

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: INTENTIONAL IMPLEMENTATION: A SELF-STUDY EXAMINING AND EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF DIGITAL TOOLS TO FOSTER ACADEMIC WRITING IN THE ENGLISH SECONDARY CLASSROOM

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This self-study examines the planning, practices, policies, and procedures present in a blended learning classroom environment to develop academic writing with tenth and eleventh grade public high school students. Digital technology is a prevalent and powerful force intertwined with most aspects of the human experience in the twenty-first century. As school systems, educators, and teacher educators try to respond to and within this rapidly evolving climate, they are confronted with challenges on many fronts, including infrastructure, professional development, teaching practice, policy, and further compounded by fiscal limitations. This effort is additionally challenged by a high-stakes testing climate in which state exam scores

are used to evaluate performance on the student, teacher, school, district, and state levels.

Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) is the frame predominantly used in academic literature to articulate, explore, and understand the aspects in play in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. Two practices implemented with digital tools to support academic writing development, discussion boards and digital document submissions/revisions were studied. Digital document submission/revision was found to have a positive relationship with fostering improved attitudes towards revision and about students' own writing efficacy. This practice was most successful when classroom policies were modified to account for the shift in the nature of task and its role in student learning.

This self-study suggests a fourth dimension of knowledge is necessary to understand and implement digital technology in the classroom. Organizational knowledge (OK) includes: classroom policies, arrangement of physical and virtual spaces, and classroom management in physical and virtual spaces. Technological Organizational Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TOPACK) would integrate OK into the framework, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding on what teachers need to know when implementing instructional technology in their classrooms. While some have included classroom management under the pedagogical knowledge branch of TPACK, I suggest that this fails to acknowledge the larger OK needed beyond knowledge of how best to teach and is a limited perception of the purpose of classroom management. Navigating institutional and procedural considerations also impact classroom operations. Additional research is needed in the area of OK and

how its components are impacted by the inclusion of digital technologies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom and to confirm the findings.

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CLASSROOM

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Mildred L. Jester (1921-2015), who passed away before it was complete. Her example of perseverance, iron will, and fierce spirit is inspiring, even after her death. As a child, polio kept her out of school and bedridden for a year. She survived a disease that struck her from the waist down, was told she would never walk again, that it was a medical impossibility. She walked. She struggled with her studies after missing a year of school. Nevertheless she fought to graduate not only high school, but college in an era before the Americans with Disabilities Act would have improved her access to campus buildings. She became a second and third grade teacher who was remembered and recognized by her students when they saw her shopping around town, even though she had been retired for over 30 years. More often than not, she remembered them too.

## Acknowledgements

I was told to think of the dissertation as an expedition and to select the people for that journey who would work well as a team and each bring their own strengths and talents. Thank you to each of my committee members: Jing Lin, Wayne Slater, Peggy Wilson, Kathleen Travers, Jennifer Turner, and Joseph McCaleb for being guides, motivators, and refiners.

Additionally, I would never have been able to survive the marathon experience of dissertation writing without the support and guidance of my advisor and chair, Joseph McCaleb. I hope that I can emulate your patience and grounded approach to life, research, and family.

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To my husband, Sergio Alcoser, thank you for listening when I needed to talk through my ideas and for questioning and challenging my thinking. Your continued support and editing prowess were very valuable. We are proof that quantitative and qualitative researchers can work together.

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# Table of Contents

Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures .....	viii
List of Illustrations .....	ix
List of Abbreviations .....	x
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Overview .....	1
Digital Spaces, Technology, and Social Change.....	1
Research Problem Description .....	4
Inclusion of Digital Technologies in English Education .....	4
Writing Standards in the High School .....	7
First Attempts at Studying the Implementation of Technology .....	8
Realizations about My Practice .....	12
Essential Pedagogical Allegiances .....	24
Purpose of the Study .....	25
The Research Questions.....	26
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	30
Overview .....	30
Theoretical Frames .....	30
Ecological Adoption Theory .....	30
Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK).....	32
Summary .....	38
Research Practices .....	38
Teacher Action Research .....	38
Living Educational Theory and Self-Study.....	40
The Characteristics of Self-study.....	41
Summary .....	44
Professional Development and Technology.....	45
Professional Development and Writing Instruction .....	45
Challenges and Opportunities.....	47
Summary .....	49
Formative Assessment .....	50
Summary .....	51
Writing Research .....	52
Sociocultural Learning, Technology and Writing .....	52
Collaborative Writing and Digital Spaces.....	52
Discussion Boards .....	55



