenges

throughout the transition process and shared those experiences with teachers helped create a much-needed growth mindset in the staff.

School leaders provided flexible learning opportunities, flexible time to collaborate, and flexible space to facilitate growth in teacher practices. Teachers in this study adopted and accepted a growth mindset and tried innovative teaching practices without worrying about failure. To increase self-efficacy, formative feedback to teachers from administrators helped teachers attempt new teaching strategies.

Creating a Community of Learners

The *support* component of Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory refers to the supports available to those experiencing a transition. As individuals move in, move through, and move out of the stages of a transition, the support system may require altering to meet the needs of the individual. Resources may include but may not be limited to personal connections such as husbands or wives, close family members, or colleagues (Schlossberg, 2011). Individuals may interpret support either as positive or negative. Positive support may come as honest feedback from administrators, coaches, or colleagues who boost self-esteem while negative support may come in the form of feedback from harsh supervisors (Akalin & Sucuoglu, 2015; Tuytens & Devos, 2013).

The literature on professional development identified effective professional development as focused and engaged teachers in a sustaining level of support (Gerard, 2014; Wiener, 2013). DeLuca et al. (2012) asserted that new professional development opportunities require greater support and structure to deal with the rapid changes in instructional practices. Multiple sources noted the need for targeted and ongoing professional development to facilitate changes in teacher practices (Gerard, 2014; Kopcha, 2012; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Darling-Hammond &

McLaughlin, 2011). Napier et al. (2011) stated that teachers must have adequate training to make the transition to a BLM. Several co-researchers acknowledged a lack of professional development on the topic of blended learning (Ann, Brooke, Taylor, & JP, personal communication, 2016). However, many received professional development on perceived unrelated topics such as project-based learning, simple technology apps, websites, or other county mandated initiatives (Ann, Brandy, Joan, Martha, & Taylor, personal communication, 2016). Taylor expressed a desire for more professional development and believed additional professional development should target blended learning.

Although the co-researchers indicated the lack of professional development or unrelated professional development did not make or break their practice, administrative support ranked high on the list of important contributing factors. The literature revealed administrative roles and responsibilities needed to shift to that of instructional leaders to allow for a restructuring of shared decision-making and effective leadership to initiate change (Kuo et al., 2013). Berrett et al. (2012) noted how district leaders facilitate policy changes from the top "creates resistance at the school level" (p. 200). Msila (2011) suggested that effective leaders provide the necessary foundation for teachers as they chart unknown territory to implement change. The co-researchers expressed a keen interest in the schools' initiatives but at times felt it was too much (Joan & Taylor, personal communication, 2016). Therefore, it is important district leaders encourage other learning opportunities such as reflective learning communities (Berrett et al., 2012; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011).

The related literature on professional development identified reflective learning communities, also referred to as collaborative learning communities or professional learning communities as an effective means of support to promote change and strengthen teacher practice

(Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, & Powers, 2010; Kuo et al., 2013). Learning communities that provide a culture of shared and distributed leadership that facilitates innovative practices and collaboration among teachers strengthen school culture (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Papaooannou & Charalambous, 2011). Co-researchers in this study relied on each other for determining what worked, and more importantly, what did not work (Ann, personal communication, 2016). The transition process would have proved more difficult without the combined knowledge of individuals (Martha, JP, & Seymour, personal communication, 2016). The co-researchers highlighted the use of new teaching strategies, emotional support, and shared knowledge as benefits of relying on each other through the transition (Brandy, Ann, & Karen, personal communication, 2016). Further, these communities provided opportunities for collaboration and trying innovative practices to support each other's growth (Cifuentes et al., 2011). Specifically, these middle school teachers with opportunities to engage in teacher networks bridged the gap between technologically more and less proficient teachers as they provided support for one another (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Kopcha, 2012).

