<u>A TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND SOCIAL
PRESENCE IN A BLENDED LEARNING COMMUNITY COLLEGE ESL COURSE</u>

by

Allison Omohundro
A Dissertation
Submitted to the
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of
Doctor of Arts
Community College Education

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DEDICATION

This dissertation work is dedicated to my family. A special feeling of gratitude to my parents, Dan and Karen Sauveur whose words of encouragement and pride carried me through my journey in education. My sister Kristin has supported me while setting an exemplar for hard work and persistence. I also want to give special thanks to my husband William Omohundro for being there for me throughout the entire doctorate program. You have been my greatest support system.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Blended Learning .... BL
Computer-Assisted Language Learning .... CALL
Community of Inquiry…………………………………………………COI
English as a Second Language .... ESL
Face-to-Face Instruction…………………………………………………..F2F
Learning Management System .... LMS

ABSTRACT

A TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND SOCIAL PRESENCE IN A BLENDED LEARNING COMMUNITY COLLEGE ESL COURSE

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This dissertation will address the views of an experienced instructor of a blended learning (BL) community college English as a Second Language environment. The research will explore the BL community college setting from the perspective of an instructor on how the fostering and action of social presence impacts the course. The aim of the study is to understand how an English as a Second Language instructor plans for language learning and fosters social presence so that ideas might be developed for the successful implementation of BL community college environments in the future that will support English language learning.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

A sense of classroom community is defined as the "spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals" (Rovai, 2002, p.11) that occurs within a classroom environment, either virtual or physical. A sense of classroom community has been found to correlate with important educational outcomes, including retention and academic achievement (Abedin, Daneshgar, & D'Ambra, 2010; Drouin, 2008; Lamport & Bartolo, 2012; Liu, Gomez, & Yen, 2009; Pichon, 2016; Wang, 2010). Yet many English as a Second Language (ESL) students feel disconnected from their classroom learning community (Jiménez & Rose, 2010) which can have an impact on motivation, interest, and achievement (Dörnyei and Csizer, 2002). Peirce (1995) spoke in terms of investment for ESL students in the classroom:

> …for a new learner of English to take the risk of using the fledgling language in spite of the fear of being misunderstood or laughed at, the learner must believe that there is a substantive payoff in language use. The user's social identity in the new language and new culture is being formed, and for the time being, the new identity is fragile (p. 17).

Instructors need to develop social communities of learners that both support students and incorporate the identities that ESL students bring to the classroom (Rance-Roney, 2009).

Many practitioners suggest that blended learning (BL) is an avenue to explore in order to boost learner engagement (Tay, 2016; Woltering, Herrler, Spitzer, & Spreckelsen, 2009; Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2009) and in the process encourage ESL students to become a part of the classroom community (Senior, 2010) and develop a social presence, an ability to identify and communicate with the community (Garrison, 2009) during class interactions.

The term blended learning is generally applied to the practice of combining both online and face-to-face learning experiences when teaching students within one course. In a blended-learning environment, for example, students would meet with a teacher in a traditional classroom setting, while also independently completing online assignments for the course outside of the classroom (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005). The delivery of the online part of the course is usually through learning technologies, typically involving a Learning Management System (LMS), such as Blackboard or Canvas, and the use of synchronous and asynchronous electronic tools (Bersin, 2004).

BL is a bridge for all universities between e-learning and traditional teaching (Hubackova, 2015). Because e-learning came first, its origins are important to BL. "E-learning is all forms of electronic supported learning and teaching, which are procedural in character and aim to affect the construction of knowledge with reference to individual experience, practice, and knowledge of the learner" (Tavangarian, Leypold, Nölting, Röser, & Voigt, 2004, p. 274). The belief has been gaining ground that the most constructive way to implement e-learning is not as a singular entity, but as the integrated process of BL (Hubackova, 2015). In the case of BL, the role of the teacher is not

replaced with online instruction but rather is enhanced. The role of the instructor becomes one of facilitator rather than lecturer (Bauer-Ramazani, Graney, Marshall, & Sabieh, 2016; Han, 2015; Webb, Doman, & Pusey 2014).

An important element for fostering social presence and a sense of community in blended learning is the instructor's involvement in both virtual and physical settings. It is also important for instructors to push their students to engage in critical analyses and higher-order thinking in the online environment (Whiteside, 2015). Teachers' instruction influences students' perceptions (Asri Humaira, Rasmitadila, Widyasari, & Rachmadtullah, 2019), so the implementation and use of the different resources and tools of a course will impact students' perceptions of how important and useful these resources and tools are to their language learning (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Instructors are still navigating the models of a BL environment and are continually learning more about how to maximize student learning in a multimodal program with a learning management system, social media tools (Abdillah, 2016; Aurangzeb, 2018; Comas-Quinn, 2011; Woodley & Meredith, 2012), and traditional classroom tools (Bender, 2012). Blended learning programs can be challenging because instructors and learners are maneuvering among the different modes of BL which requires a lot of adaptability and increases the need for social presence (Whiteside, 2015).

Different from e-learning courses where students may experience the lack of presence of a teacher and other classmates, a BL design offers features of e-learning, and incorporates components from traditional education that promote student success, such as group work and one-on-one discourse with a teacher (Hotle & Garrow, 2015). McGuire

(2016) noted fully online instructors have great difficulty in facilitating quality interactions among students in asynchronous online discussion forums, but they also mentioned challenges of interacting with their students individually, which accords with previous studies of faculty perception of online instruction (Chiasson, Terras, & Smart, 2015). As Deggs, Grover, and Kacirek (2010) noted, faculty's perceptions of their effectiveness in an online class are challenged by students, particularly if the faculty does not engage the students in discussion or if they are slow in providing timely and relevant feedback (p. 698).

An instructor who is implementing BL in their classroom could benefit from understanding the definition and origin of BL as well as the varied models and which models best fit their learning outcomes for a specific course. More attention needs to center on the practitioner's use of BL regarding their perception of effective instruction for social presence and language learning. In addition, focus needs to shift in BL research to community colleges where instructors tend to face more challenges in the implementation and delivery process than in 4-year institutions (Crawford, Barker, & Seyam, 2014; Crookston & Hooks, 2012).

Blended learning in community colleges.

Today's community colleges are responsible for improving social mobility despite growing economic inequality while also working to make the U.S. more globally competitive (Century Foundation Press, 2013). Two-year colleges face the task of educating students who have the greatest academic and economic needs while simultaneously receiving lower financial support than 4-year institutions (Century

Foundation Press, 2013; Desrochers & Wellman, 2011). Practitioners need research-based information about the effectiveness of BL methods, especially at the community college level. While the terms blended learning and hybrid learning are used interchangeably at community colleges and varying definitions exist, this paper uses the definition by Rovai and Jordan (2004) in which BL is "a mix of classroom and online learning that includes some of the conveniences of online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact" (p. 1).

Community colleges can benefit from a hybrid of virtual and physical learning (Snart 2017). Flexibility is an important asset that community college students are seeking when choosing courses (Jaggars, 2014, Snart, 2017). Community college instructors need to design and implement courses that reflect the diverse student population. Additionally, educators need to provide support for technology on the LMS and online resource support for students when they are outside of the classroom (Snart, 2017).

The affordability of community colleges attracts many multilingual and international students seeking to improve their English language skills (Hagedorn & Li, 2017; Yueh-ching, 2016). In fact, ESL is one of the fastest growing programs in many community colleges and across all types of adult education programs (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2015). The site for this research is among the top five community colleges with the highest numbers of international student enrollments (Institute of International Education, 2017).

BL has been widely used in English language teaching since at least 2007, when Sharma and Barrett wrote about blended learning tools and applications that may lead to language learning success in the classroom if used appropriately and knowledgeably. According to Watanabe and Swain (2008), multiple studies have examined the nature of peer-peer instructional conversation and its significance to ESL learning from a socio-cultural theory perspective. ESL instructors need to incorporate a more student-centered approach, encouraging students to have conversations with each other in and outside of the classroom (Yueh-ching, 2016). The socio-cultural nature of teaching and learning in ESL classes requires instructors to take on the role of the cultural broker in ESL classrooms. Lack of awareness of students' identities associated with their unique, but connected, communities could impact a student's interest in the language practices of the classroom (Darvin & Norton, 2014). Instructors must find strategies that deal with individual differences in learners through using instruction that meet the needs and characteristics of ESL students.

Research into the area of the use of technology that has potential to boost student achievement with ESL students is relevant and needed (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012; Chen, 2016; Silverman & Hines, 2009). Diverse forms of online communication, including email messages, discussion forums, online chatting, and social networking, have supplemented the teaching and learning of second and foreign languages over the last two decades (Fotos & Browne, 2004; Kern & Warschauer, 2000; Paepe, Zhu, Depryck, 2018). Despite these varied communication styles, there is little research on the

development of social community within an online environment blended in the ESL community college setting.

Building community and social presence in language learning.

Following the sociocultural tradition in language and learning research (Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998) in the last decades, a number of ESL researchers have begun to explore students' online language tasks by observing the interaction between learners and their sociocultural contexts (Slavkov, 2015). Learning is seen as a process of becoming a member of a certain community (Lave, 1991, p. 65), including gaining "the ability to communicate in the language of this community and act according to its norms" (Sfard, 1998, p. 6). In an educational institution, ESL students are seen to participate in "negotiated literacy" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 61) by seeking meaningful learning and defining their group role based on the benefits and limitations of the contexts in which they find themselves, including cultural norms, social expectations, and institutional ideologies, as well as students' goals, personal histories, and familial obligations (Fuchs, 2016; Jang & Jiménez, 2011; Yu and Lee, 2016). ESL research has begun to explore the advantages that online communication provides to adult ESL learners in order to make language learning meaningful and sustainable (Coryell & Chlup, 2007; Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Paepe et al., 2018). The studies examined involve primarily online courses and lack a range of ethnically and culturally diverse participant groups. Further research needs to concentrate on BL courses in conjunction with the ways in which ESL instructors consider the sociocultural background of each student when planning for collaborative activities.

Digital communications have been used in second language teaching since the early 1990s. Chapelle (2001) stated nearly two decades ago, "Everyday language use is so tied to technology that learning language through technology has become a fact of life" (p. 1). Presently, Kessler (2018) observes, "technology use has become so ubiquitous in our daily lives that the absence in our classroom is quite noticeable" (p. 206). The principal idea of BL in second language education is to achieve a more effective and efficient way to promote second language teaching and learning by combining two different but complementary modes: computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies and face-to-face (F2F) interaction (Hong & Samimy, 2010). Computer assisted language learning (CALL) is thought to be able to fulfil the principles of language teaching by providing more communicative practices with the use of technology (Mishan, 2005). In contrast to the traditional classrooms where face-to-face discussions are often held, the open-access online discussions enable every member to think critically about their posts before submitting them to classmates and instructors. It is also important, however, to draw on Warschauer (1996) to mark a distinction between the research conducted on classes with computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and blended courses. CALL is the collection of instructional tools, not instruction deliveries, and while it is possible for a BL course to incorporate CALL technologies, CALL by itself cannot constitute a blended course.

The aim of this study was to carefully examine the use of synchronous and asynchronous assignments in a BL course, using CALL tools, for different types of ESL learners, in order to enhance their English language acquisition and foster social

presence. Specifically, this research focused on how an experienced ESL instructor

perceived the use of technology and course materials in a blended class to involve

students in face-to-face and online discussions and foster a social presence while

promoting language learning. While research in ESL and collaboration in academic

contexts has shed light on learning language, blended learning environments, in which

ESL students engage in English and make it meaningful to them, have received far less

attention**.** With a social presence perspective, this qualitative case study examined the

discursive practices of a blended community college ESL classroom and of its online

discussion forums and assignments with the goal of learning what instructional practices

are most and least effective in promoting language learning.

Statement of the Problem

ESL students are currently the fastest growing population of students in the

United States (Barr, Eslami, Joshi, Slattery, & Hammer, 2016; Kanno & Kangas, 2014;

Dobbins & Rodriguez, 2013). In 2006, Fu and Matoush reported, "the number of English

language learners in the U.S. over age five has grown from 23 million to 47 million, or by

103 percent" (p. 10). ESL students enrolled at colleges and universities have diverse

educational experiences and linguistic abilities. In addition, ESL students have unique

motivations for learning English. Meeting ESL students' diverse needs can create

instructional challenges in the classroom.

In community colleges, instructors face challenging work environments such as

additional workloads for adjuncts, a need to teach a wide variety of courses, and lack of

time for professional development (Brock et al., 2007; Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl,

& Leinbach, 2008). Without knowledge of best practices and proper guidance on how to foster a social learning community, ESL instructors cannot adequately strive for successful language learning among their students. Technology offers a way to address the diversity of student needs within one class by allowing teachers to customize instruction in online platforms, often with limited burden on the teacher.

According to Graham, Allen, and Ure (2005), there are three main reasons for choosing BL: (1) improved pedagogy, (2) increased access/flexibility, and (3) increased cost effectiveness. In the review of the literature, it is apparent that blended learning means different things to different people and that a definition of BL "depends upon the context and purposes of the developers" (Dewar & Whittington, 2004, p.4). The reasons for implementation from Graham et al. (2005) seem to be speaking to the burdens that community college teachers face in their classrooms. These instructors as developers have an obligation to work within a minimal budget (Crawford et al., 2014; Crookston & Hooks, 2012), provide instruction to non-traditional students (Mullin, 2012), and maintain education derived from current best practices, which includes technology (Li, 2013). Studies indicate that community college English language teachers have more of a burden in developing courses under those stipulations due to learning various technological skills, staying updated in the field of English language teaching, and meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse generation of learners (Webb et al., 2014).

There is limited research on not only how the community college ESL teacher can blend both practices (Ingerson, 2011) successfully in a classroom, but also what factors impact the satisfaction and success for both themselves and the learner. Also, while a few

studies have looked at teachers' perceptions of blended learning and social presence (Ndlovu & Mostert, 2018), even fewer, if any, have examined whether teachers have a good understanding of how social presence is formed effectively in the learning community of an ESL community college environment. The challenge for ESL instructors is fostering effective social presence in the online portion of a BL setting where paralinguistic cues such as facial expression and intonation are often absent. The present study, therefore, aimed to examine the attitudes and perceptions of a teacher on F2F and online assignments meant to develop social presence and promote language learning in an ESL community college BL course.

This study is built on the previous studies of blended learning and social presence in a Community of Inquiry Framework (So & Brush, 2008; Jusoff & Khodabandelou, 2009). Despite the positive impact of social presence on learners' satisfaction with a course (Leafman, Mathieson, & Ewing, 2013), it is still unclear what role social presence plays in an ESL instructor's design and implementation process, as well as student's achievements in language learning. The previous literature also mainly investigated the role of social presence on students' satisfaction with online courses rather than in a blended course or the teacher's perspective. Further research that investigates the role of social presence in a BL community college ESL setting would be beneficial with the goal of understanding what creates social presence and promotes language learning.

Purpose

This research aimed to recognize the rich social, linguistic, cultural, and academic potential that ESL learners develop when an instructor adapts curriculum and

assignments to encourage those capabilities. Practices and resources are needed to guide

instructors on how technology can be used to effectively foster social presence and meet

the language learning needs of ESL learners. The affective component of social presence

exemplifies the use of humor, emotions, and self-disclosure (Leafman & Mathieson,

2014). The interactive element includes acknowledgement, appreciation, and return of

communication among learners (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010; Rourke,

Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2001).

ESL students are ethnically and linguistically diverse and they bring a wide range

of sociocultural backgrounds and learning styles to the class to facilitate their learning

(Li, 2013). Accordingly, second language learning has begun to focus on incorporating

the sociocultural context in ESL classroom settings to assist learners in their language

development (Aimin, 2013; Behroozizad, Nambiar, & Amir, 2014; Lantolf & Thorne,

2006; Panahi, Birjandi, & Azabdaftari, 2013). By perceiving the language classroom as a

learning community, ESL instructors can develop the construct of the "strategic

classroom" that makes "maximum use of affective, cognitive, metacognitive, and social

learner strategies to influence effective learning communities" (Takeuchi, Griffiths, &

Coyle 2007, p. 91).

Deriving from socio-constructivism, Garrison, Anderson, and Archer's (2000)

Community of Inquiry Theory (CoI) provides a method for designing and maintaining the

socially constructed nature of traditional classroom learning in virtual

environments. Garrison et al. introduced their model as a "pragmatic organizing

framework of sustainable principles and processes for the purpose of guiding online

educational practice," (Swan, Garrison, & Richardson, 2009, p. 5). CoI has gained

momentum in instructional design and BL research that emphasizes theory to practice.

CoI has three main elements: cognitive, social, and teaching presence (Garrison,

Anderson, & Archer, 2010, p. 6). The teaching presence, referring to how instructors

sequence the learning activities and facilitate learning (Koh, Herring, & Hew, 2010),

encompasses the design, direction, and support of student activities that can lead to a

powerful learning experience (Rubin, Fernandes, & Avgerinou, 2013). Cognitive

presence refers to the development of critical thinking skills (Scherer Bassani, 2011); the

engagement with course concepts; and the ability to create meaning out of ideas, develop

and build competence via discussion, and reflect and apply the newfound meaning

(Rubin et al., 2013).

Liu et al (2009) found that social presence is a predictor of community college

course retention and final grade achievement in online environments at community

colleges. Social presence, an effective way to support the social and interpersonal

communication required for online teaching and learning (Lowenthal & Dunlap, 2014),

includes affective responses and expression, open communication with others during the

course, and cohesive communicative responses (Ice, Swan, Diaz, Kupczynski, & Swan

Dagen, 2010; Rourke et al., 2001; Rubin et al., 2013). Studies involving the CoI

framework, specifically social presence, have largely focused on online learning

exclusively. This study examined social presence in the blended environment with an

ESL population at a community college.

BL has the potential to provide students a sense of belonging in the online portion of a course (Sorden & Munene, 2013) that can be provided by the fostering of social presence. There is also a strong correlation between social presence and student satisfaction (Barker, 2015; Downing, Spears, & Holtz, 2014; Hsieh, Wu, & Marek, 2017; Lee & Huang, 2018; Lyons, Reysen, & Pierce, 2012; McGuire, 2016; Sorden & Munene, 2013) that can increase student engagement. BL facilitators must promote an authentic learning community to engage students in their learning (Tu, Sujo-Montes, Yen, Chan, & Blocher, 2012). In order to retain and motivate ESL students, institutions and educators must continue to look for innovative ways to meet evolving student learning needs. While learning outcomes appear to stay constant in both F2F and BL environments (Crawford et al., 2014; Palmer, Shaker & Hoffman-Longtin, 2014; Ryan, Kaufman, Greenhouse, She, & Shi, 2016; Xu & Jaggars, 2013), students in blended-learning environments have reported increased satisfaction with a strong, collaborative community in both the online and face-to-face components (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Dixson, 2010; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). Oliver and Trigwell (2005) have attributed the student satisfaction advantage to variation theory to explain the increase in learning as resulting from the blending of instructional approaches. Their study explored how the three factors of social presence, collaborative learning, and student satisfaction correlate with each other in BL environments.