Summary .....	59
Authenticity .....	59
Defining Authenticity .....	59
Authenticity in the Classroom and Digital Tools .....	60
Summary .....	61
Contribution to the Field .....	62
Chapter 3: Methodology .....	64
Overview .....	64
Purpose .....	64
Autobiography .....	65
Revisions to Practice .....	68
Description of the Setting .....	71
Courses .....	72
Classroom Description .....	73
Teacher Research as part of Professional Practice .....	75
Data Collection and Limitations .....	76
Data Analysis .....	81
Ethical Considerations .....	84
Privacy .....	84
Teacher as Researcher .....	85
Potential Bias .....	86
Trustworthiness .....	87
Chapter 4: Findings .....	89
Overview .....	89
The Research Questions .....	89
Blending the Classroom .....	90
Student Feedback: Midterm and End of Course .....	94
Indirect Student Feedback .....	95
Direct Feedback .....	96
Discussion .....	112
Student Participation in Digital Tools .....	113
Student Participation in Online Revision and Submission .....	113
Discussion Board .....	115
Discussion .....	119
Journal and Artifact Analysis- Types of Knowledge .....	121
Discussion .....	129
Summary of Findings .....	129
Research Question 1 .....	129
Research Question 2 .....	131
Research Question 3 .....	132
Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations .....	133
Overview .....	133
Revisiting the Study .....	133
Conclusions .....	138
Revisiting the Research Questions .....	138
Limitations .....	147

Recommendations .....	148
Individual Praxis .....	148
District Implementation of Digital Tools .....	150
Responding to the Infusion and Managing Expectations.....	152
For Further Research.....	153
Using OK .....	154
Looking to the Future .....	155
Appendices.....	157
District English Language Arts Rubric.....	157
Sample Syllabus Grade 10 .....	159
Term Guide Sample English 10 .....	164
Syllabus Grade 11.....	165
Term Guide Sample English 11 .....	171
Bibliography.....	172

## List of Tables

Table 1 Demographic data for Sweetrock High.....	71
Table 2 Teaching Assignments .....	73
Table 3 Sample Entry from Teaching Journal - Raw .....	78
Table 4 Sample Reflective Journal - Raw .....	79
Table 5 Teaching Journal Week of 2/22/16 .....	82
Table 6 Excerpt from Coding Spreadsheet .....	83
Table 7 Teaching Journal Excerpt 8/31/15 .....	92
Table 8 Midterm Prompt and Responses .....	97
Table 9 Students' Post High School Plans .....	100
Table 10 End of Semester Feedback Questions .....	105
Table 11 Sample of End of Course Feedback Spreadsheet .....	106
Table 12 Overview of Students End of Course Responses .....	107
Table 13 Breakdown of student responses explaining nonparticipation .....	108
Table 14 Reactions of students who participated in Resubmission .....	110
Table 15 End of Course Reaction to Coursesites .....	111
Table 16 Student Resubmission Rates and Scores for Tenth Grade Honors Students. .....	114
Table 17 Discussion Board Participation and Grades .....	117
Table 18 Coded Teaching Journal Entry .....	123
Table 19 Types of Knowledge Observed and Examples .....	125
Table 20 Overlapping Knowledge Groups Considered under TPACK .....	126
Table 21 Proposed Additional Overlap Zones under TOPACK.....	127
Table 22 Suggested Definitions in Expanded Framework .....	128