The findings from this study suggest there is a need for sustained and supported professional development experiences. Co-researchers in this study acknowledged they received professional learning opportunities, but they expressed that what they received was a county mandated initiative or in a manner that was unrelated to their personal needs. Most all co-researchers in this study described collaboration, communication, and learning from each other as valuable assets to promote a change of teacher practice. According to the associated literature, learning communities provide these elements for teachers (Cifuentes et al., 2011; Gerard et al., 2014; Kopcha, 2012; Potter & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

Lifelong Learning Attitudes

The strategy component of Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory relates to the coping actions an individual takes because of the transition. Whether the transition to a BLM was a choice or whether it was mandated, influenced the co-researchers and their actions. According to the literature, individuals with various strategies may cope better with transitions (Schlossberg, 2011). Therefore, as the co-researchers adapted mindsets to shift teaching styles and roles for both teacher and student, and at times, shift perspective; the more strategies reflected an easier transition. For co-researchers in this study, *strategies* such as the application of prior knowledge and the use of strong research skills prepared teachers for expected and unexpected changes.

According to the literature, a shift in teaching style required to implement a BLM is a constructivist approach. This method minimizes the acceptance of passive learners and requires students to take ownership of their learning by gaining responsibility through choices and engagement (Gerbic, 2011; Smyth et al., 2012; Fox-Turnbull & Snape, 2011). According to Gerbic (2011) and Fox-Turnbull and Snape (2011), a teacher in the classroom has become more critical, but they face new challenges that may require new strategies to overcome. Smyth et al. (2012) asserted that teachers must include new strategies that allow students to make educational choices in how they learn. Co-researchers recognized the need for students to have choices and utilized their strategy of actual research to discover new platforms, materials, lessons, and activities (Ann & Karen, personal communication, 2016).

The literature on strategies established that teachers need a variety of strategies to navigate the changes in a BLM, specifically those related to role changes, teaching styles, and an alteration in perspective (Horn & Staker, 2014). Co-researchers acknowledged the role change from an instructor to a facilitator required inquiry and understanding (Karen & Seymour,

personal communication, 2016). Blau (2011) asserted that teachers should be the "guide on the side" (p. 275) by reducing lecture time and scaffolding instruction, creating a more student-centered learning environment. Going against the traditional teaching model, Karen explained that many teachers did not want to give up what they had done for years, and it was a journey of self-discovery through trial and error and research. Johnson et al. (2011) recognized the increasing demand to delete the one-size fits all teaching mentality and the need to provide an avenue for students to increase the control over their learning. Co-researchers acknowledged the value of shifting roles but expressed a need to understand the role of the facilitator further and cited research as a means redefining their role (Brandy, personal communication, 2016).

The findings from this study confirm the need to allow teachers time and opportunities to cultivate new strategies. Co-researchers in this study described limited strategies that may modify or provide an understanding of the transition process but felt they need more opportunities to learn about those strategies. Although strong research abilities and prior knowledge have served them well, other strategies might prove helpful in the future. Leaders should provide opportunities for teachers to observe colleagues, engage in collaboration and reflection, and give time to research and develop new teaching skills and ultimately adopt best practices to improve student achievement.

Implications

The findings of this transcendental phenomenological study have several implications for administrators, teachers, and other stakeholders in the educational community. The empirical, theoretical, and practical aspects of the data analysis highlighted ways in which the information reduced the gap in research with middle school teachers transitioning to a BLM.

Closing the Gap

A review of the literature related to the experiences of teachers with a BLM revealed a gap in the experiences of middle school teachers as they transitioned through the process. Several factors contributed to this gap and included a lack of understanding the effects of technology on teaching and learning processes, how a lack of understanding affected student achievement, the best practices considered by the co-researchers, and strategies to improve transitions of this type (Cilesiz, 2011; Guzer & Caner, 2014). The current study contributed to the missing literature on middle school teachers' experiences as they transitioned from a FTFM to a BLM by clarifying what co-researchers utilized effectively to balance the implementation of a new teaching practice.