In online collaborative learning, strategies promoting the feeling of connectedness and belonging have appeared to be critical for learners (Hara, Bonk, & Angeli, 2000; Kitchen & McDougall, 1998). As a result, social presence can be considered a social and

communication factor that is particularly critical to distance learners' perception of psychological distance with their instructor and other learners (Gunawardena & McIsaac, 2004). Closely tied to social presence is the concept of instructor immediacy (Sung & Mayer, 2012) which applies to both face-to-face and online facilitation, and is generally defined as verbal and non-verbal behavior that reduces the psychological and transactional distance (Baker, 2004) An important argument in the earlier social presence theory is that different types of communication media have different abilities to affect an individual's perception of social presence (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). Early in social presence research, Gunawardena (1995) noted that practitioners who engage in studying skills and techniques related to fostering social presence will have the greatest impact on student perceptions. Therefore, there is a need for research on collaborative language assignments used in blended environments to determine effectiveness for social presence and positive perceptions.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of an ESL teacher in a blended learning environment on fostering language learning and social presence. The teacher perception focused initially on why they developed assignments in the blended setting and how those assignments impacted language learning. The second focus was on the teacher's perception of how their course fostered social presence within the face-to-face and online modes. The study was conducted at a community college campus in Northern Virginia in an ESL blended course (hybrid) in the area of reading. This study sought to broaden the existing body of research in language learning, social presence, and blended learning by examining an ESL instructor's attitudes towards

the constructs and evaluation of their students' learning during a spring semester at the community college level by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the approach of an experienced community college English as a Second Language teacher to structuring a blended learning course to promote language learning?

RQ2: What are the teacher's perceptions of assignments that most effectively fostered social presence and promoted language learning in an English as a Second Language blended learning community college course?

RQ3: What are the teacher's perceptions of assignments that least effectively fostered social presence and promoted language learning in an English as a Second Language blended learning community college course?

Significance

In a 2010 EDUCAUSE report titled "Blended Learning: A Report on the ELI (EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative) Focus Session," authors Diaz and Brown suggest that "over the past 10 years, blended learning has matured, evolved, and become more widely adopted by institutions of all types" (p. 2). The community college's diverse setting presents an ideal opportunity for blended teaching and learning to serve ESL students in an impactful way. As the Diaz and Brown report goes on to say, blending online and face-to-face learning allows institutions to "address learners' specific needs and customize the learning environment rather than rely on a one-size-fits-all approach" (p. 2).

While there is an abundant amount of research on the integration of technology in language learning, focus on the effects of a blended approach on ESL students at the community college level is minimal. Research that specifically addresses ESL students tends to focus primarily on online assignments in place of the F2F, rather than a hybrid of both instructional types (Al-Jarf, 2004; Campbell, 2007). A focus on quality blended instructional deliveries is imperative in order to implement BL courses into community colleges across the United States to fully promote language learning achievement.

The unique feature of blended classes is that they offer two instructional delivery methods. Educators who advocate online-only instruction often cite the opportunity for students who might normally be shy or feel intimidated in a face-to-face classroom to find their voice through online assignments. This, they claim, allows marginalized students to establish themselves as part of the classroom community (Palmer, Holt, & Bray, 2008). Other researchers argue, however, that online communicative assignments, such as discussion boards, negatively impact students who feel self-conscious and will cause them to limit their participation (Zhao & McDougall, 2008). Previous research suggests that an LMS, such as Blackboard, is structured to facilitate formal and monitored communication, and is therefore unable to provide adequate and meaningful social presence for participants if used in isolation (Brazington, 2012).

Students want to feel connected with their teachers and other students in an online class (Dikkers, Whiteside, & Lewis, 2013). Social presence is a strategy that faculty can use to increase student involvement and engagement in the blended classroom when collaboration occurs online that may have a positive effect on student success, such as

persistence and academic achievement. Social presence, concerning ESL learners, is found to be more critical than the other two constructs in the CoI framework (Estrada, Doupoux, & Wolman, 2005) because language learners tend to have more of a need to establish a connection in the community in order to interact with peers (Becerra, 2012). BL could potentially solidify the classroom community by providing students differing ways to communicate, allowing them to choose the best and most comfortable ways to express themselves. Research in BL needs to begin to aid educators in gaining insight in how to foster a learner's sense of connectedness in order to promote student language learning in the community college setting.

Organization of Study

This dissertation research will be presented in five chapters. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature, including the impact of social presence in BL environments and the challenges instructors and students face in those courses. Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study, including participants and setting, measurement and research design, procedures, data collection, and analysis. Chapter Four presents the study's findings and results of data analysis for the faculty pre/post interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations. Chapter Five provides a discussion of the findings, implications of the findings for theory and practice, recommendations for future research, and conclusions.

Definition of Terms

For clarification and to assist the reader of this study, definitions and explanations are provided of important terms used in the research.

Asynchronous

Learning happens when a time lag exists between the presentation of instructional material and student responses to that material (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009).

Blended Learning

Although multiple definitions exist, and the term 'hybrid' is also used synonymously in research, this study uses the meaning by Rovai and Jordan (2004) where BL is "a mix of classroom and online learning that includes some of the conveniences of online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact" (p. 1).

Collaboration

In order to narrow the focus of collaboration to its value in education, the study employs the definition by Roschelle and Teasley (1995) where they state that collaboration is "The mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem together" (p. 70). The academic work to be examined in this study will be taken from both F2F and virtual tasks.

Community of Inquiry Model

The Community of Inquiry Model was developed through an emphasis on three elements of presence: teaching, cognitive, and social presence. The research in this study will focus on the area of social presence exclusively. This model represents the space where interaction occurs online between learners, teachers, and the learning material (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001, p. 88). The social presence component will also be observed in the F2F environment for this study.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning

Computer-Assisted Language Learning, according to Beatty (2003) is "Language learning in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language" (p. 7). While BL is a type of instructional delivery, CALL applications serve as avenues to deliver the type of online tasks in which instructors would like to have students engage virtually.

ELL

English Language Learners, or non-native English speakers learning English (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009).

EFL Learner

English as a Foreign Language, a learner taught English in a country where it is not a first language (Shawer, 2010; Wu & Alrabah, 2009).

ESL Learner

English as a Second Language learner. The learning is usually taking place in a country that predominantly speaks English (Warren & Miller, 2015). The other names used in research are English Language Learner and English as a Foreign Language Learner (EFL). ESL will be used in this study.

Social Presence

Social presence is "the ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities" (Garrison, 2009, p. 352). For the purpose of this study, the community refers to the BL course in which the

participant is enrolled. Social presence subset categories included personal/affective,

open communication, and group cohesion.

Synchronous

Palloff and Pratt identify communication as synchronous when "those

communicating do so at the same time" (1990, p.189). Synchronous communication can

be done in a virtual or F2F setting.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents the rationale for conducting research on the effect of blended learning instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms at the community college level. The review of the literature includes studies that focus on the use of social presence in blended ESL environments in addition to strictly online environments with traditional college students. Studies in this literature review also focus on pedagogy that promotes language learning in a blended learning environment. The studies have contributed to the research on social presence and language learning because they provided direction for methodology, extensive literature review, and focus for the purpose and significance of this study.

Additionally, to support the review on fostering social presence in BL, the literature includes studies on teacher perceptions of social presence and language learning in BL and the benefits and challenges to BL that might influence those feelings and learning outcomes. Literature on perceptions are included because perceived social presence by students has been positively associated with student learning outcomes (Hostetter & Busch, 2013; LaPointe & Gunawardena, 2004; Liu et al., 2009; Swan et al., 2008). However, research is limited on teacher perceptions of social presence and language learning when designing a course which therefore guides the research questions for this study. The body of literature selected is based on relevance to the topics of social presence and a sense of community in blended English language learning classrooms.

The literature review in this study discloses various perceptions of social presence and language learning and the value of social presence in learning communities while delivering quality blended instruction.

The Flipped Model of Blended Learning

A BL environment could look different in every classroom. A BL model can be implemented at an activity level, course level, program level, or institutional level (Graham, 2006; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003). This research focused on the course level assignments, and the impact of those assignments on a teacher's perception of social presence and quality language learning in a blended learning environment. Lee and Wallace (2017) investigated language learning in a blended classroom and reported that flipped learning allows students autonomy in their own learning and reinforces their comprehension, performance, and confidence through a repeated process. While most literature on the impact of beliefs on language learning is situated within the traditional classroom, investigations on how teacher's beliefs influence language learning in a flipped classroom could expand the literature by enacting the flipped classroom approach in an English language classroom.

In 2011, Staker and Horn profiled forty organizations that offered a blended learning environment within brick-and-mortar classrooms and identified six models of blended learning. In 2012, they further narrowed the models down from six to four structures: station, lab, flipped, and individual (Staker & Horn, 2012). Of these structures, the flipped-classroom model has been seen most frequently in college BL courses (Jensen, Kummer, & Godoy, 2015) and will be focused on in this literature review. In a

flipped model, students rotate on a fixed schedule between face-to-face guided practice in a classroom and online content and instruction asynchronously from an off-campus, alternative location. Students spend their time in the classroom participating in collaborative activities with classmates, in a lab with online tools, and at an off-campus location learning course content (Jensen et al., 2015).

The concept of flipped learning first emerged in the 1990s. The basic idea involves learners studying new concepts on their own. The classroom, then, becomes a place where students can do homework under the supervision of an instructor, who can offer one-on-one help and guidance whenever they need it (Bailey, Ellis, Schneider, & Ark, 2013, p. 6). Researchers note that flipped learning is not a substitution for traditional learning (Bauer-Ramazani, et al., 2016; Blake, 2009; Vaughan, 2014), but instead, a goal of flipped learning is to allow teachers to become guides to learning instead of being the center of the learning process (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2014; Han, 2015; Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016).

Research in flipped learning has identified four requirements involved in the development for instruction (Hamdan, McKnight, McKnight, & Arfstrom, 2016) including: flexible environment (Chenoweth, Ushida, Murday, & Ushtoa, 2006), learning culture, which enhances motivation in a classroom, (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Hsieh et al., 2017), authentic content (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016), and guidance from an informed perspective (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Coryell & Chlup, 2007). Authentic content, from a professional educator, can be derived from project-based learning (PBL) and multiple informal assessments (Han, 2015) where the

teachers are not simply following a set curriculum designed by the university. Educators can use authentic content to maximize classroom time in order to adopt methods of student-centered, active learning strategies. The flexible environment has the potential to allow for individualizing needs of students and providing students with frequent, personal feedback from the instructor (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2014).

Through flipped learning, research has shown that teachers are able to assist students during class time without sacrificing direct instruction (Bergman & Sams, 2012; Kim, Byun, & Lee, 2012) and enabling students to take ownership of their own learning in order to be autonomous, lifelong learners (Hsieh et al., 2016; Kvashina & Martynko, 2016; Pinto-Llorente, Sánchez-Gómez, García-Peñalvo, & Casillas-Martín, 2017; Yalçınkaya, 2015). Studies show that with autonomous learners immersed in engaging activities, the classroom can become a setting for meaningful discussion and collaboration (Coryell & Chlup, 2007; Egbert, Herman, & Lee, 2015; Han, 2015). Researchers claim that flipped classrooms give ESL students more opportunities to engage in higher order activities that promote participation and language learning (Evseeva & Solozhenko, 2015; Lee & Wallace, 2017). Egbert, Herman, and Chang (2014) found that through the use of Moodle and flipped strategies, students had opportunities to be involved with authentic language learning materials in the form of audio, text, video, and graphics. Students were able to discuss topics outside of class via the online discussion board, and they were able to learn and practice at times they deemed appropriate rather than being restricted by in-class time restraints (p. 8). Similarly, Hsieh et al. (2017) found that flipped instruction, when using extensive

online interaction, motivated the participants to learn English idioms and to improve their oral ability and engaged participants in the learning tasks, making them more active and competent in using the learned idioms for communicative interaction in class discussions.

One of the most important implications for English language teaching is that the flipped model can encourage discussion and critical thinking which is key to increasing students' language production and collaboration (Chen, Wang, Kinshuk, & Chen, 2014; Davies, Dean, & Bell, 2013; Kostka & Brinks Lockwood, 2015). Mehring (2016) supports flipped learning in ESL courses due to the study's findings that it creates a communicative and student-centered learning environment. Further studies are necessary in order to develop an understanding of flipped instruction in an ESL setting in regard to social presence, specifically in a community college setting. The connection that the current study observed is the student-to-student and teacher-student relationship (Gaughan, 2014; Slomanson, 2014; Van Veen, 2013).

Social Presence in Blended Learning Research

Online interactions have been reported to significantly enhance learning outcomes in online learning contexts (Ravenna, Foster, & Bishop, 2012). Meaningful interactions can facilitate peer relationships between students in a blended synchronous and asynchronous learning course. Garrison et al. (2010) further suggested that social presence occurs when learners are able to identify with a community, communicate within that community, and develop relationships by projecting their personalities. Tu et al. (2012) agreed with their findings and observed that students felt enabled to make learning more personal by projecting positive social digital identities in a community of

learners. Weinel, Bannert, Zumbach, Malzahn, and Hoppe (2011) found that while social

presence does not cause collaboration, it can affect the attitude of participants towards

collaborating on a particular assignment. The study findings showed that ambiguity and

uncertainty in online communication can be minimized through the use of chat protocols

and norms established by the teacher. More research is needed to determine "how such

rules can influence the perceived quality of the communication" (p. 519).

Other researchers have also found a connection between social presence and

blended learning (Jusoff & Khodabandelou, 2009; So & Brush, 2008). Jusoff and

Khodabandelou (2009) found, "social presence is an individual's ability to demonstrate

his/her state of being in a virtual environment and traditional environment and so signal

his/her availability for interpersonal transactions" (p. 81). The study suggests that the

blended mode decreases the psychological distance and also increases interaction

between instructor and students. Similarly, So & Brush (2008) found that a blended

format lowers the psychological distance while still maintaining a positive perception

from students of social interaction. The research also highlighted the importance for

instructors to design courses with meaningful online opportunities to collaborate and

socialize. There is a need for additional research that explains how to accomplish these

goals in a BL classroom. To work collaboratively in the virtual environment of a blended

course, ESL students need carefully structured and supported assignments that facilitate

communicating with their peers.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has emerged as a tool for online

communication and collaboration in blended courses for second language learners. CALL

is a language learning and teaching approach in which a computer is used as a tool for presenting, assisting students, evaluating materials, and promoting interaction (Jafarian, Soori, & Kifipour, 2012). On the use of technology for language learning, Garrett (1991) stated that the power of technology as a medium for supporting new kinds of language learning activities is multiplied by its potential for an unprecedented integration of research and teaching. A CALL lesson has the possibility to create an environment for interesting language learning assignments that could then be fitted with a program collecting data on how the learner makes use of that environment. "The data can not only feedback into improving pedagogy but can also contribute to the development of second language acquisition theory" (Garrett, 1991, p. 94).

Studies of perceptions of social presence have focused on the satisfaction level of group work and class discussions. This dissertation, however, will look at social presence as defined in the introduction. Little research to date has focused on community college faculty members' perceptions of creating digital content to enhance their own social presence with their students in a BL course. Studies have reported online university faculty members' perceptions of video as a useful tool to enhance social presence (Borup, West, & Graham, 2012; Griffiths & Graham, 2009). Another study reporting online university instructors' perceptions of social presence focused on strategies other than creating digital content (Bruce, Young, & Kennedy, 2012). These studies represent a small population of strictly online teaching faculty members and an even smaller representation of community college faculty members.

The perspective from the teacher of how the students, and they themselves, become a part of the community is a question that remains unanswered by the research. More research also needs to be done on the implementation of collaborative assignments, CALL tools, and social presence in BL. The observations in this study of social constructs will allow language teachers in the community college setting to reflect on their classroom community, how they foster social presence, and what integrated assignments achieve the best results for social and language learning. A BL course has both online and face-to-face activities, so identifying how to promote social presence and language learning in both settings needs to be taken into consideration.

Design Guidelines of Blended Learning for Language Learning

Successful BL courses for language learning require carefully designed instruction on the foundation of the learners' needs and abilities (Neumeier, 2005), as well as their potential. Parameters suggested by Neumeier (2005) provide an exemplary rubric for evaluating a BL course design and improving implementation. The framework is composed of 6 parameters: mode(s) (computer assisted and/or face-to-face), model of integration (lead mode guides the learning process and the structure of the course), distribution of learning content and objectives (the tasks pertaining to both modes are arranged and sequenced as well as the use of each of these tasks is determined), language teaching methods, involvement of learning subjects (both students and teachers), and location (virtual and traditional) of learning. CALL as a field still lacks qualitative research on blended learning and parameters such as these offer language teachers a guide in managing online learning components present in blended programs.

For mode, there are two major forms cited for BL by Neumeier, face-to-face interaction and the CALL system, usually on an LMS. Both modes need to be specific to the learning environment and intentional, which aligns with BL research that validates meaningful interactions and assignments (Chapelle, 2009). Once the balance of modes has been decided on for a course, the adoption of a model of integration plays a vital role in the BL environment as the order of modes and their level of integration into the learning process dictates the path of a course. The modes can be organized in a rotating cycle or can be overlapping and parallel. The degree of transactional distance, meaning "the space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of the instructor and those of the learner" (Moore, 1993, p. 22) needs to be assessed during the sequencing. The primary goal is to minimize the level of transactional distance by ensuring that students do not feel isolated or uncertain (Moore, 1993).

Stracke (2007) reported on the fact that some ESL students choose to drop second language courses with a technology component. Stracke determined that one of the main reasons behind their decision had been the failure to see a connection between face-to-face instruction and CALL modes. Based on the results, Stracke suggested language teachers provide transparent connections between the two modes of instruction (face-to-face and online). In terms of the distribution of learning content and objectives for the language classroom, educators must ascertain if the target language skills will be practiced in both modes in parallel, meaning that assignments flow between online and in-person class sessions or they are isolated in one mode or the other. For language

teaching methods, learning techniques in each of the applied modes may vary due to differing manners of interactions in the classroom and virtual environments.

The parameter, involvement of learning subjects, refers to the diverse interactional styles: individual vs. collaborative language learning, teacher and learner roles, and level of autonomy of each mode (Mendieta Aguilar, 2012; Neumeier, 2005). For example, a student's role might change from a passive one, in which the student listens and take notes on a lecture and solves or struggles with homework on their own (Shimamato, 2012), to that of an active participant in a FL classroom when in-class activities focus on discussions, problem solving, and providing meaningful feedback (Baepler, Walker, & Driessen, 2014; Hung,2015; Šafranj, 2013; Zappe, Leicht, Messner, Litzinger, & Lee, 2009). The teacher-to-student and peer-to-peer communication and interaction may help students to elaborate on the issues being studied and may facilitate the transition to active learner (Al-Zahrani, 2015). An active role can require a greater level of autonomy from the learner due to students being faced with a much greater scope and variety of roles than if their actions were only restricted to one mode of learning (Neumeier, 2005). Lastly, location means the educator designs learning spaces, both virtual and in the classroom, to assist students in achieving the goals of the course through the selected modes. These locations can extend to home, outdoors, computer lab, and other institutional settings. According to Neumeier, "locations where learning takes place successfully are social and individual artefacts that are an integral part of a learning culture" (p. 175).

Time and consideration are required to adapt to BL environments for both professors and students (Barr, Leakey, & Ranchoux, 2005; Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016). BL has been practice-led as opposed to research-based (Neumeier, 2005). Academic practice is often sustained by an instructor's understanding of BL rather than a consistent approach across an institution (Zapata, 2004). Neumeier's pedagogical parameters provide a useful framework for teachers to consider when incorporating BL in language learning courses. Nevertheless, the results of Neumeier's study point to the likelihood that time spent in online and traditional modes may not be equally valuable for all students. There is a need for a more ethnographic approach to the research to provide details of the learning environment, such as teacher beliefs about their own roles, relationships, and interactions. Ethnographic research has the potential to capture a complete picture of the BL environment, providing an in-depth correlation of the relationship between contexts and situations of language use (Geertz, 1973).