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Screenshot of the Administrator Security Options as of 2/08/17.....	15
Figure 2. Example Padlet Posts on <i>A Wizard of Earthsea</i> .....	17
Figure 3. Screenshot of Symbaloo of High School English Resources.....	19
Figure 4. Main Page viewed upon entry Proboards.com.....	21
Figure 5. Example of a ProBoards.com board with individual threads.....	21
Figure 6. In this sample exchange, the moderator is suggesting a way to improve the commentary.....	22
Figure 7. Screenshot of Coursesites.com, showing the navigation menu .....	74
Figure 8. Screenshot of the Hero's Journey Resources and Assignments. ....	75

## List of Illustrations

Illustration 1. PCK.....	33
Illustration 2. TPACK.....	35
Illustration 3. TPACK in Context.....	36
Illustration 4. SAMR Model .....	37
Illustration 5. TOPACK.....	145

## List of Abbreviations

BYOD.....	Bring your own device
CAEP.....	Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation
CFG.....	Critical Friends Group
CK.....	Content Knowledge
ISTE.....	International Society for Technology in Education
NCTE.....	National Council of Teachers of English
NWP.....	National Writing Project
OCK.....	Organizational Content Knowledge
OK.....	Organizational Knowledge
OPK.....	Organizational Pedagogical Knowledge
OTK.....	Organizational Technological Knowledge
PCK.....	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PK.....	Pedagogical Knowledge
PLCs.....	Professional Learning Community
SAMR.....	Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition
TCK.....	Technological Content Knowledge
TK.....	Technological Knowledge
TOPACK.....	Technological Organizational Pedagogical and Content Knowledge
TPACK.....	Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge
TPK.....	Technological Pedagogical Knowledge

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## **Overview**

This chapter provides an overview of the impact digital spaces and technology are making on common discourse practices. It then provides a brief historical context for the push to include instructional technology in public schools. Building on this base, the chapter describes an autobiographical account of my first attempts at improving my use of instructional technology and a discussion of the critical junctures I reached in this pursuit follows. The chapter then articulates the purpose of the study and the research questions.

## **Digital Spaces, Technology, and Social Change**

Technology is a prevalent and powerful force in the modern world. Active participation in professional, civil, and social activities requires an increasing level of competence in navigating and understanding digital spaces. The recent controversy over “fake news” (Hubbard, 2017) spread through social media networks during the 2016 presidential election has increased the volume calling for efforts in media literacy and the teaching of students to separate fact from fiction (Herold, 2016; Jocson, 2015). This societal movement towards accessing news through social media is widespread. According to the Pew Research Center’s November 2016 “Social Media Update,” the majority of Americans report getting their news through social media (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). In his report, *State of the News Media 2015*, Mitchell reveals that the over 75% of news websites are accessed from a mobile device as opposed to a desktop computer. This shift changes not only the

medium of print to digital but the format of the digital as well. When accessing the Internet from a mobile device, many websites now have versions which are “mobile friendly” and differ in navigation and layout from traditional webpages.

The movement of social media news as a legitimate and widely accessed news source is accompanied by social media activism. Bennet and Segerber (2012) identify these movements as digitally networked action (DNA). Organizing protests by utilizing digital platforms and social networks allows,

in this network mode, political demands and grievances are often shared in very personalized accounts that travel over social networking platforms, email lists, and online coordinating platforms. For example, the easily personalized action frame ‘we are the 99 per cent’ that emerged from the US occupy protests in 2011 quickly traveled the world via personal stories and images shared on social networks such as Tumblr, Twitter, and Facebook (p. 742).

Tufekci (2014) explains that participatory civics movements like the “Occupy Wall Street in the United States, the Indignados (or #m15) in Spain, Italy, and Greece, some segments of the activists in initial Tahrir protests (#jan25), and Gezi Park protests in Turkey (#direncezi)” focus primarily on defining their identity and stance, asserting “establishing themselves as a constituency” (p. 202). The Occupy Wall Street (#ows) movement in 2011 in the United States of America, which gained widespread media attention and inspired similar protests in over 1500 cities around the world, directly acknowledges the Arab Spring, uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia in 2010, and its successful efforts creating societal change through the use of collaborative networks as the model for organizing and provoking social activism



(Occupy, 2011). The Interactive Internet (Web 2.0) plays a fundamental part in allowing a people to contribute to and receive global news, even in some cases, in spite of restrictive and oppressive regimes. Twitter, a social networking service, played a central role in allowing people to connect with the international community, providing citizens with a voice strong enough to breach oceans (Grossman, 2009). In addition to social networking sites, several online communities are growing. These spaces provide individuals and groups with space to create webpages and journals/blogs and to network within and beyond these digital communities.