Although the co-researchers noted the potential benefits of a BLM, they also noted how they spent a significant amount of time working to understand the best practices of a BLM. It is important to point out that the co-researchers indicated it was still too early in the implementation process to understand the full impact of a BLM on middle school students. This group of co-researchers felt that the knowledge of best practices, their passion for doing what is best for students, believing in their ability to overcome challenges, and leveraging a collaborative environment to support them through the transition could provide an avenue for success and further understanding. Based on this understanding, stakeholders would benefit from acknowledging teachers as professionals, and that stakeholders should not choose teaching practices based on TKES evaluations or state mandates. Many teachers in this study had used a version of blended learning before technology was a part of the new evaluation system. This knowledge may inform the decisions made at the state and local level.

Theoretical Contribution

The key idea is surrounding Schlossberg's (2011) Transition Theory, i.e., the four S's: situation, self, supports, and strategies, provided a framework for the experiences by which the co-researchers transitioned from a FTFM to a BLM. Past research focused on technology integration or BLM in secondary education. Therefore, further investigation of teachers' experiences is essential to understand the full impact a BLM has on teaching staff (Cilsez, 2011). The co-researchers in this study expressed how their situation, self-reliance, the available support, and the strategies they incorporated contributed to their experiences and how they related to student achievement as they moved into the transition, through the transition, and eventually, out of the transition.

In light of the findings of the current investigation, teachers, administrators and central office staff may want to consider the length of the process and resources teachers may need to implement a BLM. While paper and pencil surveys are efficient in collecting data, the knowledge that the co-researchers possess about the transitioning process in a blended program may provide insights through face-to-face or small group sessions. With the increase of digital tools, the district leadership may consider the use of video conferencing to gain feedback from the individuals currently going through the transition.

School Districts

Practical implications for these co-researchers are a direct result of decisions made at the current school, district, or state level associated with the school system in this study. Central office administrators may focus on the findings of this study and implement solutions related to the specific co-researchers' needs. Co-researchers clearly communicated the frustrations of adjusting to a new teaching strategy that initially took more time to plan, implement, and carry

out. However, co-researchers reflected on the importance of understanding how a BLM benefits students and ultimately student achievement. This information provides building administrators and central office leaders with the opportunity to establish a plan of action to define the situation concerning how the transition to a BLM may benefit both students and teaching professionals.

Administrators and District Officials

The practical implication that requires the most effort for local school administrators and district office leaders relates to professional learning. The co-researchers rejected the idea that professional development is the key to transitioning to a BLM. However, the co-researchers noted the importance of teachers coming together to learn from each other in collaborative learning communities. The most important outcome for the co-researchers in this study was to increase the development of best practices surrounding a BLM and student achievement. Teachers desired an environment that encouraged the sharing of information, had less unrelated professional development, and had administrative support and encouragement. As such, providing opportunities for building administrators, central office support officials, and state leaders to initiate and facilitate focus groups will encourage discussions surrounding practices. A series of face-to-face sessions could prove beneficial, and then data generated from these sessions needs analyzed to determine how to create best and build a learning culture among teachers. Results of such a project provide a way to design the best course of action for professional development.

Local leaders and evaluators may also provide targeted feedback for teachers to help them improve their practices in a BLM and accommodate teachers' needs for information by providing resources on a digital platform that is readily available. Although the district has

recently designed several digital resources, teachers needed awareness of where to find the information.

Teachers

Co-researchers desired a working environment where they could take risks and not be afraid to fail. The co-researchers understood how self-efficacy played a role in the success of the transition, as they had to rely on themselves to "figure it out" as they went. Many co-researchers relied on their self-efficacy to have the confidence to make it happen for their students. Teachers also utilized prior knowledge and their research skills as a strategy to help them navigate the transition. Many co-researchers realized that self-efficacy was important when making the transition to a BLM; however, a community of learners comprised of their peers had an influence on the success of the transition. The co-researchers noted that professional learning communities provided opportunities for teachers to engage in meaningful conversations, share resources, and gain support.