Wen (2008) proposed the Output-driven/Input-enabled model for second language acquisition and it has been adopted as a primary framework for Flipped Learning by researchers (Hsieh et al., 2016). Wen (2008) emphasizes that the need for output drives learners to pursue input, and input enables learners to produce output. According to Wen's model, teachers are responsible for: (1) designing authentic output tasks that meet and improve the learners' proficiency level; (2) providing appropriate task-based inputs to enhance learner intake; (3) providing appropriate output assistance to improve learner ability; and (4) offering targeted feedback rather than general suggestions (Wen, 2008). Numerous studies positively align with Wen's model (Bauer-Ramazani et al.,

2016; Ferreira, Salinas, & Morales, 2014; Han, 2015; Hsieh et al., 2016; Šafranj, 2013) and indicate that if those parameters are not in place in the online environment, the learner has less of an opportunity to be successful (Compton, 2009).

Practitioners cannot assume that a natural transition in teaching skills from a face-to-face classroom into an online environment will occur. Faculty teaching blended learning courses must adopt new tools and new mindsets to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes (Leonard & DeLacey, 2002). Language teachers need to account for new learning systems, especially considering that the effort and cost of creating online materials "can be wasted without the adequate training of teachers to present and support the learning" (Hampel & Stickler, 2005, p. 312). Ehlers and Schneckenberg (2010) found that practitioners are concerned with their changing roles from information transmitters to facilitators who reinforce social interaction. Hoic-Bozic, Mornar, and Boticki (2009) emphasize that instructor roles need to be redefined from instructor-centered to learner-centered. More investigations are needed to gain insight on the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of faculty when constructing and implementing assignments in blended learning courses.

To aid instructors in the design process, Neumeier concentrates on the design of a course broadly. Wen brings personal feedback and individualized instruction into consideration which plays a significant role in BL success (Hsieh et al., 2016). Neumeier (2005) and Wen (2008) both provide frameworks for implementation and parameters of BL in the classroom. However, both researchers lack a comprehensive guideline for how educators can adopt BL and sustain the positive effects through different courses with

varying learner styles. Both researchers also lack specific recommendations for developing social presence with students from diverse cultural backgrounds in an ESL classroom.

The CoI framework, originally proposed by Garrison et al. (2000) can guide instructors to bring in the social presence piece in their practice in blended education. The framework is based on the "collaborative constructivist" (Garrison et al., 2001, p. 92) perspective of teaching and learning associated with the work of John Dewey (1938) and the foundations of interaction and continuity in the learning environment. Social presence has evolved since the work of Dewey (1938) and Garrison et al. (2001) and is now seen as a factor for learner engagement, knowledge construction, and peer relationships (Armellini & De Stefani, 2016). Due to the influence of social presence on teaching and cognitive presence (Kanuka, Liam and Laflamme, 2007), the other two constructs in the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000), this study focused solely on social presence in the blended learning environment.

Blended Learning in ESL Higher Education

Language learning takes place when learners interact and construct social practices (Block, 2003). BL course design, steeped in a social framework, has potential to encourage learner participation and meaningful interaction between both instructors and their students and students and their peers. A BL college course design must be intentional to create a student-centered, authentic learning community (Tu et al., 2012). A BL approach also allows for communication necessary to help build relationships to promote a rich language learning environment that can be both synchronous and

asynchronous (Webb et al., 2014). During planning for any ESL college course, considering the educational level of the language learners is a top priority. However, with a BL language course, ESL educators also need to understand the students' familiarity with the instructional materials and technological delivery systems when designing a course (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). Once a student's competency level is established, educators are responsible for giving students guidelines on how to use tools specifically for the purpose of acquiring greater language proficiency (Garrett, 2009).

Contextualization, authenticity, and sustainability enrich student content knowledge which promotes linguistic comprehension (Han, 2015; Pinto-Llorente et al., 2017). Many academic settings fail to foster authenticity which can impact pragmatic knowledge (Nikula, 2002). In language classrooms that utilize communicative language teaching (CLT), an approach to language teaching that allows for interaction and engagement with authentic materials, student-centered pedagogy is already in place, but paralleling that with BL instruction allows the teacher to be even more accessible with the added mode of online availability (Webb et al., 2014). Higher education professionals using BL have been able to deliver instruction, including new innovations in technology, which broadened communication and meaningful interaction (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2014; Han, 2015). Thorne (2003, p. 18) also points out that "blended learning represents a real opportunity to create learning experiences that can provide the right learning at the right time and in the right place for each and every individual, not just at work, but in schools, universities and even at home."

Benefits of Blended Learning in ESL Higher Education

The use of a BL model in university language courses has been found to be successful, despite numerous obstacles, in creating an authentic context to support language learning. Obstacles can include the high number of students per class (Bueno-Alastuey, 2009) and the different levels of proficiency among students (Ruiz, Palmer, & Fortanet, 2005). Ananiadou and Claro (2009) suggest that collaboration is one of the most important capabilities that learners can develop for a globally connected world. BL affords ESL students the opportunity to collaborate with meaningful input and interactions (Gillies, 2006; Krashen, 2014). These collaborative interactions can take place outside of the face-to-face classroom to allow more time for genuine language use (Webb et al., 2014; Pennington, 2004).

Combined with technology, BL instruction can introduce an active learning environment with flexibility in using resources for the students and provide more time for faculty members to spend with learners in small groups or even individually (Pinto-Llorente et., 2017; Šafranj, 2013; Yalçınkaya, 2015). Chen and Jones (2007) outlined other advantages of blended learning such as contextualization and understanding of topics by using web-based resources as well as active participation of students in class. Furthermore, online learning engagement provides an interactive setting for communication among teachers and students in the classroom and may facilitate cooperative activities even beyond the classroom (Yuen, 2011).

Regarding using digital communication tools in activities, Dzakiria, Mustafa and Abu Bakar (2006) found that the interaction between students and lecturers as well as

scholarly discussion, both in synchronous video conferencing or asynchronous video-taped communication, is preferred in a blended learning application rather than F2F. Many studies have shown that BL increases student achievement compared to solely online and traditional courses (Bleffert-Schmidt, 2011; Webb et al., 2014; Ferreira et al., 2014; Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016; Šafranj, 2013; Scida & Saury, 2006). In these experimental studies, the investigator actively manipulates which groups receive the agent or exposure under study (Aschengrau & Seage, 2013, p. 137).

Blended learning can also bridge the gap between the traditional sense of community and the loss of it in an online course. Rovai and Jordan (2004) applied a causal-comparative design to investigate the relationship of sense of community in fully online, traditional classrooms, and blended higher education learning environments. They found that blended courses create a stronger sense of community among learners than either traditional or fully online courses. BL provides more productive engagement and active participation among students in the online environment and in course content as well which can lead to improved academic performance (Hsieh et al., 2016; Kvashinina & Martynko, 2016; Tayebinik, & Puteh, 2012).

Finally, BL can increase the amount of input and practice that language learners receive inside and outside of the classroom (Ferreira et al., 2014). In Han's study (2015), the goal of the research was not only fluency development in speaking, but also, because of limited time, autonomous language learner training. The aim was to "train students to know how to learn English effectively and independently" (p. 99). Autonomy, a popular theme in BL (Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016; Pinto-Llorente et al., 2017; Šafranj, 2013;

Yalçınkaya, 2015), is critical for English learners to actively engage in their learning in order to extend and sustain their knowledge. Bender stated (2003, p.6) "research shows that through BL, students become far more active in their own learning, feeling more technologically empowered and able to learn anywhere and anytime in the manner that best suits their lifestyle." Learner autonomy in the ESL setting promotes self-sufficient learners and citizens capable of evaluating problems and inconsistencies in their education and in real world contexts. The current study focused on teacher perceptions of social presence in the BL environment, their impact on student achievement, and the advantageous tasks that drive successful language learning.

Challenges of Blended Learning in ESL Higher Education

Difficulties in language teaching and learning have also been documented in the literature. Blended learning in ESL courses requires different teaching approaches than those in face-to-face classrooms and those in other blended learning subject areas (Compton, 2009). Furthermore, language teachers are burdened with the same challenges as traditional higher education teachers. ESL teachers face limited class time (Han, 2015). Limited practice time hinders the development of linguistic skills (Ferreira et al., 2014). BL can supply ESL teachers with more time inside and outside of the classroom environment for remediation and differentiation (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2014), but BL also requires an additional time commitment for educators. Finding the time for training, both for the educator and the student, on technology tools was an obstacle found in numerous studies (Al-Fudail & Mellar, 2008; Coryell & Chlup, 2007; Han, 2015). In their 2015 study, Mirriahi, Alonzo, and Fox found technology competence

among faculty remains low and technology is used as a management system more than a way to promote student-centered learning.

Researchers found that educators had to find extra time for professional and course development (Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Hubbard, 2008; Mendieta Aguilar, 2012), some of which were lacking in useful outcomes for implementation (Hubbard, 2008). Providing individualized feedback and designing rigorous tasks, while extremely valuable, was noted to be daunting and time consuming, both in online and face-to-face settings (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Webb et al., 2014; Grgurović, 2014; Kvashnina & Martynko, 2016). Another challenge in the technology implementation was getting the students on board with BL synchronous and asynchronous tools (Webb et al., 2014). Benson, Anderson, and Ooms (2011) found that teachers perceived of the work required to develop BL materials as time-consuming and that technology resources were prone to failure.

Challenges to learning can be met and overcome using a variety of methods, but challenges posed by a learning interaction between teacher and student or student and student are difficult to vanquish if adjustments are made by one person alone (Draffan, Rainger, & Ltd, 2006). Meeting the needs of a learner's skills, abilities, and preferences in order to facilitate a particular learning interaction requires the cooperation and involvement of both the educational faculty (represented by the teacher perspective) and of the student (represented by the learner perspective) (Draffan, et al., 2006). Social presence research indicates that establishing environments where instructors and students can project themselves effectively is imperative to their accreditation of a learning setting

(Garrison et al., 2000; Whiteman, 2002). In contrast, when the environment is characterized by low social presence, participants perceive it as impersonal and the amount of information shared decreases (Leh, 2001).

Blended Learning in ESL Community College Higher Education

Community colleges provide open access and affordable options for higher education to a growing population of adult learners in the United States. According to 2015 enrollment data from the American Association of Community Colleges, about 19% of community college students at the national level are Hispanic, 13% are African American, and 13% are Asian (Community college trends and statistics, 2015). About 40% of Hispanic students enrolling in two-year colleges have needed English remediation in Virginia, and 41% nationally (Complete College America, 2016). As Hispanic student enrollment increases, colleges should be intentional with their plans to serve these students.

In light of the changing demographics, community colleges have been looking for innovative ways to meet the academic needs of their non-traditional student body on a diminishing budget. Community colleges tend to have small budgets because they are generally under more pressure than universities to keep tuition and fees low which affects the amount and types of advanced technology that they can afford to purchase (Crookston & Hooks, 2012; Roe, 2009). Community colleges in many parts of the United States cater to lower-income populations who either cannot afford university tuition or are unable to gain admission because of their educational background (McKinney & Backscheider-Burridge, 2015; Roe, 2009). Furthermore, many ESL students at the community college

level tend to be working adults who are struggling to balance work, academic expectations, and familial obligations (Crawford et al., 2014; Roe, 2009). Low socio-economic levels may also mean that these students have little or no experience using, or access to, technology until their first community college class (Crawford et al., 2014; Mate-Martinsen, 2009; McGee & Reis, 2012). On the other hand, there may also be ESL students coming from public education who are knowledgeable in technology due to access in K-12 schools. ESL learners at community colleges are a diverse group. Research on blended learning is minimal and in ESL community college education, the body of research is especially scarce.

A majority of studies that address online learning in higher education focus on well-prepared university students and ignore questions of effectiveness of online learning in community colleges (Xu & Jaggars, 2011). Researchers suggest that the lack of success among students in online courses may be associated with barriers including technical difficulties, a sense of isolation, a relative lack of structure, and a general lack of support (Jaggars, 2011). Additionally, collaborative learning and social presence are not widely researched at the community college level. The findings suggest that more research needs to be done in the community college setting to promote active learning, collaboration, and social presence in the ESL education setting. However, educators must understand that learning is more than gaining knowledge about certain content and that meaningful learning occurs when students effectively collaborate, communicate, and engage in the process (Tu et al., 2012). Therefore, continued research is essential to explore how educators who use blended learning perceive the ways in which it influences

their teaching practices and assists students in the language learning process while establishing a social presence.

Teacher Perceptions of Language Learning and Blended Learning

Riel, Lawless, and Brown (2016) acknowledge that in order for BL to be successfully implemented, it is valuable to understand teachers' perspectives. The authors note that teachers are the ultimate representatives and facilitators of curricula and adhering to their perspective during implementation is paramount for a blended classroom. Comas-Quinn (2011) explored teachers' experiences using blended learning. This mixed-methods study involved both participant observations and a survey followed by interviews. Comas-Quinn identified three emerging themes impacting teachers' abilities to effectively integrate technologies into the curriculum: technical issues, the lack of online tools to integrate course activities or assessments, and shortage of time. These three factors, supported by earlier studies, are among the top reasons for negative teacher perceptions about BL in the classroom (Barr et al., 2005; Lin, Wang, & Lin, 2012). However, the studies in the literature focus predominantly on experiences and strategies for overcoming challenges instead of the direct perceptions and attitudes themselves. Lin et al. (2012) reported that teachers' technology integration was affected by many factors including Instructional Computer Technology (ICT) equipment, support, curriculum, culture, teaching load, leadership, and most importantly, teacher buy-in (Lin et al., 2012). They suggested further research to corroborate the evidence and to understand teachers' personal attributes of technology integration.

In one of the few studies detailing teachers' specific perceptions and concerns of blended learning, Wanner and Palmer (2015) interviewed 47 educators about flexible learning. Teachers overall believed that flexible learning and flipped classrooms specifically required greater amounts of work. Approximately half of all teachers indicated that they had a low level of commitment to the flipped classroom but felt under high levels of pressure to include a flipped component in their courses. Many were engaged in flipping their classes while some teachers had used a flipped classroom "by default." Other participants were "experimenting" with it as they were currently providing a blended learning environment through some online content. Many were open to flipping their classrooms because, as one teacher put it, "our current model of teaching is not sustainable" in a context of budget constraints and more time demands for teachers (p. 361). A concern shared by all teachers was the time commitment and workload required to set up, implement, and manage a flipped classroom. Analysis showed that the time required to implement a flipped classroom was the most prevalent concern and the reasoning behind faculty not engaging in BL instruction, which aligns with the aforementioned studies. In addition, higher education teachers, with the exceptions of innovators who are experimenting with new ideas, are reluctant to change traditional teaching methods (Partridge, Ponting, & McCay, 2011).

Cuban (1986) emphasizes the importance of the educators' role on the success or failure of BL as a pedagogical tool. He describes teachers as "having the password that will unlock the classroom door," and advises community college administration to "understand what questions teachers ask and what criteria they apply as essential to

unlocking the door" (p. 71). Lacking in this body of literature thus far is the faculty's perceptions of the role of social presence within an ESL blended learning environment and techniques they may have adapted to compensate for distance. Without an understanding of their perceptions, it is difficult to create and sustain an effective BL curriculum to motivate students and encourage their own positive perceptions of communicative language learning.

Factors that drive student motivation in BL courses have been researched for a number of years. Educators implementing BL courses cite student motivation as the most important factor in educational success in general (Dörnyei, 2001). Gardner (1985) hypothesized that ESL learners with positive attitudes toward the target culture and people will learn the target language more effectively than those who do not have such positive attitudes. To extend his work, Gardner, along with MacIntyre, (1993) drew together findings from many studies over several decades and developed Gardner's socio-educational model of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The researchers claim that individual-difference variables (e.g., cognitive variables and affective variables), influenced by antecedent factors (e.g., biological factors such as age and experiential factors such as previous language training experience), interact with both formal and informal language acquisition contexts and influence both linguistic and nonlinguistic outcomes (e.g., students' reactions to the learning experience). Gardner and MacIntyre (1993, p. 9) argue that this model shows the importance of what takes place in the learning contexts: "Teachers, instructional aids, curricula, and the like clearly have an effect on what is learned and how students react to the experience." The model also

predicts that students' degree of success (linguistic outcomes) affects their feelings (nonlinguistic outcomes) and that both types of outcomes will have an influence on individual-difference variables including language attitudes and motivation.

Gardner's model coincides with student motivation research that yielded positive attitudes and academic success in BL courses (Han, 2015; Hsieh et al., 2016; Kvashnina & Martynko; Šafranj, 2013). In Hsieh et al.'s (2016) research student perceptions were evaluated in four dimensions: motivation, time commitment required, nervousness in using English, and outcomes. In the study, teachers eased student anxiety by pointing out that the more time and energy students put into their workload, the more successful the students became with their learning. The results also indicated that educators should show students the formative benefits and beneficial outcomes of putting extra effort into a BL course and this should be done early on in the course.

Teacher Perceptions of Social Presence

Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) examined social presence and determined it was "a predictor of satisfaction within a computer-mediated conferencing environment." They continued, "Instructors who are accustomed to relying on nonverbal cues to provide feedback and who have a lesser-developed ability to project their personality will need to learn to adapt to the online medium by developing skills that create a sense of social presence" (p. 23). Social presence research involving practitioners suggests that there are many possible roles and associated behaviors or actions that define online teaching, and these ultimately have an effect on student perceptions and learning. The gap in the research is that it lacks insight into the decision-making processes that instructors engage

in and the reasons for such decisions. Defined as "decisions made during teaching," Tsang (2004) observed the kinds of interactions three ESL teachers made in their teaching of a lesson and the basis for these interactive decisions as it related to their personal practical knowledge. Although Tsang's study focused on traditional classroom teaching, it illustrated how the development of various contextual constraints such as lack of time, equipment breakdowns, and misinterpretations impedes the ability of the instructors to make decisions that allow for building a sense of community.

A greater investment is needed to understand characteristics that may distinguish faculty perspectives about blended learning and social presence, and how they influence student outcomes. Vesely, Bloom, and Sherlock (2007) found that students prioritize instructor modeling, in which an instructor conducts an exhibition of proper skill performance, over interaction and dialogue. They also found that the reverse is true for instructors. A more current view of instructor perspectives in the community college setting is imperative to bridge the gap in the classroom community. The current study will draw on teacher pre- and post-course interviews, document analysis from the LMS, and in-class materials, and classroom observations. DeNoyelles, Zydney, and Chen (2014) suggested two strategies that instructors can use to promote social presence. First, instructors should model good social presence in asynchronous online discussions (DeNoyelles et al., 2014). Second, instructors should require that students participate in the discussions (DeNoyelles et al., 2014). The current research will examine how the instructor implements activities to reinforce those strategies.

The CoI framework construct of social presence can provide practitioners with a model for online community development. Combining classroom and online activities is only a small step in blended learning. Instructors and instructional designers should invest more time and effort on the analysis of learners. Therefore, this study aimed to examine in-depth one instructor's activities and the impact on students' language learning and social presence.

Relationship of the Literature to the Study

Blended learning course offerings have evolved from what began as e-learning courses. Through these offerings, higher education is accessible for students who cannot attend traditional courses. BL courses are especially appealing to community college students who do not reside on campus, are of varying ages, or have work and family responsibilities. While demand for convenient courses is increasing, the BL model has both advantages and disadvantages, as discussed in this chapter. As a result of the prospective advantages to language learning, collaboration, learner autonomy, and student satisfaction are among the major components that have been studied in regard to blended learning.