The influential and pervasive presence of Internet-based communications in society has led some to label this time in human history as the digital age. Negroponte (1995), credited with calling this time in human history as the digital age, first outlined his vision of how the world would change as a consequence of the rapid increases in technology and media and the consequences of their expanded presence in daily life. In the digital age, current events are documented in real-time by participants in these events through the use of video, text messages, and blogs and disseminated through digital social networks. This digitization of information allows for widespread and inexpensive dissemination of data and images around the globe. Social media changes the typical model of filtering events through news outlets; news outlets are now reporting on events first reported though and disseminated by social media. News agencies are beginning to look to digital publications as a supplement or substitute for their print editions. In Ann Arbor, MI, The Ann Arbor Times has ended its daily paper and moved to an online edition. This maneuver is reflective of the dramatic decrease in newspaper subscriptions (Mitchell,

2015) and being observed by many in the print media industry as an experiment that might indicate the future of print journalism (White, 2009).

The shift to digital data dissemination occurs in the government and public service sectors as well. Whether interested in reading the latest version of the health care bill or learning about the dangers of eating disorders, local, state, and federal documents currently produced are digital from inception to their publication on the Internet (Jackson, 2008). Consequently, “over the past several decades, our culture has undergone a period of profound and prolonged media change, not simply a shift in the technical infrastructure for communication but shifts in the cultural logics and social practices that shape the ways we interact” (Clinton, Jenkins, & McWilliams, 2013, p. 7). Whether the shift is for convenience, cost, or efficiency, it is clear that being an informed and active participant in modern society requires an understanding and skill in new literacies and technologies.

Being an informed, active participant in the world today requires an understanding of digital spaces. Developing literacy skills for these contexts requires exposure to composing and researching in digital spaces. A disconnect exists between the importance of the personal narrative in social media discourse and the absence of the “I” in traditional high school writing. A shift from the conception of the student as an absorber of knowledge to one who engages in a dialogue about and in the development of knowledge needs to occur to bridge this disconnect.

## **Research Problem Description**

### **Inclusion of Digital Technologies in English Education**

Schools need to prepare students to engage in this digitally dense world through the development of skills that support an understanding of visual media, the

utilization of computers, and the Internet. This awareness is reflected in national and local education policy. In 1989, the Education Summit and the adoption of the National Educational Goals, two major technology standards and outcome based educational goals specific to technology, were signed into law. The Goals 2000: Educate America Act supported the Clinton-Gore Technology Literacy Challenge. This program aimed to make all children technologically literate by the year 2000. Literacy in this instance is defined as possessing the critical thinking and communication skills necessary to engage in the next century. In 2002, the education act, No Child Left Behind, includes the Enhancing Education Through Technology Act 2001. Two key goals of this provision are to breach the digital divide among students and to encourage the integration of technology into teacher preparation programs. The recommendation for and mandate of this inclusion is evidenced in the guidelines published by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). These guidelines reflect those published by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) standards used to evaluate teacher education programs. Key in the language of the law is the word effective when referring to the inclusion of technology in teacher education.

NCTE (2006) publishes guidelines specific to the preparation of teachers of the English language arts. These standards are integrated with the ISTE (2008) standards<sup>1</sup> into the accreditation standards implemented by CAEP for the evaluation

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<sup>1</sup> ISTE is working with its community to refresh the standards in 2016 and plans on publishing the refreshed standards in 2017.

of educator preparation programs. English education programs can also be evaluated by NCTE for accreditation purposes. In the introduction to the NCTE guidelines, the committee acknowledges the need for the incorporation of technologies into English teacher preparation.