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Limitations

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Limitations are boundaries placed on the methodology of a study (Joyner et al., 2012). Limitations of this study include the inability to generalize due to a small sample size, geographic location, and limited demographics. The actual participant sample may not be a true or authentic representation of middle school teachers in other schools, districts or education in general (Kurz & Batarelo, 2010). The study included 11 participants as co-researchers across all three middle school grade levels (6-8). The co-researchers represented all of the core content areas and a variety of years of teaching experience. However, other teachers in the same grade levels who had the same experience level may have provided different perspectives on the transition to a BLM. The geographic location may limit the transferability to other student and

teacher populations due to social and cultural differences of the participants in this study in relation to other geographical locations (Jinam et al., 2012). Finally, the current study focused on middle school teachers and might not transfer to elementary or secondary levels of instruction. Moustakas (1994) explained that because of the nature and closeness of the researcher to the subjects for a lengthy period, preconceived judgments might have occurred. In an attempt to offset any preconceived notions, the primary researcher embraced epoche, or bracketing, of her experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This process served to validate all of the interviews and interactions with the co-researchers. For the co-researchers, the close interaction created a safe environment for honest communication.

Recommendations for Future Research

This transcendental phenomenological study contributes to the literature on middle school teachers' transition from a FTFM to a BLM. Because the study focused on middle school teachers in one school district located in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia, further research may target other educational levels such as the elementary or high school in other geographic regions or districts. The transition process to a BLM may vary depending on the teacher's content, level, or style of teaching; therefore, teachers in elementary or high school may have different experiences. An additional suggestion is that future researchers study student perceptions of a BLM on varying levels including but not limited to elementary, high school, and college students concentrating on student achievement and satisfaction.

Further findings of this study indicated that teachers preferred collaborative learning communities as a means to implement a BLM more consistently and more efficiently, rather than attending professional development. Consequently, future research could seek to address how collaborative or professional learning communities meet the needs of teachers transitioning

teaching styles and the impact on teacher practices. These communities may vary from the geographical region or district to district. Each member of a learning community may bring a different skill set or resource to contribute to the overall success of a BLM.

Finally, colleges across the country responsible for training the next generation of educators may benefit from research on BLM. A study focusing on how pre-service teachers transition to a BLM may provide information to inform new teachers of reasonable expectations, challenges, and potential strategies needed to make the adjustment. An investigation of this scope will allow for a connection between college teacher preparation programs and their first teaching assignment.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of middle school teachers' transition from a FTFM to a BLM in a suburb of Atlanta, in a Georgia school district. This study, focused on the stories and experiences of middle school teachers, was necessary for helping to close the gap in the literature, which lacked research on middle school teachers and blended learning. The central research question used to examine the shared experiences of teachers changing from a traditional FTFM to a BLM in a middle school setting was: What are the shared experiences among teachers changing from a traditional FTFM to a BLM in a middle school setting? The sub-questions centered on the situational role changes, personal and professional self-efficacy, the influence and support of professional development, and the strategies teachers rely on for successful implementation of a BLM. Results of the investigation demonstrated that middle school teachers in this geographical setting and district location described their shared experiences with differing levels of frustration on how it affected students, adjustments of teaching strategies, and the change in roles for teachers and students.

Further, the middle school teachers experienced reliance on their self-efficacy. Teachers acknowledged they had to take risks, manage stress, become flexible, and utilize their ability to figure it out as they went as a means to coping with the situation. The co-researchers did not harp on the lack of professional development or unrelated professional developments; however, they did mention an intense need for learning from each other. The takeaway is that if a BLM intends to improve student achievement, then successful BLM practices need identification and then shared with other teachers in collaborative learning communities.