In this chapter, social presence was discussed through the lens of the CoI theory. The CoI framework provides a comprehensive theoretical model to inform both research on BL and the practice of flipped instruction. The framework suggests that student satisfaction with online learning requires the development of a community that supports meaningful inquiry and deep learning (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). Since strong development of social presence provides a platform for sharing ideas

and supporting learning, educators interested in the effectiveness of online instruction must engage in the development of social presence by fostering community (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). For language learners, this is particularly imperative because relationship-building facilitates authentic writing and communication in English (Vanek, King, & Bigelow, 2018).

Several researchers have studied presence in distance and hybrid courses using specific tools to facilitate authentic communication. Limited research exists, though, on community college teacher perceptions of ESL blended courses in relationship to social presence and language learning. This study aimed to fill a gap in the research by examining a teacher's perceptions of student language learning with the use of blended learning tools and the cultivation of social presence in an ESL course at a Virginia community college campus. Chapter three will detail the methodology, data collection, and analysis for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the case study methodology undertaken in this dissertation. It provides the rationale for the descriptive, single-case design. This dissertation employed qualitative data sources that were obtained from an instructor of an ESL blended learning course at a community college campus at Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC). The primary goal of this study was to explore teacher perceptions of effective instruction to foster social presence and promote language learning in an ESL BL course and how those perceptions may affect learning outcomes. The chapter is organized into four sections: (a) research method and design; (b) population and setting; (c) procedures and data collection; and (d) data analysis.

Research Method and Design

Faculty play a significant role in the success of a university's BL implementation efforts (Christo-Baker, 2004; Graham & Robison, 2007). Despite their involvement, "little has been published regarding faculty application of hybrid teaching" (Porter, Graham, Bodily, & Sandberg, 2016, p.17). As addressed in chapters 1 and 2, there is limited research on how community college ESL instructors can blend F2F and online practices successfully in a classroom in order to promote language learning (Ingerson, 2011). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore a teacher's perception of

a blended learning design that promoted rich social, linguistic, cultural, and academic potential in ESL learners when the instructor adapts curriculum and assignments to encourage those capabilities.

The qualitative case study occurred in the Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) system at a campus in Northern Virginia. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the instructor, utilized documentary analysis, and observed class sessions. To answer the questions posed in the introduction, a phenomenological case study was used to guide this research. This methodology was employed to give voice to the ESL instructor's experiential claims and concerns in the context of their shared environment with students in the class. With this method, I sought to understand the perceptions of a teacher on how they design and implement course assignments to foster social presence and a sense of belonging to the community within the context of a blended learning English language community college course. Creswell (2007) deems this inquiry best for "capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals" (p. 55). A qualitative case study was an appropriate methodology for this research in that it can reveal relevant data about human experiences, expectations, contextual meanings, and causal explanations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2013). Each component of this chapter has been geared to following a qualitative research methodology especially designed for a case study in order to explore a teacher's perceptions of language learning and social presence in the blended learning ESL classroom.

Qualitative research was utilized to provide an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). Forming a connection with the participant led to my responsibility to interpret the participant's understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The research was exploratory; the context and experiences of the participant increased the practical relevance of the findings (Tetnowski, 2015). Case study research has been used in various areas of applied linguistics for the last 30 years (Duff, 2010) to study a wide range of phenomena ranging from bilingualism, language fossilization, and loss to the effects of individual learner differences, identity, and gender on language learning. Although they are limited, exploratory qualitative case studies can also be found focused on BL in the community college setting (Futch, deNoyelles, Howard, & Thompson, 2016; Hill, 2016; Zielinski, 2017).

While some do employ constructivist methods (Zielinski, 2017), most are multi-case or comparison and none of the current studies involve language learning. The participant in this study shared their perception of social presence and language learning pedagogy in blended learning through recorded interviews. Since the study was geared toward the community college ESL blended learning environment, the I selected a campus with courses designed to be a hybrid of F2F and online for the ESL population. A one-hour pre-interview was conducted with the instructor to establish how assignments were designed in the course to foster social presence and promote language learning. The interview questions also highlighted the planning and implementation process of course materials. At the end of the semester, the instructor participated in a one-hour post-

interview to express perceptions of how assignments related to learning outcomes and if the assignments contributed to students forming a sense of community. The interview questions were formed with the guidance of the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000) and the CoI survey (Arbaugh et al., 2008).

CoI framework was an appropriate theoretical lens for this study because it provided a procedure for creating and maintaining the socially constructed nature of traditional classroom learning in virtual environments. Researchers using the framework, and the framers themselves, believe a worthwhile educational experience is based on a process of reflective inquiry (Bangert, 2008; Garrison, 2011; Garrison et al., 2000; Ice, Gibson, Boston, & Becher, 2011). In their CoI survey instrument, adapted from the CoI framework, Arbaugh et al. (2008) developed 34 items to determine a strong educational experience based on three overlapping elements. From a methodological perspective, the three categories of social presence (open communication, group cohesion and personal/affective projection) are used to operationalize the concept (Arbaugh et al., 2008). Based on the importance of social presence in the framework, the current study concentrated on that construct with its three subsets from the model and survey to create open-ended questions for a semi-structured interview in order to delve into the participant's experience as an ESL community college BL instructor.

This single case study explored social presence in an adult ESL blended learning course at a community college. The study met the criteria of a phenomenon and exploratory case because the researcher investigated the phenomenon of a teacher's perception of the effectiveness of blended learning and social presence on language

achievement in an ESL community college course (Yin, 2013). This case study examined the blended learning model of the course and perceived attitudes towards the effectiveness of the assignments by the teacher. The comparative methodology in the past literature did not allow for a sufficient description of the detailed experiences in an environment of a blended learning class and in its context. Moreover, numerous authors of blended learning comparison studies (BL and traditional) in higher education have uncovered mixed results or insufficient evidence for either learning style (Amaral & Shank, 2010; Bowen, Nygren, Lack, & Chingos, 2013; Jones & Lau, 2010; Tsai, 2010) and therefore lack a rich description of a BL learning environment that produces an impact on learners.

The review of the preceding literature indicated the lack of information about technology tools, course design, collaboration, and participant roles, which are all important features for successful design and implementation of blended models (Neumeier, 2005). Without knowing these elements, researchers have difficulty accounting for why learners performed the way they did or if a strong social presence in the course was formed. Studies have tracked the impact of online and hybrid courses on student achievement and retention as colleges and universities expand their online course catalogs (Palmer et al., 2014; Shea, & Bidjerano, 2014; Xu & Jaggars, 2011; 2013). However, rather than solely focusing on how students achieve success, the current study aimed to focus efforts on identifying practices that foster social presence and exploring the teacher's perception of how students achieve language success in a collaborative, blended learning environment.

Population and Setting

NVCC has five campuses in Northern Virginia. The population was selected because the number of students enrolled in ESL courses has increased in the specific campus of the research site since 2013. The college was among the top five in a ranking of digital community colleges by the Center for Digital Education (2015). The ranking recognizes technology innovations at community colleges. Therefore, this population was appropriate for the study design. I selected an educator from the research site who demonstrated extensive knowledge and experience in both ESL and blended learning. The selection of the instructor was critical to this research in providing valuable data and insight into future development of courses and activities needed to address teachers' pedagogical practices for a blended learning ESL environment. Once the instructor was selected based on expertise in ESL education while teaching in a blended learning environment, a reading course was chosen due to the fact that the understanding of texts requires cultural and social value knowledge (Rance-Roney, 2010). ESL courses at this institution range in levels and the courses included in the requirements are reading and vocabulary, written communication, oral communication, and reading. Researchers have defined reading comprehension as "a basic piece of the diverse exchange of systems engaged with L2 reading" (Brantmeier, 2003, p. 52).

Creswell (2007) stated, "we intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problems under examination" (p. 118). Therefore, critical case sampling, a type of purposive sampling technique, particularly useful in exploratory, qualitative research (Patton, 1990) was used. ESL community

college students exhibit a range of demographic traits, personal attributes, and cultural awareness. The aim was to view the phenomenon of blended learning through the ESL instructor's perspective and observe their students in the blended learning setting that they had created. As an interpretive form of research, case studies explore the details and meanings of an experience. The richness of case studies is related to the amount of detail and contextualization that is possible when only one or a small number of cases are analyzed (Yin, 2003).

Region Characteristics

Virginia has 11 Metropolitan Statistical Areas and of these, Northern Virginia is among the three most populous. Northern Virginia is most frequently defined to include the counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William and the independent cities of Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax, Manassas, and Manassas Park (Northern Virginia Regional Commission, n.d.). It is the most populated region in Virginia and the Washington metropolitan area with more than 2 million residents (Northern Virginia Regional Commission, n.d.). The most populated counties, both in Northern Virginia, are Fairfax and Prince William, with respective populations of 1,150,795 and 468,011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

There are more than one million immigrants in the state of Virginia (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017). People who were born in El Salvador make up 11% of the population in Virginia, with those born in India (9%) and Korea (6%) comprising the top three immigrant groups throughout the state (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017). Due to the proximity to Washington, D.C.,

Northern Virginia attracts a wide range of cultures and backgrounds from all over the word and most immigrants who come to Virginia reside in Northern Virginia. Over two-thirds of the state's immigrant population lives in this region, making up almost 30% of the total population of Northern Virginia (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017). Immigrants in the state of Virginia who are over the age of five and speak English fluently, represent 61% of the immigrant population in this area (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017). In the county of the case study, immigrants comprise more than 20% of the population and among this group, more than 30% speak languages other than English at home.

NVCC Characteristics

Founded in 1964, Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) is a public, 2-year community college that advertises a convenient, affordable, quality education. According to the NVCC website, it is the largest educational institution in Virginia and the second largest community college in the United States with more than 75,000 students and 2,600 faculty and staff members. NVCC is also one of the most internationally diverse 2-year community colleges in the United States, with a student body consisting of individuals from more than 180 countries. NVCC offers more than 160 degrees at the associate's level, including certificate programs. The six main campuses of the NVCC system are located near Washington, D.C., and include: Alexandria, Annandale, Loudoun, Manassas, Springfield, and Woodbridge. In addition, NVCC has major locations in the northern Virginia area that offer distance learning through NOVA Online and Workforce Development courses. Of the 75,000 students

enrolled in 2018-2019, 18,000 students registered for noncredit courses throughout the campuses and online.

Students coming to the NVCC system can be first-time, returning, and transfer students. The international population represents 20% of the entire student body. The number of students enrolled in ESL courses has fluctuated among the campuses somewhat between fall 2014 and fall 2016 with an increase in Loudoun and Manassas, stable enrollment in Annandale, and declining enrollment in Alexandria and Woodbridge. According to the NVCC Office of Institutional Research Factbook (2012-2017), the college ESL student body, on average, is 57% female and 43% male. Data is consistent with the student gender trends in Alexandria, Annandale, and Loudoun, with Manassas and Woodbridge showing a somewhat larger female population (approximately 62%) and smaller male population (about 38%). In terms of linguistic backgrounds, the largest linguistic group is represented by speakers of Farsi (14.52%), followed by Spanish (14.31%), Arabic (11.04%), Amharic (8.18%), and Vietnamese (7.87%). Interestingly, in the 2007 ESL Discipline Review report, the four largest linguistic groups were comprised of speakers of Vietnamese (almost 23%), Russian (over 17%), Japanese (almost 13%), and Spanish (over 10%). These differences represent demographic changes and recent immigration trends.

The OIR Factbook also reported that the ESL student population differs significantly from the non-ESL student cohorts at NOVA, and ESL students come with their own unique sets of strengths, challenges, and needs. One challenge is the commitments that ESL students have outside of their college life. Additionally, the OIR

compiled another report that shows that approximately three quarters (74%) of ESL students are employed, with 46% working full-time (35 hours per week or more), and 18.35% working 20 to 34 hours a week. In addition, 43% of ESL students are married, with 28% also raising children. At the same time, 21% of students live in the United States by themselves, without their families, and 5% live with extended family. All of these factors affect the time that the students can devote to their studies, in addition to affecting them psychologically (OIR ESL Enrollment Profile, 2014-2016).

These factors need to be taken into consideration in relationship with student recruitment and retention. In regard to prior education, 55% of ESL students graduated from high school in their native country and 20% earned a bachelor's degree in their native country. The reasons for attending an NVCC campus varied, however 43% listed the goal of transferring to a 4-year institution and 20% aimed to acquire a better job or a promotion. It is important to note that only 6% of the ESL population from all campuses combined responded to the survey (OIR ESL Enrollment Profile, 2014-2016).

Campus and ESL Program Characteristics

The campus site of this study was one of the first permanent campuses built for NVCC. The population in the city where the campus is located is about 40,000. The campus is smaller in size and maintains smaller than average classroom sizes compared to more populated campuses in Northern Virginia. The ESL program at the campus offers classes to international students, ESL students from the surrounding area, and students attending college on student visas from around the world.

The college ESL program offers four levels of instruction from Level 2 (low-intermediate) to level five (advanced). At all four levels, students take courses in reading and writing. At levels two and three, they also take a course in oral communication. Students in levels four and five can begin taking introductory general education courses for credit along with their ESL reading and writing courses. Prior to that, all courses in the ESL program are non-credit courses. Students are placed into an instructional level prior to enrolling at the college. In order to qualify to enroll, a student must score at least 225 on the placement test. If a student scores 225 or higher, they can enroll in ESL courses, or may be eligible to begin taking credit-bearing courses in English. If a student scores below 225, the campus also offers courses in the American Culture and Language Institute (ACLI) ESL Program, including a focus on the work environment and areas of cross-cultural communication, multiculturalism, and diversity awareness. The ESL program at the campus currently has classes in reading and vocabulary, reading, oral and written communication, and composition. This study focused on a Level 4 reading course. For a student who started the program in Level 2, this would be the third level of classes. Other students might begin at Level 3 or test directly into Level 4. The campus ESL program currently serves more than 300 students.

Participant Profile

In order to provide a context for understanding the results and to develop a strong narrative about these findings, a brief description on the teacher participant will be presented. A pseudonym has been used to maintain the anonymity of the participant. The instructor who consented to be part of the study teaches hybrid and F2F classes at the

community college that was the research site for this study. This research will refer to the participant as Linda.

Background

Linda has been teaching ESL for over 25 years in the United States. She started at NVCC as an adjunct professor and acquired a full-time position seven years later. NVCC does not offer tenure to instructors. The school offers a one-year contract first, then multi-year contracts after that time period. Instructors can be on a 3-year or 5-year contract. Linda remarked that she is unsure of how instructors progress through the contracts. She is currently on a 5-year contract. At the same time, she has been teaching English at a four-year institution in Virginia. In the past, she has also taught at a large state research university and in programs for refugees. The ESL program at her campus introduced hybrid courses twelve years ago and she has been a part of the initiative from the beginning. Linda has been teaching the level 4 reading hybrid course for ten years.

Linda lives in the Northern Virginia area about 30 minutes from the campus. She enjoys her schedule because a majority of her in-person classes are in the morning which she prefers to evening classes. She also appreciates the flexibility of working remotely and having her work centralized in one device. Linda has a positive attitude about the hybrid course. In general, she enjoys using the computer and she likes the challenge of finding ways to interact with students online.

Linda is dedicated to helping students develop not only a deep understanding of the objectives in the course, but also a comprehension of hybrid learning in general. A large component of that understanding is that student-teacher communication is critical,

especially outside of the face-to-face time. She continually works to achieve a level of comfort amongst her students so that they will reach out to her beyond the classroom walls. With laughter she states, "I had several students say that I would be a good grandma. I want my classroom to feel welcome and comfortable." In the four classroom observations, Linda's presence appeared to be that of a calm and gentle facilitator who provided clear and detailed language instruction to the students.

Procedures and Data Collection

This study followed the extensive review of literature on BL by Bluic (2007) and incorporated the belief that the current research should be holistic in nature. Sharpe, Benfield, Roberts, and Francis (2006) state that holistic studies on blended learning "shed light on the complex interplay of the virtual and the physical and the choices that learners make in finding pathways to successful outcomes" (p. 54). In order to take on this holistic approach, I met with the ESL department chair of the research site to gain insight into the blended learning courses offered and the ESL demographics of the college as a whole. After receiving Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from both participating colleges, interview questions and a consent letter, with an introductory email, were sent to the professor of a hybrid ESL reading course being offered in the spring of 2019 at the research site.

The instruments used for this case study were semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations. Interview questions provided information on the instructor's (Appendix A) perception of the blended learning experience as outlined by the CoI survey instrument (Appendix B), used as a reference for this research study.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one using open-ended questions as a guide to obtain teachers' perceptions on social presence and instructional methods to promote language learning in an ESL blended learning environment. The interviews were conducted in-person and recorded using an audio digital recorder. Documentary analysis provided another source of data. A review of collaborative virtual and F2F assignments from the instructor, as well as course resources and materials, were collected. Documents on the LMS of the course were of importance to the data collection because hard copy or electronic materials were able to be closely examined beyond the initial distribution (Miller & Alvarado, 2005). Document analysis has been used to examine the content of written materials for insight into the importance of the social activities described (Bloor & Wood, 2006). The analysis process explores data contained within a document to provide insight into a social phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). Documents are "non-reactive" sources of data, meaning that they can be read and reviewed multiple times and remain unchanged by the researcher's influence or research process (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

After the initial in-person class session, data collection also included four classroom observations. Marshall and Rossman (1989) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (p.79). Observational data collection methods contribute by their focus on "natural" settings which allow the explanation of social processes and phenomena. Specifically, they can create an understanding of what people do and how this can change situationally and over time (Walshe, Ewing, & Griffiths, 2012). Observations occurred four times, evenly spaced, during the semester and each time the researcher stayed for the

entire class session (155 minutes). Notes for the observations were completed through the use of Google Keep. The tool is primarily designed to take and organize notes, record audio, and keep track of media and fit the design for this research, especially for taking field notes. The data collection is stored on a password protected Google Drive where Google Keep is located. In accordance with George Mason University's IRB guidelines, the data collected will be retained for five years before being disposed of by the researcher.

Data Analysis

The process for analyzing, interpreting, and determining the validity of data was conducted through coding. First level coding was used in the initial process to create descriptive, low inference codes that were important in categorizing segments of data and provided a structure for a second level of coding (Punch, 2014). The second round of coding focused on making patterns with the codes to minimize and focus on major themes. "A pattern code is," Punch (2014) wrote, "a more abstract concept that brings together less abstract, more descriptive codes." After the establishment of the coding system, data were divided into themes and categories to compare and contrast results to reduce the amount of data being analyzed (Creswell, 2015; Richards, 2015; Saldaña, 2016).

The process for data analysis used to accomplish the goal of documenting the ways in which ESL faculty perceive social presence and language learning in a BL community college learning experience will be discussed below according to research questions (RQ).

RQ1: What is the approach of an experienced community college English as a Second Language teacher to structuring a blended learning course to promote language learning?

RQ2: What are the teacher's perceptions of assignments that most effectively fostered social presence and promoted language learning in an English as a Second Language blended learning community college course?

RQ3: What are the teacher's perceptions of assignments that least effectively fostered social presence and promoted language learning in an English as a Second Language blended learning community college course?

To ensure accurate data collection, the interviews were recorded. Seidman (1991) recommends that interviews be audio recorded in order to preserve the words of the participants, and to ensure that interviewers can return to the transcripts to check for accuracy. The instructor as informed of the recording and signed informed consent forms. The following steps were taken to analyze the interview data. First, I transcribed the interviews from the digital recorder. Next, during the transcription process, preliminary categories were digitally noted and given a code. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically and inductively using Dedoose qualitative software. I then read through transcripts, making notes and placing codes in memos with Dedoose. Observation notes were kept in a password protected Google Drive in Google Keep.