The NCTE position statement, NCTE Framework for 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment, defines literacy in the twenty-first century as “a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups” (NCTE, 2008) and recognizes that literacy will evolve as technology and society change. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, participating in society in the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities, competencies, and multiple literacies. In order to remain current, this flux requires “the continued evolution of curriculum, assessment, and teaching practice itself.” For the English Language Arts (ELA) teacher currently in practice to remain current requires a commitment to continued professional development.

The experiences, dispositions, knowledge, and skills articulated in the ISTE and NCTE standards and guidelines are clear that teachers must be able to use computers and technology for instructional and professional purposes. While the NCTE guidelines provide a clearer understanding of the subject specific uses of technology, they do not provide specific guidance as to how practitioners can learn to integrate technology effectively in classrooms. In-service teachers are navigating this ever-evolving space with minimal resources and guidance, often while trying to meet

district, state, and federal level technology initiatives and simultaneously developing competency using these new technologies.

The Conference on English Education (CEE) technology commission (2005), a group comprised of NCTE members who are primarily involved in the research of English education and preparation of English educators, asserts that teachers must be prepared to engage students in the literacies not only of the past century but in those of the present. Preparing all students for participation in an increasingly globalized society requires instruction in new literacies (Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitlin, 2006). Several scholars suggest ways to incorporate new literacies and technologies into instruction (Carroll & Bowman, 2000; Kingen, 2000; McGrail & Rozema, 2005; Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006). The academic conversation on the inclusion of technology is concerned about the quality of the learning that results from the inclusion, the authentic incorporation of the technology, and the importance of critical engagement.

### **Writing Standards in the High School**

When teaching English in a public high school, the teacher designs the course curriculum to align with the standards defined by the district. The district bases its standards off of those articulated by the state. In 42 states, at the state level, the essential curriculum is delineated by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) which were developed by representatives from the participating states, territories, and districts (National Governors Association for Best Practices, 2010b). The CCSS<sup>2</sup> are

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<sup>2</sup> The complete writing standards for grades 9-10 are available at: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/> and for grades 11-12 as: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/>

used to develop the Assessment Instrument for Common Core Standards<sup>3</sup> that is administered to tenth and eleventh grade students in the subject areas of English. The English language arts CCSS are defined for reading, writing, speaking and reading, and language for grades K-12. These standards are designed to scaffold students as they develop critical literacy skills throughout their primary and secondary schooling. Two of the ten writing standards contain language directly related to digital research and composition. Standard 6 articulates the “use [of] technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information” and standard 8 requires students to “gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources” (National Governors Association for Best Practices, 2010a , p. 46). These two standards embrace the move towards digital composition and dissemination.

### **First Attempts at Studying the Implementation of Technology**

What technology means for reading, writing, communicating, and learning is a topic for evolving debate (Dail, 2001; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006). As new technologies emerge, they impact the meaning of literacy and the discourse of society. It becomes essential for educators to engage in meaningful and productive ways with new literacies and technologies (McGrail & Rozema, 2005). As a high school educator, it became clear that I needed to attend to the inclusion of digital tools in my practice if I wanted to

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<sup>3</sup> I have renamed the state assessment used in the district where this study was situated to help protect the identity of the state and the district.

provide a relevant education to my 21<sup>st</sup> century students. Upon further reflection, I realized that I had reached a moment known as critical juncture (Whitehead, 1989) in my practice. I was also forced to confront here my second critical juncture. I was not implementing processes and procedures that were in harmony with my beliefs about the nature of writing. I believe that writing is the consequence of a process that is recursive, rarely final, and should be for as “real” a purpose as possible. Revision of my classroom practice from the roots up was necessary if I was going to teach in accordance to my beliefs about writing.

At the end of the 2012-2013 school year, I was approached by a teacher in the English department who asked if I would be willing to collaborate with her improving her understanding of instructional technology in the coming school year. She asked if I would be willing to meet with her in-person a few times a month to work on this issue. Part of her motivation was the announcement that the school would become a “bring your own device” (BYOD) building with wireless Internet access in the fall of 2013.