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APPENDIX A: IRB RESEARCH APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 25, 2016

Lisa Manross
IRB Approval 2470.032516: Middle School Teachers' Perspectives of Transitioning from the Traditional Teaching Model to a Blended Learning Model: A Phenomenological Study

Dear Lisa,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

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APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

**MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES OF TRANSITIONING FROM THE
TRADITIONAL TEACHING MODEL TO A BLENDED LEARNING MODEL IN A K-12
ENVIRONMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

Lisa Manross
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study of teachers' experiences in the transition from a traditional face-to-face teaching model to a blended learning model. You were selected as a possible co-researcher because you were identified as a teacher who works in a blended learning environment in a K-12 setting. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Lisa Manross, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to answer the following research questions:
1. How do teachers describe their situational role changes throughout the transition from an FTFM to a BLM?
2. How do teachers' personal and professional self-efficacy influence the transition from an FTFM to a BLM?
3. What influence, if any, does professional development have on transitioning from an FTFM to a BLM?
4. What strategies, if any, do teachers use to transition from a traditional FTFM to a BLM?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1.) Participate in a focus group interview held in a neutral location within the district. The focus group interview will last a minimum of 45 minutes but no longer than 60 minutes. Co-researchers will use pseudonyms when discussing personal experiences ensuring the information will remain confidential. The focus group interview will be recorded and transcribed.
2.) Attend and participate in a face-to-face interview at a convenient location within the district. The individual interview will not last any longer than 45 minutes. Co-researchers will use pseudonyms to protect their identities during the interview.
3.) Each co-researcher will be asked to complete a reflective blog activity after the completion of the focus group and individual interviews. This blog activity will not last longer than 20 minutes. This blog activity will give the co-researchers an opportunity to voice concerns or opinions that they may not have felt comfortable discussing in the interviews. The blog activity link will be sent to the co-

researcher's email and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the individuals.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks involved in this study are no more than co-researchers would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation include possible insights into the experiences of teachers transitioning from a face-to-face teaching model to a blended learning model. The results may provide information to stakeholders on how to best support the transition for teachers.

Compensation:

You will not receive compensation for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that I may publish, I will use pseudonyms, and I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

I will secure all documents, audio recordings, and transcripts in a locked file cabinet and password protected on my personal computer. Only the researcher, the dissertation committee, and a transcriptionist will have access to the information, and all data will be erased three years after the completion of the dissertation. Focus group co-researchers' confidentiality will be limited to those in the group, and I cannot ensure the privacy of each individual.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to refrain from answering any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to

withdraw. However, three years after the completion of the study, all data will be destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa Manross. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ███████████ ███████████. You may also contact the research's faculty advisor, ██████████ ███████████████████████████.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and/or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY CONSENT AND DIRECTIONS

Questionnaire Consent:

Unfortunately, very little research is available on teachers' experiences as they transition from a face-to-face teaching model to a blended learning model. This questionnaire is designed to collect initial information about teachers' experiences as they relate to a transition in teaching style. The information collected from this questionnaire may help advance the needs of teachers and increase the interest in the phenomenon. The participation in this questionnaire is voluntary. Any information gathered from this questionnaire will not link to you in any way.

About this questionnaire:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather general demographic data and provide some specific information about transitioning from a face to face teaching model to a blended learning model.

If you have experienced a transition from a traditional face-to-face teaching style to a blended learning model, please proceed with the questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, a screen will appear with my contact information to reach me if you would be willing to participate further in the study.

Definition of transitioning teaching style:

The transitioning of teaching style, for the purposes of this study, will be defined as a transition from a traditional style of teaching to a blended learning style of teaching. A traditional style is defined as when students spend their day at school learning primarily from a teacher. Blended learning is a combination of students spending time online learning content mixed with face-to-face classroom instruction at a brick-and-mortar school.

Blended Learning may include the following scenarios:

a. Students are learning content online at home and/or school, but also attend classes to

receive instruction from teachers.

b. Students spend a majority of their time learning content online, but attend classes once or

twice a week depending on needs.

c. Students take classes that are not offered at their local high school online, but also attend

other classes on a campus.