The participant was identified on the typed transcript by the pseudonym "Linda." The resulting document facilitated further analysis and established a permanent written record that could be shared with interested parties. Added to the transcript were notes on

observations that I took during the observed class sessions. The transcript, notes, and academic F2F and online activities were combined and coded manually according to themes. The instructor role in the fostering of social presence and language learning for the student learning experience was examined. Therefore, the instructor interview questions were developed to determine Linda's perspective on her methods of creating social presence in the BL model, as well as her implementation and planning of a BL course for ESL students' language learning. The purpose of this research was to suggest ways to improve student language achievement and the quality of the blended language course. Secondly, the propositions of this research are the effective factors for a blended language course based on the analysis of a teacher's perception.

Transferability refers to the ability of results of the qualitative study to be transferred to other contexts or settings. To engage thoroughly with the data and get a full view of the subject of study in context, Geertz (1973) recommends "thick description." Thick description goes beyond surface data. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 83). Thick description affords the reader the opportunity to determine whether findings may be appropriate in another setting; this is not possible without a rich description by the researcher of the studied environment.

Researcher as Instrument Statement

Because the researcher is the instrument in semi-structured or unstructured qualitative interviews (Pezalla, Pettigrew, Miller-Day, 2012), it is important to reflect on

my attributes as a researcher and the professional development that has informed my practice. In my career and current work as a doctoral candidate in the higher education program at George Mason University, I have been guided to expand my thinking about the nature of evidence and the concept of researcher "as the primary instrument or medium through which the research is conducted" (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 3).

First, I received a Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) certificate in Rome, Italy, during my undergraduate studies. The training provided me with introductory, intensive coursework in linguistics and practicum experience teaching adult ESL students ranging in levels of English proficiency. With the certificate, I received a teaching position in Naples, Italy, and taught English to elementary students and adults. The varying range of abilities among the students allowed me to differentiate instruction while still maintaining best practices for language learning. The institution in Naples did not have access to technology and therefore the materials used were print textbooks and journals. Second, I hold a master's degree in special education and a bachelor's degree in elementary education. I have been licensed in Virginia to teach K-12 special education subjects, as well as K-6 elementary education curriculum. My experiences as a general education teacher at the elementary level for the past nine years have enabled me to work closely with English as a Second Language students and their families. Through Fairfax County Public Schools, I have attended blended learning trainings, served on the technology committee of my school, acted as the school's equity leader, and adapted and created curriculum to fit the ESL population's needs using a flipped model approach.

Third, my current experience in the doctoral program has provided opportunities for internships in instructing ESL students in the community college and 4-year environments and assisting with qualitative research. Through INTO Mason, I was able to conduct workshops for ESL professors in blended learning as well as to tutor international ESL students related to their coursework. The experience provided practice in editing academic work and offering feedback that will promote student understanding of the English language. At Northern Virginia Community College in Woodbridge and Loudoun, I was able to encounter a hybrid course and understand the technology options available to instructors from the institution. I assisted faculty with lessons and introduced them to a blended model. During my opportunity at NVCC, I was able to use my blended learning training to move beyond the textbook and paper and pencil exercises that might not appeal to all learning styles in the classroom. The time of the practicum was limited but gave me an overview of the ESL program at the community college.

Finally, my program of study included coursework in linguistic competencies, community college trends, and, as stated, work on qualitative research. The main duty of the research consisted of conducting semi-structured interviews, transcribing, coding, and writing about the themes that emerged. Specifically, I used a phenomenological approach to gain insight into perspectives of faculty involved in self-study and the inclusion of digital andvisually rich media in the classroom. For the data analysis, the structure and meaning were relied upon to draw from the participants' experience with reflection and technology.

Summary

In order to accurately describe the BL experience of an ESL CC course, a qualitative, exploratory single-case design was used. Case study research is recommended in instances where the use of qualitative data is sufficient to fully describe the phenomenon from the participants' perspective. As the study is holistic in nature, it was determined that this was the best methodology for the task at hand. The research consisted of qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews, virtual and physical documents, and class observations from an ESL blended learning faculty member in a reading course on the campus of a community college.

The goal of the research was to richly describe the BL experience of an ESL community college instructor and her perception of social presence and effective language learning pedagogy in the classroom community. The learning experience elements, such as teacher perceptions, engagement, motivation, successful acquisition of knowledge, and course delivery method, were examined under the umbrella of the social presence construct from the CoI framework and guided the categorizing data collection and analysis. The ultimate result of the findings will allow faculty at similar community colleges to offer BL in a delivery method that is grounded in research to assist ESL students in their language learning while building a strong sense of community for learners.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This dissertation explored the experience of an ESL instructor in a blended learning classroom at a community college campus in Northern Virginia. The researcher sought to understand how instructors develop blended courses to promote language learning and social presence in both face-to-face and online modes. The specific assignments that were perceived by the instructor in the hybrid environment to be effective or ineffective were also explored. The researcher employed an exploratory single case study approach to generate new ideas and examine practices for blended learning language teachers. This chapter presents findings from the study that answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the approach of an experienced community college English as a Second Language teacher to structuring a blended learning course to promote language learning?

RQ2: What are the teacher's perceptions of assignments that most effectively fostered social presence and promoted language learning in an English as a Second Language blended learning community college course?

RQ3: What are the teacher's perceptions of assignments that least effectively fostered social presence and promoted language learning in an English as a Second Language blended learning community college course?

This chapter begins with a descriptive profile of the learning environment, classroom structure, and Linda's perception of the nature of a hybrid course. The chapter then highlights four broad areas: F2F format, LMS and online activities, communication, and challenges to detail the instructor's approach and develop an understanding of more effective and less effective assignments in the blended environment. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings. The data collection consisted of an extensive pre- and post- interview with the course instructor, document analysis from the LMS and F2F learning environments, and four classroom observations. Data was collected for 12 weeks during the spring semester of 2019. Data focused on how the teacher perceived the establishment of social presence, both F2F and online, and how the design and implementation of a blended learning approach influenced language learning.

Learning Environment

During the semester of data collection, spring 2019, Linda taught four courses. Three were F2F. The course observed for this research, level four ESL reading, was the only hybrid course she taught at the time. This specific campus only offers hybrid courses at the upper language levels because faculty feel that lower levels benefit more from increased in-person interaction. Other campuses in the NVCC system offer hybrid for all ESL levels. The class met once a week in person for two hours and 35 minutes with an average of five to six hours of work to be completed online, outside of the classroom. The class was at capacity at 24 students and Linda remarked that the hybrid class typically filled due to its popularity. However, due to the increasing number of ESL students at the

campus, the traditional F2F classes filled to capacity during the spring semester as well.

When asked why the hybrid course is popular, Linda explained:

> I think for a lot of them, it's schedule reasons. Most of them live and work here in the community. They have family obligations, work obligations, and it just makes it easier for them to get their work done and attend class.

In the course observed, Linda states that the student ages ranged from 17 to 77, although she recalls that most of the students were 18 to 22. The students came from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The location of the classroom was a computer lab, although the students generally did not use computers during the F2F class time. They completed a significant amount of work via computer outside of class meetings and Linda prefers the class to focus on face-to-face time when they are together in person. The lab was set up with long rows of tables on each side of an aisle with 3 seats per table, leading up to a teacher's desk in the upper corner with a computer that can project on the whiteboard in the front of the classroom. The students tended to remain in the same seats throughout the semester and therefore had discussion with the same group of people during discussion tasks. In order to get tables of students talking with one another, Linda would often facilitate discussions and rigorous tasks among tables involving short stories. She would choose a character and have students identify a problem the person was experiencing. Through discussion, debate, and time to develop their ideas, they would agree on a solution which then they would share with the whole group.

During F2F time, all of the students consistently came to class and even arrived 20 to 30 minutes early to work on assignments or go over material from other courses.

During the four observations, only two students, at separate times, were absent for a class period. Linda observed that everyone participated in the online posts and homework assignments. Some students turned in homework after the due date, but it was not enough to label this as a challenge in the course. Linda reported that two students did not complete the course; in one case that was due to a family emergency.

Classroom Structure and Assignments

The research took place during the spring 2019 semester in the reading course which ran for 12 weeks from the end of January until the first week of May. Linda created the course in a blended learning model, using the classroom time for activities that benefit the most from direct, in-person interaction. The F2F space was dedicated to structured exercises that applied the topics and themes from the at-home, online practice. The students regularly discussed main ideas and symbolism together and worked through specific learning tasks. During the semester, students completed a significant amount of work online that informed their in-person classroom discussions. Linda purposely used discussion boards to cultivate connections outside of the traditional classroom walls.

Linda held in-person office hours on campus on Monday and Wednesday from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. and on Thursday from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. In addition, she made herself readily available to her students virtually by phone or email and scheduled additional F2F meetings with students when requested. Linda designed the course to help students improve their reading comprehension and vocabulary in order to move to, and succeed in, ESL level five and beyond that, to credit-bearing college courses once students complete the ESL program. The online class assignments emphasized reading

and responding to readings in written form. The other course objectives from the syllabus included: integrating reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to promote thinking and learning; becoming active, independent learners able to apply integrated strategies appropriate to reading-related tasks; increasing self-confidence in one's ability to be an effective reader; and understanding the role of reading in academic, professional, and personal life.

The course assignments included tasks of varying degrees of difficulty that students, for the most part, completed during the asynchronous time. Reading homework, relating to assigned articles and short stories, consisted of questions about the setting, symbolism, and comprehension and instructions usually required answers to be supported by evidence from the text. The reading posts were done on the discussion board and equaled 15% of the final grade. In connection with the reading homework, summaries of readings, that were typed at home and handed in at the beginning of F2F class sessions, made up another 15% of the student grades. Additional homework assignments, related to the short stories, comprised another 15% of the total grade. For example, students wrote journal entries from the character's point of view with guiding questions to help them develop a post with detail.

The vocabulary portion, worth another 15% of the final grade, was broken down into three parts over a three-week cycle. The first week with a vocabulary list had students finding definitions of words that were tied to articles and short stories. Students chose from the list of words and typed the original sentence where it appeared in the reading, the part of speech, and a clear definition of the word. The second week, students

worked to apply the vocabulary word and developed original sentences of their own while also completing a matching practice. Finally, in the third week, students completed vocabulary quizzes on the list of words. The students had 15 minutes to complete a matching quiz online. The quizzes could not be made-up if missed and Linda used the exact definitions from the practice matching from week two. The cycle continued with a new list of vocabulary words throughout the semester. Included with the vocabulary work and grade was the program *ReadTheory*, an online reading comprehension assessment tool. Linda had students sign-up for the program which is free of charge for students and instructors.

The remaining portion of the class assignment grade consisted of an advertisement PowerPoint project that compromised 10% of the grade and contributed to many in-class discussions. The first exam at the beginning of the semester compromised 10% of the grade and the final exam included three separate portions, reading, vocabulary, and summarizing, completed the last 20% of the final grade. The students needed a 75% or higher in the class to pass for the semester.

The class utilized Open Educational Resources (OERs) and students were not required to purchase any additional books. Linda posted all materials on Blackboard and provided additional paper copies in class as requested by students. The course did require that the students have access to a reliable computer at home or on campus for weekly hybrid work. In addition, students could use the classroom itself as a computer lab for their academic work when class did not meet in person. The course requirements specified that students have the technical skills of turning on a computer, accessing the

internet, sending an email, and typing well enough to produce a one-page document during a class period. The online responsibilities of the student consisted of logging in to the LMS at least twice a week to complete assignments at home or an alternate location and contacting the instructor via email if they experienced technical difficulties with an assignment.

Linda outlined her responsibilities as an instructor of a hybrid course on the LMS in the class syllabus. The syllabus stated that it is the responsibility of the instructor to respond to student email and address student problems within 24 hours of receiving the email on a weekday and within 48 hours of receiving an email on the weekend or during breaks. During the interviews, Linda shared that she tries to respond to emails as quickly as possible regardless of the day because student-teacher connection is important to her.

Nature of Hybrid Courses

Linda believed that blended learning allows students the flexibility to complete their online work and attend class while still meeting all of their family, work, and other outside obligations. Success in a hybrid course, however, requires an understanding of the nature of the course design and a commitment to the course requirements. Students as well as teachers need to understand that a blended hybrid is not half a course. Linda stated, "I think people don't understand what hybrids are." She continued, noting that students often find the course in the catalog and say "'Oh, it's a 5-credit course but I only have to go once a week. I'm going to take that one.'" She provided guidance to students by explaining that the course requires as much work as a F2F class. She reminded students that, "you need to carve out your own time for yourself," to do well in this class.

She recommends that students clearly schedule time during each week, saying to themselves "'this is my school time.'" If they are unable to do that at home, she recommends that they "need to leave the house" to create dedicated time to complete class assignments. In addition, Linda shared her experiences with colleagues and adjuncts and will often help them build their LMS and provide feedback on what works well in a hybrid setting.

The remainder of this chapter will explore the findings within the context of the research questions. The questions seek to determine how the instructor in this study experienced designing, and teaching in, a BL environment. A detailed analysis of the pre- and post-interviews, class documents, and the researcher's classroom observations provided the data. The qualitative data findings are presented in categories to highlight effective teaching in the ESL blended environment and assignments that lead to both language learning and to building a sense of community. The categories include: organization of the F2F format, the use of the LMS and online activities, communication between students and communication between students and the teacher, and challenges in both modes that could contribute to assignments being less effective for language learning and establishing community.

Organization of the Face-to-Face Format

The category of organization of the F2F format centers on the teacher's approach during classroom sessions and her instructional practice to guide students' language learning. In her approach, Linda encouraged students and provided explicit directions and expectations on assignments. During her lecture period, the students seemed engaged and

actively listened while taking notes. Linda permitted students to call out questions and ideas and did not interrupt them until they were finished. She did not use rephrasing with student ideas, allowing the student's original statement to remain intact, and she consistently related student comments to the main objectives of the day. Her tone and manner were calm in class sessions. She started most class periods by introducing the agenda and then focused on addressing any misconceptions from the online forum or homework. Next, she introduced the topic for the class session and gave a lecture-style lesson on that topic. She also allowed 20 to 30 minutes during class to explain directions for upcoming assignments and projects.

Explicit Instructions

One of Linda's strategies is to use class time to discuss instructions for projects and upcoming assignments. She does this to overtly demonstrate how to complete an out-of-class task which can be used to teach basic and higher-order reading skills. She set routines and used consistent language, so the students learned the new skill in the task but also the language associated with it. During one class in February, Linda explained a major project that was to be completed at home. She spent 30 minutes of classroom time stating expectations, guiding students to annotate the directions to ensure completion of all elements of the project, and reviewing the components of the grading rubric (Appendix D). In her explanation of the project, she stated, "Reading is about reading and making connections. Take your pen and annotate a little bit, because there are important things that you need to know to do well on this assignment. We will go through the project packet." She opened the discussion with the due date and stated that the

77

assignment would be submitted via email. She highlighted this information on the overhead where she also projected the project summary.

The project asked students to develop a PowerPoint presentation displaying an advertisement on each slide. The students needed to choose a total of five advertisements to demonstrate their knowledge of at least five of the commonly used advertising techniques that they had discussed during in-class sessions. The students needed to state which advertising technique they thought the designer or artist meant to use to draw consumers into the picture. To prepare for the assignment, Linda posted more than 70 advertisements in a Blackboard folder. She stated with emphasis, "You will not print. It is going to be digital, you are in a hybrid class" She annotated notes for each section of the project on the packet and told the students to do the same for what should be on each slide for each individual advertisement. The students expressed confusion and it took time for them to understand the project. Almost every student took the time to annotate to make sure they understood. Linda showed one slide for an advertising technique of "direct gaze" as an example. Her tone during directions was even as she spoke slowly and kept her voice neutral when answering numerous questions. The class seemed confident in following the parameters of the project by the end of class. Linda was pleased with the final results of the advertising assignment and she noted that most everyone followed the directions.

The project took the place of a test and that made her "hard on the deadline." At the end of the explanation, Linda drew attention to the bottom of the rubric (Appendix D) and reiterated that this was a big project. She stated, "You will lose 10 points if you don't

spell check and 10 points every day that it is late." There was nervous laughter in the room among the students about the amount of points someone could lose. Many students commented on the importance of turning the assignment in on time. Linda deliberately scheduled the due date after spring break to allow students additional time to work on the project. At the end of the discussion, before moving on to the day's topic, one student asked, "Where do we put our names?" The class worked together to add an extra slide to the directions to include student name, project name, and the date. "I assumed," she said to the class "and I didn't count that."

Linda would often spend large amounts of class time on the expectations of projects, assignments, and exams to ensure that the students comprehended the directions. She commented that detailed directions are especially important in an ESL classroom where the students are navigating vocabulary for which they sometimes do not have background knowledge. The students needed accountability measures with assignments and continued to need explicit instructions. Linda used F2F time for explicit instruction for the success on assignments, but also to help students develop background knowledge on a particular topic. Linda found it beneficial to spend time reviewing previously learned concepts, checking whether students had understood concepts, and correcting misconceptions during the lesson.

The Use of Advertisements

Linda used a diverse range of instructional materials to provide language instruction in the F2F format. She incorporated visuals, short stories, and songs to engage students in the learning environment. The advertising PowerPoint project provided

individualization and academic choice and contributed to language learning as well as social presence through partner discussions about the advertisements prior to the independent task. With the assignment, Linda also had students break down the symbolism in the visuals and portray their carefully considered assessment of what the ad was trying to achieve. The last slide on the PowerPoint provided a space for the student's analysis about why they thought the advertisement was using particular techniques (color, repetition, direct gaze, association, body language, composition, rule of thirds, vectors, focal point, symbolism).

Students using the same advertisement could have differing opinions about which techniques were being used. They received full credit if they were able to explain themselves and justify their answers. Linda reported that she was "happy with the results" and mentioned the improvement in the use of vocabulary by the students, which had been a struggle during the semester. Visual materials worked as a powerful tool in the project because they gave Linda the opportunity to show the culture of the target language in a unique way. The visual impact of images has proved to be superior to the one of texts (Clark and Lyons, 2004), and that is why visual aids can be very effective to help students in memorizing new vocabulary and structures.

Linda perceived the in-class discussion of the project, used to build background knowledge on the advertisement techniques, and the PowerPoint as a whole, to be the students' preferred activities. The researcher observed evidence of social presence during class sessions used to prepare for the assignment. For example, students participated in active listening with each other and worked to weave their own comments about the

visuals into the larger conversation at their table. Students listened to each other and prompted further discussion when the speaker of the group did not say enough or was stuck on an idea and could not find the words to express themselves. The students seemed to listen not only to understand one another, but also to add to the conversation and participate in the group. Students consistently added on to ideas and comments of their peers during small group tasks.

In addition, the students made connections between each other's comments and used specific evidence from the advertisements to foster conversation. The advertisements provided a platform to share opinions without having a "correct" answer. This allowed students to learn from each other and experience multiple perspectives about the same visual. The exchange of ideas allowed the students to see that they can learn from other members of the learning community and not rely solely on the instructor for insight and information. Linda believes that the visual aspect of the assignment fostered engagement from the students. Interpreting pictures together are things that they do socially online already and for many students, sharing photos is a daily feature in their lives. Linda points out that the assignment also helped students make connections between the symbolism in stories and articles. She selected pictures that were purposely dynamic and interesting, and the students created a rich discussion about the meaning behind the imagery.