Mrs. Thomas<sup>4</sup> and I began our technology collaboration in the fall of 2013 with horrendous results. At the inception of the school year and our collaboration all signs pointed towards success: Mrs. Thomas was intrinsically motivated, seeking support in implementing instructional technology. The school was going to support BYOD classrooms with school wide Wi-Fi and the school district began explicitly encouraging teachers to use Edmodo, a digital platform that allows for a stream of posts and assignments similar in appearance to Facebook, in the secondary classroom.

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<sup>4</sup> Pseudonyms are used for the names of colleagues and the school to protect their identities.

After a few work sessions, we successfully set up our classes in Edmodo, enrolled students, and began implementing its use in our courses. Mrs. Thomas was confident that with my continued support, she would be able to incorporate this instructional tool into her classes. Essentially, that is all that we accomplished. About half-way through the first term, Mrs. Thomas and I dissolved our collaboration because the students hated Edmodo, and it was creating additional work and chaos for the teachers and students. It was clear to both students and teachers that it was a redundant and less efficient feature of the classroom. We both intended to abandon it in the second semester.

The Edmodo experiment was a critical moment for me where I questioned how I plan for and implement instructional technology in the classroom. After reflecting on my inclusion of instructional technology tools to that point, I realized that the tools I selected were recommended to me at in-service meetings on professional development days after modeling their use or from professional education coursework focused on instructional technology. Absent from these introductions was consideration for the intended outcome; technology was being included for the sake of adding it to the existing structure without attention to the instructional purpose and objective. In no other area of my planning and lesson development do I include an element simply to include it. This realization was the first step in rethinking my planning with instructional technology.

At the beginning of the school year 2015-2016, the Principal presented the staff with a new way to classify our implementation of instructional technology in the



classroom. He introduced the faculty to the work of Dr. Ruben Puentedura<sup>5</sup> (2006) who developed the SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, and Redefinition) model to classify the ways in which technology is incorporated into instruction. Despite the lack of research base, this model, perhaps because of its simplicity and observability, began being used by administrators to evaluate teacher utilization of instructional technology (Hamilton, Rosenberg, & Akcaoglu, 2016). Puentedura acknowledges that most instructional use of technology is limited to substitution and augmentation but that the goal is redefinition of the teaching and learning experience. Projectors attached to computers are used for presenting slideshows of daily lessons instead of overhead projectors, document cameras, interactive whiteboards and slates are used instead of a chalkboard or screen. These substitutions do not change the learning experience on an essential level. While these substitutions can provide avenues for augmenting, modifying, and redefining the instruction, it requires more intentional implementation to integrate instructional technology in ways that go beyond “bells and whistles.” Hamilton et al. (2016) examined the SAMR model and compared it to the more established theory of Mishra and Koehler (2006) technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK). They were concerned that the hierarchical nature of the SAMR ladder as well as the inconsistent and widely varied images used to depict the framework were confusing and that the framework as a whole is limited and classroom context is completely missing. Beginning the school year with the emphasis on transformative

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Hippasus website, “Dr. Ruben Puentedura is the Founder and President of Hippasus, a consulting firm based in Western Massachusetts, focusing on transformative applications of information technologies to education” and the creator of the SAMR model (Puentedura, 2004).

implementation of instructional technology and the expectation that administrators would be assessing the implementation of instructional technology using this framework shifted the focus of the lesson design to prioritize transformative implementation of instructional technology away from curricular standards and learning objectives.

### **Realizations about My Practice**

I stepped back from the technology question and considered my traditional lesson planning. How had I been taught to create effective lessons? What questions was I asking when selecting the materials to support those lessons? It quickly became apparent that my technology implementation diverged sharply at the inception of lesson planning from my traditional teaching. When considering technology, I began with the question: What do I need to upload to Edmodo for the lesson? The objective was to use Edmodo. When planning for my subject the first question is: What is the objective of the lesson?