Thank you for your time.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at ███████████████

    a. I confirm I have read the information above and understand the conditions. _____ Yes

    b. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without providing a reason and free from consequences. _____ Yes

    c. I agree to participate in the electronic demographic questionnaire for this study. ___ Yes

Following the submission of the electronic demographic quetionnaire

If you would like to participate in the study, please feel free to contact me. Please note, if you should elect to participate, the use of coding will help protect your personal identity and will not be shared with your school or district.

1. Contact me via email. My email address is: ███████████████

2. Contact me via telephone. My telephone number is: ███████████

Again, thank you for your time.

Lisa Manross, Researcher
Liberty University
██

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. Consent

2. What is your gender?

a. male☐
b. female

3. What is your role in your school? Check all that apply.

a. Teacher☐
b. Administrator☐
c. Media Specialist
d. Other. Please Specify _____

4. What is your age?

(a) 20-30☐
(b) 31-49☐
(c) 50-60
(d) 61-70☐
(e) 71 and over

5. What grade (s) do you teach? Check all that apply.

a. 6th Grade☐
b. 7th Grade☐
c. 8th Grade☐
d. Various Middle School Grades 6-8
e. Other – Please Specify _____

6. At the end of this school year, how many years of educator (teacher, admin, media, etc.) experience do you have? (Include all experience with in the educational field)

a. 0-4 Years☐
b. 5-10 Years☐
c. 11-15 Years☐
d. 16-20 Years☐
e. 21-30 Years☐
f. Over 30 Years

7. What is your ethnicity?

a. African American/Black
b. Caucasian/White☐
c. Hispanic/Latino☐

d. Multi-racial☐
e. Asian☐
f. American Indian/Alaskan Native
g. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander☐
h. Other – please write in: _____

8. Have you experienced a transition in teaching style, specifically from a traditional face-to-face model to a blended learning model?

a. Yes
b. No

9. I would like to participate further in this study

a. Yes
b. No

10. If your answer was "yes" to question #10 please fill out the following:

Name: _____
Date: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

Thank you very much for your time.

At the end of the questionnaire, this statement will appear.

If you would like to participate in the study, please feel free to contact me. Please note, if you should elect to participate, the use of coding will help protect your personal identity and will not be shared with your school or district.

1. Contact me via email. My email address is: ████████████████

2. Contact me via telephone. My telephone number is: ████████████

Again, Thank you for your time.

Lisa Manross, Researcher
Liberty University
██

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Introduction:

The goal of this research study is to provide a voice to educators as they experience a transition from the traditional model of teaching to a blended model of teaching. You may withdraw from this interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. The researcher will record your answers to questions using an audio recording device and transcribe your answers verbatim at a later date. Your responses to the questions will not identify you in any way. The researcher will keep digital copies of the transcript password protected, and paper copies under lock and key. You have the right to withdraw any statement(s) from this study.

Consent:

Have you read and signed the consent form necessary to continue in this focus group session?

Instructions:

The following questions relate to the transition process you may have gone through as a result of transitioning from a traditional style of teaching to a blended style of teaching. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and be thorough in your responses. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

1. Please tell the group about yourself and your current position.

2. Please describe the learning environment before implementing a blended learning model.

3. Following the implementation of blended learning, what has been the impact of blended learning on your students and other teachers.

   What was it like at your school in contrast to now?

4. Please describe how the blended model affected the achievement of students within your school.

   Before the implementation of blended learning, how did you see your student's achievement?

5. Please describe the resources that were accessed and/or offered for the preparation of implementing a blended learning model.

How often were you provided professional development opportunities?

6. Please explain teachers' reactions to the blended model.

   What was morale like before blended learning?

   What is morale like now?

7. Please describe how this transition affected you personally and professionally.

8. What additional thoughts do you have about what your experiences were like during the transitioning to a blended learning model?

APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction:

The goal of this research study is to provide a voice to educators as they experience a transition from the traditional model of teaching to a blended model of teaching. You may withdraw from this interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. The researcher will record your answers to questions using an audio recording device and transcribe your answers verbatim at a later date. Your responses to the questions will not identify you in any way. The researcher will keep digital copies of the transcript password protected, and paper copies under lock and key. You have the right to withdraw any statement(s) from this study.

Consent:

Have you read and signed the consent form necessary to continue in this interview session?

Instructions:

The following questions relate to the transition process you went through while transitioning from a traditional style of teaching to a blended style of teaching. Please answer each question as honestly as possible and be thorough. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to become a teacher?

2. Please describe the blended classroom environment compared to your idea of a traditional environment.

3. Please describe your situation before you entered the blended learning program.

   How was it different from your current situation?

4. Please describe how the transition process to the blended learning program affected your role as a teacher.

5. Please describe how the transition from a traditional teaching model to a blended learning model has influenced or changed your professional or personal life.

6. What challenges did you face when transitioning to a blended learning environment?

   How did you cope with those changes?

7. Please describe any strategies you use to help transition students from a traditional learner to a self-directed learner.

8. Please describe any professional development you have participated in as well as any training preparing you to teach in a blended learning environment.

9. Please describe how these professional developments contributed to your teaching in the classroom.

10. Please describe the impact of blended learning on the students.

APPENDIX G: BLOG QUESTIONS

Introduction:

The goal of this research study is to provide a voice to educators as they experience a transition from the traditional model of teaching to a blended model of teaching. You may withdraw from this interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. The researcher will record your answers to questions using an audio recording device and transcribe your answers verbatim at a later date. Your responses to the questions will not identify you in any way. The researcher will keep digital copies of the transcript password protected, and paper copies under lock and key. You have the right to withdraw any statement(s) from this study.

Consent:

Have you read and signed the consent form necessary to continue in this blog session?

Instructions:

The following questions relate to the transition process you may have personally experienced transitioning from a traditional style of teaching to a blended style of teaching. Please answer each question as honestly as possible, and be thorough. Please use pseudonyms in the discussion.

1. Please describe what it was like to transition to a blended learning environment, and please provide as much detail as possible.

2. How does student achievement affect your beliefs about the blended learning environment?

3. What advice would you give to educators who are about to transition to a blended learning program?

APPENDIX H: SITE PERMISSIONS

Date:

[Name]
[Position]
[School Name]
[School Street Address]
[School City/State/Zip Code]

Dear [Name]:

As a graduate student at Liberty University in the School of Education, I am conducting research as a part of the requirements for a doctorate degree in curriculum and instruction. The title of my research study is *Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Transitioning from the Traditional Teaching Model to the Blended Learning Model: A Phenomenological Study.* The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the shared experiences of teachers who are transitioning from a traditional style of teaching to a blended learning mode of teaching. A deeper understanding of this unique group of teachers may prove beneficial to better inform those who train and support these teachers.

I am writing to request permission to conduct my research at [Name of School], utilizing an email list provided by you. Potential co-researchers will receive a brief introductory email from me and be asked to complete an initial online demographic questionnaire. The information from the questionnaire will be used to determine a pool teachers who meet the criteria for the study. Co-researchers will then be asked to be a part of a focus group, individual interviews, and a reflective blogging activity exploring their own personal experiences of transitioning to a blended learning environment. Co-researchers will sign an informed consent prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and co-researchers are welcome to withdraw at any time.

Thank you for considering to allow this research at your school. If you choose to grant permission, please send me an email at ███████████████ stating that you are granting permission for me to email and speak to your teachers, along with your school's name, your name, and date.

Sincerely,
Lisa Manross
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

APPENDIX I: ELECTRONIC SURVEY CONSENT AND DIRECTIONS

Electronic Survey Consent:

Minimal research is available on teachers' experiences as they transition from a face-to-face teaching model to a blended learning model. This survey was designed to collect initial information about teachers' experiences as they relate to a transition in teaching style. The information collected from this survey may help advance the needs of teachers and increase the interest in the phenomenon. The participation in this survey is voluntary. Any information gathered from this survey will be confidential and not linked to you specifically in any way.