Key affective components of social presence are humor, emotions, and self-disclosure (Leafman & Mathieson, 2014). The researcher observed students in the course engage the areas of social presence during collaborative discourse of the in-class

discussion surrounding the advertisements and varying techniques. During one occasion, advertisements were used from a homework folder titled, *Cigarette and Other Ads*. Students who appeared disengaged during the whole class discussion, participated fully and in English. One student's group members listened to him purposefully as he discussed being a former smoker and they all laughed about the company's approach of using attractive women to lure men into buying cigarettes. Another pair of students had an in-depth discussion about an ad with the caption, "Forests are the Lungs of Our Land." One of the students clarified for another student why the ad used the word "lungs" to represent forests. They discussed the issue further and agreed what advertising techniques worked for the ad that the class had already reviewed together. Based on the researcher's classroom observations, the advertising project promoted students to bring forward their own interpretations about the advertising techniques that companies use to influence consumers, such as themselves, in their daily lives.

Literacy Instruction with Short Stories

During in-person class time, Linda integrated short stories that the students had read at home. The objective of using the story was finding the main idea and summarizing, but also analyzing and discussing the symbolism in the story. Linda used literary symbolism, where an author uses figures of speech, such as metaphors, similes, and allegory as tools, to help students to understand the abstract concepts more concisely and deeply comprehend the character and their actions. Through the use of symbolism in the short stories, students expressed themselves freely in the English language without feeling that they had to choose a side in a debate to please the teacher. They focused

instead on conveying their opinion on the characters' actions and the elements in the story. During the interviews, Linda explained:

I think maybe it's just less pressure. Finding main ideas is a skill that they're not used to and so they're hesitant. They don't want to look dumb in front of their peers. But with symbolism, pretty much everyone doesn't know what's happening and so I think they all felt like they were on a more even playing field. It seems like they always talk more, not just this semester but every semester, during that time. And it's an opinion rather than an answer.

Students in the reading course were also able to connect and engage with the short story material because of the planning and implementation that Linda provided before the course. Stories can engage the learner at "more than a cognitive level; they engage our spirit, our imagination" (Clark & Rossiter, 2008, p. 65) because they evoke the learner's prior experiences. In class, students contributed to thoughtful discourse about the stories and listened to each other's opinions and agreed or respectfully disagreed, often with laughter and positive responses. Short stories are appropriate for language learners because they often give multiple viewpoints and styles. Linda's selection often told a narrative about a culture as well as a person and allowed students to connect with the character while understanding different perspectives. *The Somebody*, by Danny Santiago, is a short story that narrates a day in the life of Chato de Shamrock, a teenager who feels neglected and wants to be known by everyone. The main character is of Mexican heritage. The main reason Danny Santiago wrote this short story was to show how somebody can change their identity because of certain things they are experiencing in

their life. Students in the class had a rich discussion while discussing elements in the story. Students discussed that the language of the story was simple. They acknowledged an understanding of what the author was saying, what the character was going through, and how the character was feeling. Students also related to the character by establishing a connection that many of their family members were far away and it could feel isolating.

Linda set a goal with short stories to go beyond a basic comprehension level because of the level of the course. For example, she went beyond discussing the conflict in the story and instead had students analyze the ways in which a character's actions impacted the conflict of the story. When Linda asked students to respond to one another in small groups, she walked around and listened to the differing opinions in order to reflect with the entire group at the end of the discussion. The use of short stories also helped the ESL students with summarizing because there are limited subplots to confuse students unlike a novel. The clear, concise plots guided students toward the intended learning objectives without overwhelming them with language and text.

Language Instruction Around Song

Linda chose material for her course to maintain learner's interest throughout lessons. Her goal in selecting music was to provide universal appeal that connected cultures. Classroom observations showed that students actively engaged in the English language while analyzing the song, "Cats in The Cradle" (Chapin, 1974). The discussion observed in class on the song provided a motivating resource for all ages and backgrounds and encouraged language practice. The students came to class prepared to engage in discourse on the song due to the assignment of analyzing the lyrics prior to

class. When starting to discuss the song F2F, students commented on how much they enjoyed the song. During discussion, the students agreed it was a sad song. They shared similar opinions that the father did not have time for his song, and although working was the right thing to do to provide for the family, it was unfortunate.

The students continued to make connections to the song around the room, sharing personal anecdotes with their peers about their own lives. Their family obligations and their own children provided a way to share how the song made them feel. During these times of connection through visuals, stories, and song in the F2F format, the students demonstrated comprehension of the English language through authentic interactions. In the F2F classroom setting, Linda used instructional strategies and materials that appealed to the students who represented a range of ages and cultures. Though a large amount of classroom time was spent providing explicit instruction on tasks, the instruction went beyond lecturing due to high levels of questioning from both the students and the instructor.

Through Linda's modeling, the students utilized annotation and organization skills in their independent assignments. In addition, Linda used resources that captured the students' attention. Linda introduced advertisements to guide students in critically reading text and interpreting imagery. The students focused their attention on how the words and images worked together to communicate a message. The short stories chosen helped students demonstrate their language skills, critical thinking skills, cultural awareness, and creativity. Lastly, Linda introduced songs to engage students in discussions about symbolism and interpretation. The students selected metaphors in the

song to represent their viewpoint and debate the meaning. The researcher observed students using these materials and guidelines as they consistently immersed themselves in English language learning.

LMS Utilization and Online Activities

The LMS for the blended class served as an engine to run Linda's online classroom. The LMS that the campus used at the time was Blackboard. Linda's longtime experience with hybrid courses has led her to find engaging resources that the students can interact with on their own. As previously mentioned, she assigned readings of short stories and articles for homework and had the students complete a variety of tasks asynchronously based on the stories. The students had to post weekly about varying questions related to the readings and to respond to at least two other members of the classroom community. The vocabulary work was also done online on the discussion board. Linda used technology tools to increase feedback and connection with her students by an online delivery of content through numerous videos for guidance, self-check quizzes with the use of the online reading comprehension tool *ReadTheory*, and interaction through discussion boards.

Discussion Board

The ongoing assignment of the class that Linda perceived to bring social presence, collaboration, and discourse were the weekly discussion board posts, which she also perceived to promote language learning. Discussion boards used in the course provided many opportunities for students and the teacher to engage with one another during the semester. Linda noted that she felt students liked the self-paced and self-

regulated asynchronous discussions and that participation was very high. Linda provided time for the students to reflect before replying to fellow classmates which enabled less vocal or more introverted students to make their voices heard virtually, allowing them to become a part of the community. During online work, Linda felt it was helpful for students to observe other responses first before attempting their own posts. Student posts were guided, analyzed, complimented, and supported by Linda and peers routinely. She did not have students who did not participate or made no effort to post during the semester. This system allowed students to remain a member of the learning community beyond F2F time.

The interactive element of social presence includes acknowledgement, appreciation, and return of communication among learners (Garrison et al., 2010; Rourke et al., 2001). The students demonstrated those elements throughout their posts. Some students selected their first introductory post to a partner who was from the same cultural background as themselves and acknowledged their commonality in their responses to one another. In their work, Biocca, Harms, and Burgoon (2003) identify social presence in terms of special presence, the sense of being present, and physical presence, the sense of being together with others. The conversations established from the LMS discussion board enabled students to feel comfortable in the virtual environment in expressing themselves to one another and finding commonalities.

Linda implemented online discussion board posts as a way to offer ESL students a tool to actively utilize the English language without feeling anxiety about their response. Conversations often worked more fluidly online than in the classroom where many topics

were covered in a session and time was limited for extended conversation. As students reflected about their posts, the tasks frequently required them to integrate class readings and dig more deeply into texts. The use of discussion boards as an active method of language learning enabled students to retain and apply reading strategies.

Short Stories

Through the discussion boards, Linda used the short story assignments to aid students in interaction with the English language online. Similar to the use of short stories in the F2F class, Linda had students work online on comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking tasks by posting responses based on the literature. Linda required students to reply to at least two other students for each post. Linda preferred short stories that had a universal theme where the students could reflect on the plot points and relate them often to their own experiences. The online posts would be directed towards the symbolism in the title and in the story, as well as literal comprehension questions such as the setting. Linda also asked students to analyze decisions by characters and put themselves in the mind of those characters. These tasks allowed the students to share in their responses about their background knowledge and experiences in relation to the text.

When the students were asked inference questions or questions related to their opinion, Linda emphasized using evidence from the text in their posts. She established guidelines for how to properly quote text on the LMS to guide students. In replies to one another, students agreed with others about their opinions or used it as a platform to respectfully disagree or share an additional point. The students responded positively to

each other and it appeared to the researcher that the stories chosen elicited student involvement in rich discussion, analysis, and responses.

Communication Across Modes

In designing effective hybrid course assignments, Linda considered that students would be coming into her classroom with individual learning styles. She selected multiple course delivery modes to appeal to a diverse student population. The decision to connect the F2F class agenda to the online portion of the class came, in part, from a desire to motivate students to stay engaged due to the factor of being prepared for class. Linda found it important to create a sense for students that they had to be equipped for the F2F classroom with the hope that it would motivate them to finish online assignments by the due date. The topic of communication covers two aspects of discourse that happened in both the F2F and online formats. The first centers on student-to-student interaction. The second focuses on student-teacher interaction. Throughout the course, students developed their communication skills through the frequent and direct contact that they had with the online communication tools, thus increasing their engagement in the course whether it was F2F or online.

Student-to-Student

Through her online forum, Linda monitored the growth of her students' language learning by setting tasks that were based on a range of cultural and social interests. Students demonstrated high levels of interaction which translated to success in group discussions in the classroom because they were prepared and familiar with the materials. Referring back to the story of Chato, students made connections to the story on posts and

related back to these thoughts once in class to further the discussion. Students also often communicated using comments to offer feedback to each other on posts. During a F2F format, the researcher observed students discussing the comments made by their peers in the online setting and asked for further clarification. The students seemed comfortable asking classmates follow-up questions related to other items on the agenda that the teacher discussed during class time. This indicated student comfort in asking classmates follow-up questions related to other items on the agenda that the teacher discussed during class time.

Student-Teacher

Student-teacher communication was of the utmost importance to Linda and she enjoyed being able to connect with her students using multiple modes. The time that Linda dedicated to responding to each post on the discussion boards seemed to facilitate students efforts to remain accountable and active online. Linda purposefully connected these posts to classroom conversations making the F2F time a way to create a social community as well. Linda stated in interviews that she wanted to encourage her students to be independent and active learners where participation was required, but also wanted them to feel appreciated. If students had difficulties, it was imperative to Linda for them to ask for help, which she often spoke of during class sessions and in the LMS platform. During the F2F observations, students appeared eager to participate and accept teacher feedback. With feedback, Linda saw many improvements, especially in the discussion board. The main points of feedback came from some of the class objectives such as

organizing a summary, following directions with multiple parts, and expressing main ideas.

In a discussion post about a short story, students would be given multi-part directions and questions to answer about the elements of the story. This allowed students to practice identifying and relating main objectives of the reading course as well as following directions and developing the technology skills to post online and interact in an online forum. Some students experienced difficulty with posting when required to submit multiple parts to an answer. One student posted three different times about the same post and took advantage of the rewrite that Linda offered the class if their attempts did not meet the full requirements. On the first attempt before the due date, the student answered what the definition of the word "setting" meant but did not explain the symbolism of the setting or the symbolism of the title for this particular story. On the second attempt, the student went further into detail, but over-explained the setting of the story and copied words directly from the book. The student also gave too much information about symbolism overall instead of answering the specific question about the title. The student also omitted the answer to the fourth part listed in the directions which was an inference question about an event in the story. The rewrites that Linda allowed, with her feedback to work from, proved to have a significant impact on the student's grade for these posts. The second chance also served as motivation to work through the material in order to improve and accept constructive criticism from the instructor to allow for improvement.

Online communication between student and teacher, especially email contact, was fostered, in part due to Linda's preparation before the course. The excerpts below from

the LMS show Linda's effort to give students guidance before the course began in the online syllabus and to stress the importance of email communication during the course:

> Our learning is taking place across the week, sometimes in our classroom, and sometimes while you are at home. If you have a question or cannot open an assignment, PLEASE EMAIL ME. Do not wait until we are face-to-face. As a hybrid teacher, it is my responsibility to be available to answer your questions when we are not face-to-face. There is no such thing as "too many emails" and you are NOT bothering me! I am available for extra help if you need it. 12-week courses are very quick. If you feel like you are falling behind and would like some extra help, please make an appointment with me. I am always happy to help you.

Linda emphasized that the students had a responsibility to check their email regularly for class announcements. She created an email assignment and asked the students to respond in order to make sure they were familiar with how the communication system worked. In addition, she outlined how to format a professional email on Blackboard and the necessary information that would be included. Her perception about the communication process, as conveyed during the pre-interview, is that:

> In a hybrid class, you're not bound by being in the classroom with the teacher. When they're online working, I'm supposed to be available within reason to help them and respond to their questions, so they were a great class for emailing, for asking for help. And I said, 'if you were in a face to face and you were going to raise your hand five times, then I expect five emails.' That's how it works and you're not bothering me. And so that piece of it, I think it helped.

Communication was an important skill for every student to practice when learning the English language in Linda's classroom. Linda maintained her dedication to regular and timely feedback. She felt the extra effort was necessary for her students to maximize their learning. She needed to facilitate the communication for the students and make the learning environment comfortable for academic conversations.

Challenges

During the course, Linda also had challenges regarding her hybrid classroom structure. She shared concerns involving technology skill issues, creating clear directions for students to follow, and plagiarism. Based on interviews with Linda, these issues tend to repeat themselves during each semester. However, Linda expressed that with adaptations to the course syllabus and online format, incidents in these categories were slowly decreasing. She developed an entire section in her LMS titled, "Before the Course," for students to review in order to minimize these challenges. Implementing specific precautions and accountability measures described in the sections below, Linda has seen a change in the problems that occur during her hybrid course. The challenges described, however, can still pose a barrier to student learning in the blended environment.

Technology Skills

Linda noted that teachers need to consider that there are physical typing skills, but also understanding basic computer concepts that may be difficult for students. In the blended environment, students are completing assignments on the computer, often without the guidance of the teacher. Linda observes that older students and students from

countries with less access to technology tend to have more difficulties with computer skills than others. Depending on student backgrounds and experience with computers, Linda makes accommodations for students by allowing them to handwrite assignments and she regularly posts free typing tutorials on Blackboard.

Assignments such as online posts and homework are more time consuming for students who do not have basic typing and computer literacy skills. Some do not intuitively know how pages work or that you might navigate to a page by clicking an icon and these difficulties, in a blended course where technology is prevalent, can make it more challenging for a student with these lower technology skills to succeed. She also has allowed students not familiar with PowerPoint to make projects on Word document pages instead. She implements keyboarding practice on Blackboard and directs students to tools available online for free.

Linda observed that students who are slow to succeed with their online activities usually have the largest issues with technology. She reiterated that the course in this study is the first time that students have an opportunity to take a hybrid if they have been at this particular campus since the beginning of their coursework. However, the level two and level three courses do use Blackboard for announcements and communication of assignment expectations, so they likely had some exposure. She also noted that students who are entering NVCC at level four usually do not have any previous instruction with an LMS or online tools. Linda did not want the BL environment to be a barrier for students and encouraged those new to NVCC to take advantage of her office hours to go over the tools one-on one. Although strict with her assignment deadlines, she added that

she is "softer for the first few weeks, because if they didn't understand how to get access, they're behind and it's no way to start off a semester."

Following Directions

Reading comprehension proved to be a challenge for students during the course in the area of written directions. The students had great difficulty following written directions, often completing one part of an assignment, but not other portions. The challenge of adhering to instructions had a significant impact on grading for these students. A large group of students could not perform activities correctly because they misread or misunderstood the instructions. Online, students would answer only one or two parts of a three-part question. In class, when taking an exam, students had difficulty completing multi-step questions as well. Linda routinely modeled the process of annotating directions to important assignments in class while the students practiced as a whole group in order to prepare them for reading and interpreting the directions on Blackboard at home and in the F2F format on exams. On Blackboard, she also posted numerous reminders that understanding directions is a critical component of being successful on an independent assignment. In the syllabus, Linda included two separate sections dedicated to reading and following directions:

Reading Directions and Spell-checking Assignments: In a hybrid course, reading directions is extremely important. Please take the time to read ALL the directions for every assignment, even if you think you know what to do. Assignments that do not meet the requirements in the online directions will not be graded and will

lose 10 points off the final score. Assignments that are not spell-checked will lose 10 points off the final score.

Reading directions is VERY IMPORTANT! Although the at-home work is based directly on what we do in class, I am not there to explain things to you. Please read the directions for each assignment carefully, especially discussion boards. KNOW WHAT YOU NEED TO DO BEFORE YOU START! This saves both you and me a lot of time.

With the many class observations involving practice with explicit instructions, written feedback on the discussion board, and guidance on the LMS, the researcher noted that students have a difficult time comprehending written directions with multiple parts. Linda also included a large section on the ways in which to post on a discussion board which included etiquette and modeled recommendations for displaying key information.

Following directions for online posts was often a challenge and when intertwined with the difficulty that students had engaging in vocabulary lessons, it became clear to Linda that she needed to change the wording of her vocabulary instructions for the next semester. Linda gave directions in the online format to post authentically about vocabulary directly from a short story, in hopes that students would be able to connect to the reading. The expectations were to type the original sentence and the page number where the word could be found in the text, the part of speech, and a clear definition of the word. At the end of the post, Linda included an example. However, students still had problems rephrasing into their own words and following the directions that included

multiple parts. Linda experimented with different ways to present the directions in an organized fashion and said she will continue to work towards making explicit instructions in the future. Most of her online assignments on the discussion board involved multi-step directions and questions with more than one part. At the beginning of the semester, she also created a course requirement assignment which took students through the syllabus step-by-step and outlined the rules and expectations for the class. She hoped this would prepare them to read through and self-direct themselves in making sure they answered all of the questions. She shared that she will continue to adapt the way she presents her directions both online and F2F. She expressed routinely that the skill to follow multi-step, temporal, and sequential directions in reading is a crucial part of the course and in their careers beyond NVCC.

Plagiarism

The issue of obtaining work from students of previous semesters or plagiarizing from the Internet came out as a significant barrier to successful language learning in Linda's experience in the blended learning classroom. She has rebuilt and adapted her syllabus and procedures numerous times to try to avoid the window of opportunities that a course could potentially provide to cheat on academic work. Prior to this class, Linda discovered the problem of cheating with former students giving materials to future students. Therefore, she implemented all new articles, which required her to create new vocabulary lists, and imposed accountability measures. In the future, she plans to update her materials regularly and limit the number of paper copies that she issues students

97

during F2F time. The redesign added hours to her pre-course workload for the current semester, but she did notice a notable decrease in plagiarism.

During in-class observations, Linda stated several times the severity and importance of academic integrity. Before the midterm exam, which was completed at home, she stated to students:

> You may not use Google. If I find a cut and paste or Internet language, you will fail the test. I'm not trying to trick you in the exam, so I want to know that you understand what we've done. And it's independent, so each individual should be doing this in their own home. We are not working on this together.

Then again before the final exam, she reiterated to her class:

> No Google. I will notice. I can tell when they are not your own words. If you need some help, please let me know. It has happened twice before, and I will give this speech again next week. You will fail the short story. It's your reputation and your education.