When lesson planning for lessons incorporating technology, I had lost the connection between my subject and its learning objectives in the pursuit of including a recommended tool. After further reflection, I developed a list of questions to use in planning for the inclusion of instructional technology:

- What is the educational objective for this lesson?
- What is the appropriate digital tool to support this objective?
- What will the experience require the learner to do by using this digital tool?
- What support will be required by the learner to do this?
- What will I need as an educator to make this happen?

- What access or materials will be required?

In 2014, I presented my findings at a roundtable as part of the CEE technology commission at the national conference for NCTE. At the same conference, I participated in a session hosted by Sheridan Blau focused on using discussion boards to advance and foster authentic academic discourse in the secondary classroom. This presentation provided me with a tool linked directly to an objective for the first time. What attracted me to this goal was its direct alignment with my pedagogical allegiance to authentic audiences when teaching writing. I began planning for my instructional technology implementation with this objective in mind.

For the second semester of school year 2013-2014, I renewed my efforts to implement Edmodo and assigned my first discussion prompt. The result was the death knell for Edmodo in my classroom as a discussion forum. The students could reply to the prompt but not specifically to anyone else. As long as they were only expected to reply to the prompt, Edmodo would work, but it reinforced the teacher-student-teacher response pathway that I was trying to reduce. I determined that in addition to being able to access the question online and submit an answer, the answers needed to allow students to track and reply directly to one another if a discernible conversation was to occur. My search refocused on identifying a virtual space that could provide both an organized and interactive discourse space.

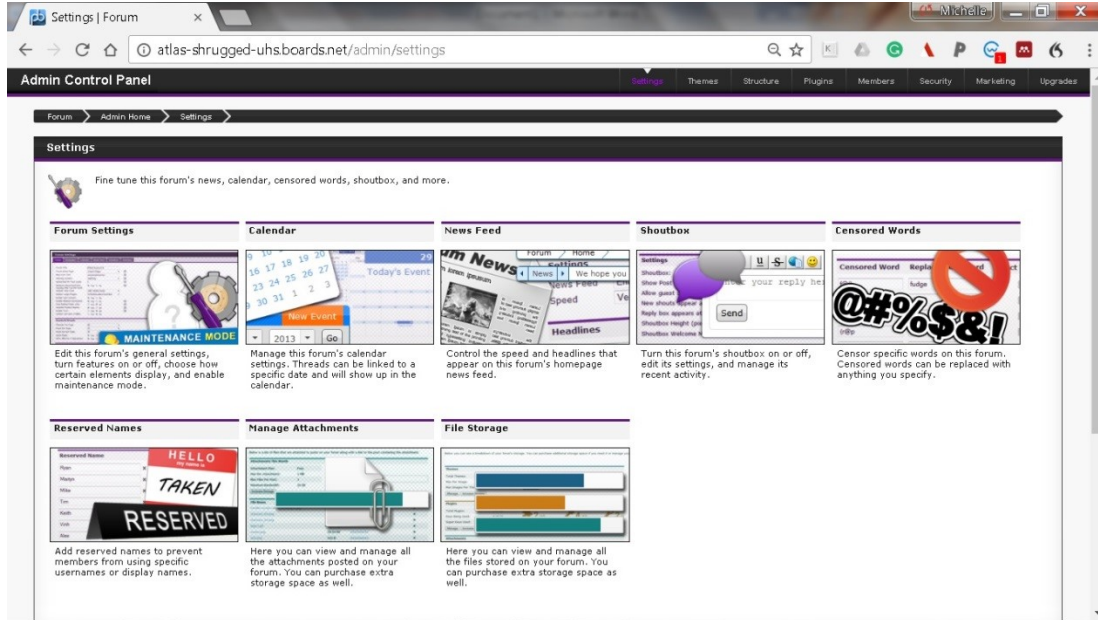
I considered the interactive component first. I had previously used both wikis and discussion boards when teaching undergraduate students to support collaboration. While wikis allow for collaboration, they can only be edited by one student at a time

and depend on the collaborators to decide how the information will be organized and displayed. I considered the use of collaborative documents and Google classroom and found that organization of the students' interactions would not be improved in either of these setting either. Traditional virtual discussion boards became the obvious choice because of their standardized layout that allowed consistent indexing and nesting of forums and threads which allowed for consistent organization and the ability for multiple students to engage with the interface at the same time or as individuals at another time.