About this survey:

The purpose of this survey is to gather general demographic data and provide some specific information about transitioning to a blended learning model.

If you have experienced a transition from a traditional face-to-face teaching style to a blended learning model, please proceed with the survey. At the end of the survey, a screen will appear with my contact information if you would be willing to participate further in the study.

Definition of transitioning teaching style:

The transitioning of teaching style, for the purposes of this study, will be a transition from a traditional style of teaching to a blended learning style of teaching. A traditional style is generally when students spend their day at school learning primarily from a teacher. Blended learning is a combination of students spending time online learning content mixed with face-to-face classroom instruction at a brick and mortar school.

Blended Learning may include:

d. Students are learning content online at home and/or at school but also attend classes to

    get instruction from teachers.

e. Students spend a majority of their time learning content online but attend classes once or

    twice a week depending on needs.

f. Students take classes not offered at their local high school online but also attend classes

    on a campus.

Thank you for your time.

If you have any further questions, please contact me at █████████████

    d.   I confirm I have read the information above and understand the conditions. _____ Yes

    e.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at anytime without

        providing a reason and free from consequences. _____ Yes

    f.   I agree to participate in the electronic demographic survey for this study. ___ Yes

Following the submission of the demographic electronic survey

Below you will find my contact information if you have any further questions. If you would like to participate in the study, please contact me. Please note, if you should elect to participate, all information will be coded to protect your identity and will not be shared with your school or district.

1. Contact me via email. My email address is: █████████████

2. Contact me via telephone. My telephone number is: █████████

Again, Thank you for your time.

Lisa Manross, Researcher
Liberty University
███

APPENDIX J: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS TIMELINE-AUDIT TRAIL

Task	Dates
Receive IRB approval	3/25/2016
Epoche experience prior to data collection	3/26/2016
Peer review of questions	3/27/2016-4/11/2016- emailed to 9 different peer reviewers
Request of recruitments	3/27/2016-3/28/2016- sent to principals
Received lists of recruitments	3/27/2016-3/28/2016-received from principals
Distribute potential co-researcher demographic survey and digital consent	Upon receipt of recruitment lists
Consent forms sent to identified co-researchers for signature	Received before or on the date of the interviews (see interviews)
Schedule, conduct, and transcribe interviews	Upon receipt of consent forms 4/1/2016-4/21/2016- transcribed as I interviewed
Interview with Brooke	4/1/2016
Transcribed interview- Brooke	4/1/2016-4/2/2016
Interview with Martha	4/5/2016
Transcribed interview- Martha	4/5/2016-4/6/2016
Interview with Brandy and Ann	4/7/2016
Transcribed interview with Brandy and Ann	4/8/2016-4/11/2016
Interviewed Joan and Taylor	4/11/2016
Transcribed interview with Joan and Taylor	4/12/2016-4/14/2016
Interview with Karen	4/12/2016
Transcribed interview with Karen	4/15/2016
Interview with Seymour	4/14/2016
Transcribed interview with Seymour	4/14/2016
Interview with JP	4/15/2016
Transcribed interview with JP	4/20/2016
Schedule, conduct, and transcribe focus group	4/17/2016-4/29/2016
Atlas.ti© data upload, code, analyze	5/7/2016-5/24/2016
Member checks for accuracy	5/15/2016
Co-researchers review of themes	5/24/2016
Draft chapters 4 and 5	5/24/2016-7/14/2016
Sent to Chair for review	7/14/2016
Make minor corrections to Chapters 4 and 5	7/21/2016 – 7/27/2016
Sent to committee	7/27/2016
Returned from committee	8/17/2016
Defense Date	9/8/2016
Sent to Chair for review	7/14/2016
Make minor corrections to Chapters 4 and 5	7/21/2016 – 7/27/2016
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Defense Date	9/8/2016