Technology tools aided her efforts in combating plagiarism. She frequently uses *SafeAssign*, a plagiarism catcher, which is included in Blackboard at the campus. This tool allows teachers to identify unoriginal content in students' papers by recognizing areas of overlap between course assignments and existing work. Linda dedicated large sections of the syllabus to discouraging students from acts of plagiarism. Part of her online feedback method is also used to stay alert to possible copycat posts. Linda responds to every post, but also carefully reads the mandatory replies from each student and uses SafeAssign to detect cheating. The risk of plagiarism hindered her from using

other online tools that may make cheating easier, such as Google Docs. She would enjoy

letting the students collaborate and write inside a document on Google but is

apprehensive considering that leaves the internet open to use in online collaboration and

exams during F2F time. Linda noted, "some students, if they don't know what to do, they

pull stuff and use it and in some cultures that's respectful."

Linda learned through experience to have private conversations with students she

suspects have plagiarized on their assignments. A student in a previous class submitted

the answer key that Linda had given out in a previous semester. Linda recounted that she

"talked to [the student] and she said that she was scared, and she was worried, because

she was scared to summarize. She was afraid she wasn't going to do it right." Research

has shown that students' ability to write well in English tended to be low, so their

confidence levels in writing were also low due to language barriers (Tran 2012). Linda

attempted to have a meaningful conversation with her student and thought:

> Everything was okay and then she also submitted someone else's vocabulary.
>
> That's the first time I've ever referred somebody to the academic dean. I figured,
>
> with once, I feel like it's an opportunity to talk to them, but it was very
>
> disconcerting and disheartening, especially the second time. Basically her excuse
>
> was 'I just don't have time.'

On the LMS and in class, Linda established clear guidelines for what constitutes

plagiarism and how to avoid it by allowing more time to practice the conventions of

citation and referencing, which are important steps in maintaining academic integrity

(Tran 2012; Youmans 2011). She has also now taken steps to make sure the students

cannot pull materials from the internet for at-home projects. For example, she explained:

> The students had a shopping project. But again, one challenge has been that
>
> people are sharing their projects with each other and there's no way to test, I
>
> didn't keep them. It didn't occur to me, so I have no way, but I can tell I've seen
>
> this before. This semester, you know, they have to take a picture of themselves at
>
> the store and if they have this type of advertisement, they're supposed to take a
>
> picture of it. So I said, you need to have some identifying item in each picture,
>
> your face, a key ring, your daughter, you know, something. They aren't allowed
>
> to use the internet, one woman wrote her whole project, 'I went to Shopper's...and
>
> I saw this.' And all of her pictures were from Wegmans that she had pulled from
>
> the internet. And I'm like (laughter) . . . and so that's why I finally said you need
>
> to have an identifying thing in your picture because I can't tell if you took it from
>
> the internet or [not]. And I say, "most of you, I apologize because you're not
>
> going to do it." But every semester, there's enough. The cheating is the worst part.
>
> And the challenge of technology, sharing of materials, downloading PowerPoints
>
> that are answers or the discussion of something.

Linda communicated a few challenges in implementing the BL approach for

language learning. She experienced technology issues involving skill level of students, an

inability to follow directions, and students participating in plagiarism. In addition, Linda

struggled with several assignments this semester, such as vocabulary, that lacked

opportunities for interaction among students and opened the door to plagiarism. The

vocabulary work involved creating sentences with the intended word that showed meaning. Often, students would pull sentences from the internet without developing an understanding of the meaning. As a teacher, Linda found the vocabulary sentences exhausting and tedious to grade each week. She adapted the assignment for the next semester to allow for more engagement with students. She will be establishing a connection between the vocabulary and the short stories to make the assignment meaningful to the students. Linda also stated that there was not an established intent of social presence in creating assignments with collaboration in mind. In previous hybrid courses, difficulty with monitoring the participation of members and students meeting outside of class time have deterred her from group projects. She would like to try collaboration again with tools that she has available with the newly implemented LMS, Canvas. Adjusting her course to avoid challenges has proven to be a necessary and ongoing part of her teaching to continue the successful process of the blended learning model.

Summary

This study aimed to capture the perception of a community college ESL instructor's BL approach for language learning and the effective areas of social presence in such a course. The participating instructor perceived that blended learning engaged students in a flexible and communicative approach to language learning. During the F2F classroom time, Linda used advertisements, short stories, and songs to elicit interactions among students in the areas of main idea, theme, and symbolism. Technology in the virtual space allowed for the design of a student-centered approach to learning with

routine and intentional feedback to enhance their learning. Linda focused on particular

tools, such as discussion boards to individualize learning for students during short story

and vocabulary exercises and to promote communication between students. While Linda

appreciates the components of blended learning and has an overall positive outlook

towards the design method, she also acknowledged that there are challenges to the

blended learning approach. She mentioned that plagiarism is not a strictly hybrid

challenge but accepts that the use of technology does allow for students to gain access to

answers more readily.

Linda felt that students were able to engage more online and participate with the

use of the discussion boards on Blackboard. She also experienced a stronger connection

for students with language difficulties through email and providing immediate feedback

than she does not normally have time for in her F2F classrooms. In her perception, more

timid students felt more comfortable typing a well-thought out question to her than

approaching her in class. A hybrid schedule also afforded the teacher and students the

flexibility to work at their own pace for individualization.

These findings may serve as guidelines for teachers when implementing a

blended learning approach in teaching, as they want their students to fully concentrate on

the objective while also creating a community in which to use the target language with

confidence. When teachers know how to keep students engaged and establish a social

presence, teachers can provide a friendly and interesting atmosphere that enhances

learning. In this study, it is not clear how social presence affects learning performance

directly and indirectly. However, promoting effective communicative language learning

through discussion boards can lead to rich conversations in the target language creating a social presence among learners. Finding errors and revising the message before sending it allows learners to communicate with each other while accepting teacher feedback. The authenticity of the visuals, literary work, and song in both the F2F and online learning environments, gave students the opportunity to explore the richness of the language and complete critical thinking tasks. These blended implementations can serve as a way to enhance language learning in the targeted language.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the presentation and analysis of data were detailed. This chapter consists of a summary of the study, discussion of the findings in comparison to the literature, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and conclusions. The purpose of this chapter is to develop the concepts of this study to provide a further understanding of its possible impact on blended instruction in the community college ESL classroom, and present suggestions for additional research targeting how community college ESL instructors can foster social presence in a BL environment. Additionally, this chapter addresses challenges for community college faculty when designing and implementing the online and F2F portion of a course for language learning and for building a community.

Summary of Study

This study sought to examine the design and implementation strategies of an experienced faculty member who teaches hybrid ESL courses at a Virginia community college, including how they perceived activities of blended learning and social presence in and outside the classroom to impact student success. The purpose of this study was achieved through pre- and post-interviews with the faculty member, rigorous document

analysis, and observations throughout the semester. The study included three research questions:

RQ1: What is the approach of an experienced community college English as a Second Language teacher to structuring a blended learning course to promote language learning?

RQ2: What are the teacher's perceptions of assignments that most effectively fostered social presence and promoted language learning in an English as a Second Language blended learning community college course?

RQ3: What are the teacher's perceptions of assignments that least effectively fostered social presence and promoted language learning in an English as a Second Language blended learning community college course?

Answers to the three research questions came from the findings from the interviews, document analysis from the LMS and F2F instruction, and in-class observations. The findings provided a detailed description of the instructor's experience with blended learning techniques in a collaborative setting to promote language learning.

In regard to the teacher perceptions of a blended learning course, this study indicates that Linda promoted blended language learning. For research question one, the methods used for instruction demonstrated that the instructor implemented strategies that promote student engagement, enhance communication between all members of the learning community, and address course learning objectives in a flexible dual mode environment. The most frequently used instruction techniques included discussion forums, short stories, and advertisements. Based on observations, these methods

encouraged student participation and created an environment where students learned from each other. The instructor used accountability measures with posting online and academic integrity, which supported student engagement and success. Interviews and observations demonstrated that the instructor regularly assessed the effectiveness of techniques and made adaptations when necessary. She considered student interests, focused on the achievement of learning objectives, and demonstrated willingness to connect with her students in a learning community. The findings from this study can be used as a resource for designing and implementing an ESL blended learning community college course.

Discussion of Findings

Previous research depicts numerous benefits in support of a blended approach for language learning (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Hung, 2015; Kvashina & Martynko, 2016; Lee & Wallace 2017). The common themes in prior research related to positive outcomes in blended learning English language acquisition include flexibility in time and space, engagement in literature and activities in the dual modes, and communication among students and between students and the instructor. Addressing challenges for the dual mode approach to language learning, previous research (Webb et al., 2014; Han, 2015) identified instructor issues such as sustaining motivation, time required to prepare and collect class materials, and loss of personal connection during asynchronous class activities.

Additionally, the past research on social presence in the blended learning classroom revealed that students can feel less self-conscious and isolated while in the

106

online format in order to prepare them for F2F interactions (Wicks, Craft, Mason, Gritter, & Bolding, 2014). The work of Volchok (2018) asked students to introduce themselves and respond to their classmates' messages. The online forum fostered students' social presence and was a critical component of their overall grade. Volchok's study focused on blended learning in a community college classroom but did not highlight ESL students in particular. Further, the research provided scarce background knowledge on the thought process and perceived successful strategies on blended learning activities that impacted language learning and fostered social presence from an ESL instructor at the community college level.

For the purpose of my study, the Linda's interview responses provided insight into her thought process and design for the hybrid classroom at the community college, why she implemented specific activities for language learning, and her perception of her use of specific tasks to foster social presence. Document analysis and observations clarified instructional strategies Linda used in virtual and F2F settings and provided more in-depth information on what influenced her choice of the activities that she employed. Categories were identified from the interviews, documents, and observations, and within those, I identified strategies Linda used in the blended approach to language learning in the hybrid course to promote language learning and social presence. These strategies were: 1) organization of the face-to-face format; 2) activities with student participation and discussion in the LMS virtual space; and 3) student-to student and student-teacher communication in both modes. It is important to examine these categories in relation to

the literature on teaching in an ESL blended learning environment to gain a deeper understanding of how Linda's experience fits within a wider framework.

Components in promoting language learning in blended learning research.

The first category identified through interviews, document analysis, and observations was organization of the F2F format. Students in the course, during F2F time, engaged in conversations about main ideas and symbolism in short stories, advertisements, and songs, which made them appear eager to learn and participate. These observations supported past research indicating that ESL students have enjoyed listening to songs and drawing meaning from them to share in discussion with the class (Şahin-Kızıl, 2014). The instructor communicated most tasks with students during F2F time using the target language, English, in order to accomplish the objective of integrating real-life scenarios and meaningful interactions (Egbert et al., 2015; Gleason, 2013). As students actively engaged in authentic tasks, with guidance from the instructor, they collectively and collaboratively built understanding (Egbert et al., 2015; Senior, 2010) and developed autonomy with the target language (Brinks-Lockwood, 2014; Han, 2015).

F2F format.

In their study, Egbert et al. (2015) found online tasks that used engaging literature, appealed to student interests, and developed necessary skills for language learning. During F2F sessions, I similarly found that the literature used in discussion and student-led conversations engaged students by allowing them to work at their own pace, receive feedback, and help each other navigate assignments. As Clark and Rossiter

108

(2008) noted, stories engage learners at "more than a cognitive level; they engage our spirit, our imagination" because they draw on the learners' background knowledge. This strategy empowers students to share their ideas with confidence, giving everyone a voice without unnecessarily imposing particular opinions (Senior, 2010), which the instructor in the course for this study hoped to avoid.

During observations, the class was regularly involved in dissecting short stories together. The instructor would guide students to apply concepts and dissect the main idea in an open and welcoming F2F classroom setting. Research supports this strategy, as it shows that students are more responsive and involve themselves in learning tasks if they sense the teacher is invested in their education and success (Senior, 2010). Based on observations and interviews, Linda worked to establish rapport and trust without undermining her classroom management and expectations of her students in order to draw students into the learning. Additionally, Linda had found in the past that vocabulary exercises that were not intentionally tied to other activities and themes in the course were less successful. They did not foster student engagement and a social presence in the classroom for the students or for her. In her post-interview, Linda remarked that she would adapt the curriculum to attach vocabulary tasks in a more meaningful way to the short stories in the future in order to make them more authentic for students.

During the course of the semester, Linda incorporated visual materials to teach the concept of advertisement techniques, main idea, and symbolism. Many online courses at the community college level still consist heavily of text-based course materials and

lack auditory or visual stimuli (Jaggars et al., 2013), however, the hybrid course in this

study did not use a textbook and allowed engagement with visuals in both online and F2F

time. The students engaged in discussion and shared personal stories and interests while

discussing the meaning and purpose of the advertisements.

   Learning management system.

   The second category that promoted learning in the BL environment by the

instructor was in the utilization of the LMS and online activities. Neumeier (2005)

reported that giving learners academic choice and independence creates autonomy and

responsibility for their learning (Šafranj, 2013; Stracke, 2007). In a blended ESL

classroom, technology tools should enable the instructor to deliver a significant

proportion of course content (more than 30%) through computer-based tasks, including

online quizzes and synchronous-asynchronous discussion complementary to carefully

planned, in-class language teaching (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007; Vernadakis,

Antoniou, Giannousi, Zetou, & Kioumourtzoglou, 2011). The LMS used in this study

aided in the transition from the physical to the virtual community because the instructor

used Blackboard purposefully to prepare students for the course, displayed all course

materials, and provided support materials for students who needed additional support.

Having a flexible platform to display materials and communicate with the students is a

way for teachers to individualize instruction and allow students to focus on skills outside

of the classroom walls (Han, 2015). The students in this study participated in flexible and

individualized learning opportunities which has the potential to reduce the feeling of

isolation during asynchronous activities. The open schedule allowed students to affirm

and clarify their learning with concepts and tasks as many times as they needed to be

successful. Blackboard was the LMS used for the virtual mode, however the instructor

was also able to share insight into Canvas which was the new LMS the campus was

switching to the following semester. The instructor's initial experience with Canvas

indicated that some of the technology challenges from the observed course would be

resolved in the new mode. For example, there is a calendar feature on Canvas that assists

in making it clearer to students about directions and due dates for assignments.

One benefit in using the virtual space during blended learning is the opportunity

to let students decide when they will engage in online activities. The intention of a

blended learning course is that students are motivated to learn and engaged in the

process, therefore they will learn more quickly and achieve language success

(Radosavlevikj, 2015). Scott and Ryan (2009) in their study discovered that online

members become more engaged in discussions and interacted effectively when they were

set appropriate tasks. In addition, Batardiere (2015) researched learners' cognitive

activity in an online forum with a collaborative task. He investigated the type of cognitive

activity learners experienced while completing the task, and found high levels during

intercultural online communication and critical reflection of different perspectives. The

findings of my study similarly indicated that the online discussion forum enabled the

participants to improve their critical thinking skills and linguistic and intercultural

111

competence. During the online portion in the course, discussion posts kept students interacting with one another and accountable in preparation for the next in-class session.

As documented in earlier research, discussion forums have long been used to facilitate, develop, and sustain social presence (Hostetter, 2013). Previous studies show that discussion boards, blogs and online collaboration tools help develop students' online communication literacies (Levy, 2017). In addition, a factor in successful engagement in F2F sessions during hybrid courses is the preparation that students do before class (Hsieh, et al., 2017; Hung, 2015). Research shows that instructors cannot fully engage students at a high level of academic achievement if proper work is not done ahead of time by the students (Webb, et al., 2014; Hsieh et al., 2017). Linda perceived visual activities as engaging to learners, both in the online and F2F environment. In observations, the interactions with materials elicited rich discussion and seemed to build confidence in students who engaged in sharing opinions about literature and various types of media. Asynchronous online discussions have gained considerable interest among educators and researchers in terms of designing and facilitating rich, authentic, and meaningful approaches to learning. A number of modes and online tools have been developed in order to analyze discussions by examining the relationships between interaction and learning (Hotstetter & Busch, 2013; Levy, 2017).

Communication.

Student-to-student and student-teacher communication across both modes was found to be the third category in this study that contributed to language learning. Yang

(2014) proposes three dimensions of engagement during the online learning portion of a blended course: behavioral engagement, which can be observed as an action that leads to an outcome, emotional engagement which refers to students' sharing of feelings; and cognitive engagement which refers to learning strategies. Online learning engagement provides an interactive setting for communication among teachers and students in the classroom (Yuen, 2011) and this engagement can be observable and measured by the teacher to influence activity choices. Having students interact with each other and with the language itself also contributes to the sense of engagement in the learners (Meltzer & Hamman, 2004). Research shows that discussion within the social spaces provided in online communities has the potential to increase metacognition, as they allow students to construct meaning and confirm knowledge in the presence of peers. discussions (Akyol & Garrison, 2011). In addition, Chen and Chiou (2014) suggested that student success in the hybrid format as compared to the traditional format was due to convenient access to information, a learning style beneficial to the use of technology, and an enhanced motivation for learning due to their sense of belonging to a community.

My findings aligned with the work of Akyol and Garrison (2011) and Chen and Chiou (2016), as the flexible hybrid environment (Bauer-Ramazani et al., 2016; Futch et al., 2016; Hsieh et al., 2017) provided a virtual community and physical space for students to master language skills and practice independently, while still communicating with the teacher and other students. Similar to my findings, research notes the importance of asynchronous learning in giving a voice to students, as it builds their confidence by

allowing them to practice their communication skills in a comfortable and secure online

forum (Bakar, Latiff, and Hamat, 2013; Futch et al., 2016). Albalawi (2014) found

student-to-student interactions were perceived by students to be the most important for

improving their satisfaction within the online learning environment. In my study, the

discussion posts that elicited the most interaction between students were about the short

stories. In particular, *Hills Like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway had the most

posts. This story focuses on a couple having a conversation at a train station. The couple

argue about an operation that the man wants the woman to have, which is implied to be

an abortion. The teacher perceived that the students felt comfortable discussing the

characters' dilemmas and agreeing or disagreeing respectfully about the decisions in the

story.

Student-teacher interactions can also increase student engagement in language

learning (Yang, 2014). The LMS, which was the major mode of communication in the

course in my study, can facilitate the process of students reaching out and interacting

with the teacher more effectively, which can make student-teacher communication more

meaningful (Yang, 2014). Albalawi (2014) found learner-instructor interactions, along

with the helpfulness and availability of the instructor, were valuable for improving the

learner's satisfaction with online learning. The LMS in my study provided a way to

enhance student-to-student and student-teacher interactions without the restrictions often

experienced in a F2F classroom, in part due to the flexibility it provided. Linda provided

her personal contact information to students in order to be available with questions on

weeknights and on weekends. Linda reported that many students took advantage of the flexible hours. Student-teacher communication in this study extended to virtual tutorials, F2F lectures, emails, one-on-one appointments, and phone calls throughout the course. Using these communication tools to provide more language input and feedback for students and accommodate the many proficiency levels allowed for individualized learning and increased learner autonomy and participation (Lee & Wallace, 2017). In the analysis of the data collected for my study, effective communication between the teacher and students improved learning outcomes for the students in the course. The instructor offered ongoing communication with students and encouraged students to communicate any concerns or questions during asynchronous and F2F time.

Along with student-to-student interaction, the instructor understood her feedback from teacher to student to be critical in helping students meet learning objectives. She felt that providing consistent and timely feedback was an important element of the communication during the course. The instructor also readily requested feedback on activities and projects from the students to enhance the quality of her course delivery methods. This practice is supported by findings from previous research, which showed that instructors recommended creating opportunities for students to provide feedback about the course to inform the instructor when an assignment was not working or a concept was not clear (Futch et al., 2016).

Research has shown that language students in a blended environment are less apprehensive about communicating with peers online due to the fact that they can

carefully consider and revise their replies before posting (Bakar, et al., 2013; Hsieh, et al., 2017; Levy, 2017). However, as explained in the previous chapter, despite the instructor's efforts and encouragement, there was apprehension on the part of students to reach out for assistance outside of class time.

E-learning and hybrid courses offer similar advantages for language learners. However, research in blended learning has revealed that learners can achieve a more significant sense of community or belonging than in a strictly online course (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Rovai & Jordan, 2004; Tayebinik & Puteh, 2013). McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined a sense of community as, "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). The hybrid approach can establish a community of inquiry that allows learners to interact and collaborate with their peers and to learn in "a learning environment that integrates social, cognitive and teaching elements that in a way will precipitate and sustain reflection and discourse" (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 8). A community of learners can interact from various places at different times because of the benefits that CALL tools provide in order to learn from each other (Šafranj, 2013).

The instructor in my study used the virtual environment to provide an online support system where students could construct meaning and confirm knowledge in the presence of peers on the discussion board format, which aligns with previous research (Akyol, Garrison, & Ozden, 2009). Linda perceived the students to be a friendly, close

community in both the F2F and online modes. Many of the students knew each other

from previous courses and she noticed a comfort in the way they turned to each other for

clarification and help with assignments.

Social presence.

Tinto (1993) suggested that the college classroom was the space where the social

and the academic met and that questions about student achievement and success should

begin with the influence of social presence and activities in the classroom. Liu et al.

(2009) found that social presence is a significant predictor of course retention and final

grade in the community college online environment. Social presence can help learners to

project themselves in online discussion boards and feel a sense of belonging to the online

community. Garrison (2009) suggested that social presence occurs when learners are able

to become a part of a community, interact within that community, and develop

relationships by revealing their personalities. Although Linda did not specifically use the

term "social presence," her approach to teaching and course structure fostered aspects of

social presence among the community of learners. Linda's interviews also relayed

information regarding components of the course that led to a strong classroom

community and some areas that did not contribute to language learning and the learning

environment.

I observed all three components of social presence — open communication, group

cohesion, and affective expression — during in-class sessions. Regarding open

communication, the learning environment in the virtual and F2F space was observed as a

place where students expressed their opinions and regularly took part in activities and discussions. The interpersonal interaction seemed to elicit more dialogue than whole group conversations. Group cohesion, although not established outside of the classroom intentionally, was achieved during F2F time when learners collaborated with each other to achieve objectives regarding short stories or advertisements. Some students who did not participate regularly in whole group discussions were able to have extensive conversations with peers about the same topics. Providing time and opportunities for students to interact and collaborate with each other can result in a significant difference in group cohesion in an online course (Lee & Huang, 2018). Linda consistently organized students to work in small groups during F2F time in order to discuss short stories and homework assignments done outside of class. Students could use their discussions to help clarify topics for their rewrites on posts or for guidance on the next assignment.

According to Chang and Sperling (2014), students online can reinforce friendship and affinity with peers while helping each other with academic topics from the classroom. Having that support system can lead students to participate and engage more regularly. Kucuk and Sahin (2013) found that group cohesion was significantly higher in a blended mode when compared to solely online. Lastly, affective expression is related to reflecting emotions. Linda observed clear moments of togetherness and friendship, as well as self-disclosure and humor, during the online discussion posts. The students were able to get to know each other, interact frequently, and receive feedback and support when needed from each other and the instructor.

In their study of an online course, Kilgore and Lowenthal (2015) found that social presence could be established if "faculty and instructional designers take the time to design intentional learning experiences that help establish and maintain social presence using a variety of technologies while they also actively engage learners and model effective ways to communicate throughout an entire course" (p. 382). In a blended learning language class, participation can be associated with student success, while minimal online interactions, both passive and active, can be associated with lower academic achievement (Rubio, Thomas, & Li, 2018).

During my study, Linda wanted opportunities to communicate with students in the online environment that would match closely with the frequency of the F2F space. The course was designed with supports for student-to-student, student-teacher, and student-to-content interaction. This was achieved through sharing of personal stories and experiences, immediate and consistent feedback, and regular discourse in the LMS and F2F settings. At the beginning of the semester, Linda started creating her classroom community by providing opportunities for students to make connections through introductions and responses, on the discussion board. With these frequent posts, Linda also communicated expectations, reminders, and routines for posting, emailing, and corresponding in the classroom. As the instructor, she found it imperative to model for students how to communicate on the discussion board and replied to each student to maintain a connection. Linda made several posts prior to the first class of the course that showed how to properly communicate with another member of the class in the forum. She continued to model her guidelines in her comments back to students on their own

posts. In prior research, modeling and monitoring participation can allow faculty to adjust their courses to encourage more participation and could also help faculty to respond appropriately when students are struggling (Rubio et al., 2018). The implications from this discussion are discussed further in the next section.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The increasing need for language teachers to create and implement instruction that will meet the needs of learners from diverse sociolinguistic backgrounds has been highlighted in the research (Hampel & Stickler, 2005; Hubbard, 2008; Liu & Kleinsasser, 2015). Blended learning with intentional fostering of social presence for language instruction has been identified as a way to reach those learners. It is important to identify instructor perceptions about the work of designing and implementing techniques used and to understand how they choose which techniques to utilize. An additional concept to address is the potential challenges that can hinder a BL environment from being successful and how instructors navigate through those obstacles to promote learning. The findings of this study have several implications for ESL faculty teaching hybrid courses with the goal of developing a classroom community and establishing social presence among their students. This study identified several promising strategies in the implementation of activities and methods as well as areas in need of improvement. The study can serve as an informative guide for community college faculty when making decisions about using materials and developing activities for both F2F and online modes. Novice and experienced faculty can use the challenges and solutions found in this study to reflect on their teaching and hybrid courses.

An implication of this study involves motivation to consistently adapt materials to overcome challenges and bring out the potential benefits of blended learning. Using engaging materials can result in motivation from the students to actively participate in their learning. Adjuncts and teachers new to hybrid courses need access to information on strategies and materials that apply to ESL courses they teach in order to identify new avenues to promote language learning. The instructor in this study indicated a willingness to incorporate new techniques to avoid barriers to student success and devoted time outside of the F2F environment to establish a connection with her students. However, the instructor also identified challenges, including technology skill level of the student, plagiarism, and student ability to interpret directions. In some cases, these are barriers to implementing new techniques. Making information on design and implementation strategies readily available to new and adjunct faculty of hybrid courses would minimize the time necessary to locate materials and aid in avoiding the barriers highlighted in the study. Community colleges could use an LMS, such as Blackboard or Canvas, to set up discussion forums for instructors to share specific methods and materials useful for ESL hybrid courses.

Another implication of this study involves the limited resources and professional development available to instructors for the establishment of a community of inquiry with social presence in the classroom. For the ESL hybrid instructors, discovering how to implement activities with social presence can create an environment where there is trust and information is successfully shared (Garrison et al., 2000). However, Linda, an experienced instructor, did not explicitly design online or F2F assignments with

collaboration and social presence specifically in mind. Additionally, she stated that group

work was difficult to implement due to a lack of participation from some members of the

group and schedule conflicts in meeting outside of class. She also felt that asking students

to meet outside of the F2F environment could impact the flexibility of a hybrid course.

To address these concerns, students could meet online using tools such as Google chat

and Blackboard Collaborate and establish roles for accountability of equal contributions.

Finally, the findings in this study indicate the importance of: 1) researching

specific activities that promote language learning and social presence in ESL hybrid

courses; and 2) evaluating these resources and their connection to student perceptions of

belonging and student success. Faculty mentor meetings and professional development

opportunities that address instruction and implementation techniques to promote social

presence and student engagement would provide information on each instructor's

understanding of the concept and increase the likelihood that they might focus on these

elements in their classes. This is especially important for community college faculty who

may not use a textbook and are responsible for developing and finding their own

materials. For NVCC, regular conferences and conventions on social presence in ESL

blended learning could also ensure motivation for use on the part of the faculty. If

professional development and research include consideration of instructional strategies

with a social presence, faculty could implement and provide feedback and suggestions for

improvement. Constant adaptations and growth in teaching would contribute to a strong

methodology for English language learning across the NVCC campuses. Since the

instructor in this study indicated that she consistently sought out ways to improve her

course to promote student learning, professional development that incorporates BL strategies for community building and engagement could be helpful to instructors and students in meeting the learning objectives of the course.

Limitations

This study was limited to one campus location at NVCC located in a culturally and socioeconomically diverse portion of Northern Virginia, so its findings may not be widely transferable to other campuses whose members are less diverse, come from more privileged settings, or may have greater access to technology outside of the classroom. While the researcher's observational experience with the institution consisted of online and in-class textbooks and drill exercises in ESL classrooms, the institution consistently ranks among the top colleges nationally for using technology to provide exceptional services to students and increase educator effectiveness. The study also limited its focus to one construct of the CoI framework: the perceived social presence and the impact on learning outcomes of an ESL blended course. There are additional factors influencing teacher perceptions of language learning, so this study is a preliminary, limited look at social presence in a specific learning situation.

Lastly, this research approach employed a single-case study which is susceptible to critique among researchers in the areas of external validity and generalizability. As King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) write, "in all social science research and all prediction, it is important that we be as explicit as possible about the degree of uncertainty that accompanies our prediction" (p. 212). The exploratory approach, rather than an explanatory one, aids in minimizing this limitation. For generalizability, the ESL program

demographics and economic make-up between counties of the institution are not drastically different from one another if the research were to inform instruction on other campuses of the institution. I am, however, cautious of overgeneralizing the study's findings.

Future Research

Future research into this subject should include a representative sample of ESL faculty at campuses who are actively selecting course material with a social presence framework and collaborative environment in mind. Using this work as a foundation, a study of a larger representative sample of ESL hybrid faculty could identify similarities and differences across institutions. A study that compares faculty knowledge and use of activities geared towards language learning and social presence in a BL format could identify positive instructional strategies that promote student success, as well as common issues from instructors that hinder the success of language learning. These studies might include student perceptions and compare them to instructor perceptions and student achievement. Additional research in perceptions could examine the difference between perceived and observed instructional strategies. In addition, an examination of end-of-semester student achievement and student perceptions of engagement could capture how students react to activities in order to constantly improve language instruction in the blended environment.

Additional research needs to include the factors that motivate students to take advantage of instructor availability during asynchronous times in order to clarify concepts or practice their language skills beyond course requirements. Because the

observations in this study were limited to one classroom, strategies and activities observed may be more related to the particular course institution that were the focus of my study. A more thorough examination of teacher perception compared to observation in multiple settings would provide additional data on what instructors do in their BL ESL classrooms over the course of a semester.

Another area of research could focus on providing more detailed information on the resources ESL community college instructors use when preparing for BL courses and F2F class sessions. Due to the success that the students had with the in-class discussion and individual assignments, more research needs to be done on the use of visual aids and advertisements to bring students together in a community of inquiry. Little research has been done on using advertisements to promote language learning. There is currently no research on advertisements and the impact on social presence in the community college language classroom. Such research would provide data on where instructors find instructional materials that they perceive to engage learners and themselves. The instructor in this study frequently used articles posted on social media and topics which interested her as assigned readings. Research that includes questions more specific to the value the instructor places on different resources for learning language and facilitating rich discussion could identify effective mechanisms for professional development of ESL hybrid instructors at the community college level. In terms of the data collection instruments, future researchers should also consider including interview questions from the COI survey that break down the categories of social presence (open communication, group cohesion, affective expression). Specifically, more research needs to be done on

blended language courses with purposeful activities geared toward group cohesion both in the online and F2F environment. Future research into how ESL hybrid instructors navigate collaboration in blended learning would help instructors promote community-building among students outside of the classroom. This would provide a more detailed account of the teacher's perception of social presence in their course.

Lastly, qualitative data on less effective techniques identified by students could be compared with the perceptions of the instructor, such as disconnected vocabulary tasks or a lack of collaborative projects. Additional methods where vocabulary can be used as an engaging community building tool without seeming rote could be included in other studies. This would provide useful information for understanding both teaching and learning ESL in community colleges. Specifically, researchers could gather information on why students found a technique less effective, the steps for making this determination, and how their preference for task implementation could address challenges and create an easier process for instructors designing future courses. Studies could also include targeting those students where misconceptions in written language and following directions can be a challenge. This would provide additional information on strengthening language instruction based on students' needs.

Conclusion

The findings of this study expanded the work of previous researchers in the area of blended learning and social presence in an ESL community college course and instructor perception. This investigation revealed that an experienced instructor of hybrid courses at NVCC campus focused on student learning objectives and planned courses to

utilize techniques that promote student engagement, included relevant connections and references, supported discourse and communication, and included assessments that encouraged students to demonstrate their language learning. As they do throughout higher education and specifically in community colleges, instructors play an important role in providing language teaching in an evolving field. The instructor in this study indicated an understanding of that role, a dedication to constant improvement, and a dedication to developing a welcoming classroom community built on open communication.

Additionally, this study showed the instructor utilizing a variety of resources that they collected and curated. The materials gathered required a large amount of time to prepare for students prior to the start of the course. Due to complications with academic integrity, the instructor regularly revised the course assignments and assessments to hold students accountable for their learning. During these revisions, the instructor was also advising adjunct faculty, teaching courses, and learning a new LMS for the next course.

While this study was not able to capture student perceptions of blended learning and social presence, the data presented here indicated student engagement in the course. The instructor reported that only two students in the class did not pass the course and that the student end-of-semester questionnaires were overwhelmingly positive. A more intentional approach to capture student satisfaction in a blended learning course would be beneficial in future research. The instructor worked to expand knowledge in the area of reading in an ESL course. This included efforts to meet student learning objectives while keeping content authentic for the learner, creating a dynamic classroom environment for

students in dual modes, maintaining their own passion for the subject matter, and

constantly growing as an education professional in order to meet student needs. It is my

hope that community colleges can use my study to serve dedicated teachers and ESL

learners in technology and language education.

APPENDIX A

Social Presence Faculty Pre-Semester Interview Questions

1. How do you convey to students how to have discussions online and face-to-face? Do you have specific conversations about agreeing or disagreeing, sensitivity to culture, etc?

2. How comfortable are you facilitating content discussions? In content discussions online, what is your expectation from peer-to-peer on the discussion boards?

3. What is your process for making sure collaboration and meaningful interactions happen outside the traditional classroom with your students? Inside?

4. What are your measures for holding students accountable while still keeping the learning meaningful?

5. What are some things that you feel you are successful at in creating a community of learning among your students online?

6. Describe how you provide positive feedback, both online and F2F. Constructive feedback for improvement? Group? Individual?

7. Are there any specific ways in which you help students get to know each other?

8. Do you find the online communication of your course to be useful for social interaction? In class?

9. How do you encourage quiet or shy students to engage in discussion with peers and yourself in online settings? F2F settings?

10. How do you promote collaboration online? F2F?

11. How do you format online discussions to make students see different perspectives?

12. What specific projects have you prepared that you feel will work best to foster social presence? Why?

13. Is collaboration among students important to you? Why?

14. How do you foster a feeling of trust from student-to-student and student-to-teacher?

15. Describe challenges of transferring social presence from F2F to online.

16. What strategies are you currently employing to increase social presence?

17. What strategies are you currently employing to build a learning community?

18. What strategies are you currently employing to reduce feelings of isolation in students?

19. What role do you think the synchronous tools will play to achieve these aims?

Community of Inquiry Survey Instrument (draft v14)

Teaching Presence

Design & Organization

1. The instructor clearly communicated important course topics.

2. The instructor clearly communicated important course goals.

3. The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.

4. The instructor clearly communicated important due dates/time frames for learning activities.

Facilitation

5. The instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped me to learn.

6. The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.

7. The instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.

8. The instructor helped keep the course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.

9. The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in this course.

10. Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.

Direct Instruction

11. The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me to learn.

12. The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives.

13. The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.

Social Presence

Affective expression

14. Getting to know other course participants gave me a sense of belonging in the course.

15. I was able to form distinct impressions of some course participants.

16. Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for social interaction.

Open communication

17. I felt comfortable conversing through the online medium.

18. I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions.

19. I felt comfortable interacting with other course participants.

Group cohesion

20. I felt comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.

21. I felt that my point of view was acknowledged by other course participants.

22. Online discussions help me to develop a sense of collaboration.

Cognitive Presence

Triggering event

23. Problems posed increased my interest in course issues.

24. Course activities piqued my curiosity.

25. I felt motivated to explore content related questions.

Exploration

26. I utilized a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in this course.

27. Brainstorming and finding relevant information helped me resolve content related questions.

28. Online discussions were valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives.

Integration

29. Combining new information helped me answer questions raised in course activities.

30. Learning activities helped me construct explanations/solutions.

31. Reflection on course content and discussions helped me understand fundamental concepts in this class.

Resolution

32. I can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge created in this course.

33. I have developed solutions to course problems that can be applied in practice.

34. I can apply the knowledge created in this course to my work or other non-class related activities.

5-point Likert-type scale
      1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

APPENDIX C

Social Presence Faculty Post-Semester Interview Questions

1. Were there any problems that students had with the technology tools, LMS, or activities that you did not expect? Language issues?

2. What will you change or adapt for the next ESL hybrid course?

3. Do you think students were comfortable having conversations with each other online and/or f2f? Were there any disagreements? If so, how were they handled, both by the students and yourself?

4. What do you think went well with collaboration (group work, partner) this semester, both online and F2F? Why? Was there any aspect of collaboration that did not go as planned?

5. Do you think your accountability measures were successful?

6. Do you feel these students formed a strong community of inquiry? Why or Why not?

7. How do you feel that your feedback helped students this semester? What about peer feedback?

8. How was the social climate of our f2f and online classroom? What do you feel contributed to that?

9. Do you feel that some students became more socially and academically open as the course developed? What do you think contributed to that?

10. How did group work go in your classroom? Is there anything that you would do differently for next semester?

11. What is your overall impression of class perception towards BL? Collaboration?

12. What course activities do you think the students enjoyed most? Least? Why do you think that?

13. What specific projects worked best to foster social presence, both online and F2F? Why?

14. Was your online discussion format successful in getting students to share their opinions about topics? How did you monitor that?

15. Describe any challenges of transferring social presence from F2F to online.

APPENDIX D

RUBRIC: Your project will be graded as follows. Use this as a checklist to make sure everything required has been included in your project.

SECTION 1:

a. Introduces the title and author, spelled and capitalized correctly _____ (5 points)

b. Explains how advertising creates emotions in consumers _____ (5 points)

SECTIONS 2-6:

a. includes a separate page/slide for each of the five concepts you choose. _____ (1 point for each slice; total 5 points)

b. includes a definition or explanation of each concept, clearly explaining what the concept means _____ (5 points for each slide; total 25 points)

c. Includes a picture on each slide chosen from our list and explains how the picture you chose supports the concept on the slide _____ (5 points for each slide; total 25 points)

SECTION 7:

a. Explains which technique you think is the most effective and why. _____ (5 points)

VOCABULARY:

a.   Ten vocabulary words are highlighted or underlined within the slides of the

presentation _____ (5 points)

b.   Ten vocabulary words are used correctly within the presentation _____ (20

points – 2 each)

c.   A numbered list of ten vocabulary words used in the presentation is on the

last slide of the presentation _____ (5 points)

TOTAL POINTS: 100

·   *Please spell-check your project. If it is not spell-checked, you will lose 10 points*

off your final grade.

·   *DUE BY EMAIL on or before March 19th at 12:30 before class time (12:30).*

Late assignments will be marked down 10 points every DAY they are late after

12:30 on March 19th.

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