In order to setup an online discussion board for the students, I needed to find a website that would provide this feature, be free of charge, provide me with enough control to post and remove content, and protect the students' information. I began my search using Google.com and searching with the keywords: free discussion board. I reviewed several of the search results and ultimately chose to utilize Proboards.com.<sup>6</sup> Figure 1 is a screenshot of the administrative panel highlights some of these features. The ability to make the discussion forum non-searchable by web search engines, was a feature offered by Proboards allowed me to keep my discussion board closed to the public and non-searchable.

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<sup>6</sup> The discussion board hosted by Proboards.com proved to be very successful. The students engaged in powerful discussions and evidenced growth in their ability to clearly articulate and insightful analysis of text.



**Figure 1. Screenshot of the Administrator Security Options as of 2/08/17.**

When registering for the Proboards.com discussion forum, students did not need to provide an email address to the web service. This is one of the requirements of the school district when selecting Internet based resources for students to use. The school district does not publish this or other requirements for adopting Internet based resources. I only became aware of the requirements through conversations with the school's Media Specialist. While discussing the districts adoption of web-based resources, the Media Specialist explained that these guidelines were still being refined and revealed that the district was aware that many teachers were doing "their own thing." The district was making a significant movement towards a system-wide implementation of Google Classroom in school year 2015-2016 [Teaching Journal, 8/18/2015].

During the school year 2015-2016 the district provided professional development introducing specific Internet based resources for teacher use. Websites like Padlet<sup>7</sup>, Symbaloo<sup>8</sup>, Kahoot<sup>9</sup>, and Peardeck<sup>10</sup> provide a variety of ways to engage students with course content. In a one day marathon, each of these websites was introduced in a breakout session with minimal opportunity to engage with the platforms as “student participants” and no opportunity as a teacher. This onslaught of the potpourri of possible ways to implement instructional technology into the classroom left even me, a participant receptive to instructional technology and intuitive in its implementation, with a sense of being overwhelmed and confused. Other professional development throughout the year was similarly broad. In my teaching journal (Week of 8/18/2015) I documented my frustrations with this introduction. Increasing student engagement, monitoring comprehension, and administering assessments were often cited as reasons for implementing these tools, but by the end of the professional development day I could not differentiate among them. When I was approached by Mrs. Thomas at the end of the day asking me to meet with her to explain what we learned about and to help her decide which of the resources were worth investing the time in mastering, I had to confess that I could hardly tell them apart. This scattershot approach to introducing technology was not

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<sup>7</sup> Padlet is a web based bulletin board. Students log in to the discussion and post memos to the board. <https://padlet.com>

<sup>8</sup> Symbaloo is a web based space for organizing bookmarks to a variety of web links. Symbaloo calls the collection and display of links webmixes. <https://www.symbaloo.com/>

<sup>9</sup> Kahoot allows students to log in on devices with Internet access and respond to questions and compete with other students. Students are informed of the accuracy of their response, how quickly they respond compared to other students, and compare their score with other students. <https://kahoot.it/>

<sup>10</sup> Peardeck allows teachers to embed student responses into their presentations. Student responses can be exported in an excel file and Peardeck can be interact with Google Classroom. <https://www.peardeck.com/>

effective for either of us. It would take several, distinct sessions with each platform for me to assess its appropriateness for inclusion in the classroom.

After familiarizing myself with these resources, I began my implementation of them by examining what activities I had planned in the coming weeks and considering what classroom activities and resources could be substituted or replaced with one of these websites. I first used Padlet on 9/24/2015 with my tenth grade students as a space for them to post an overview of their group discussion and pose stump questions<sup>11</sup> to the class. Padlet provided a reasonable space for posting student comments, but I learned quickly that it was overwhelming if students posted individually, the space quickly became cluttered and students were bothered by the text moving as additional posts were made. Figure 2 is a screenshot of the Earthsea Discussion Padlet where groups of five-six students posted their stump questions and critical events from their respective sections.

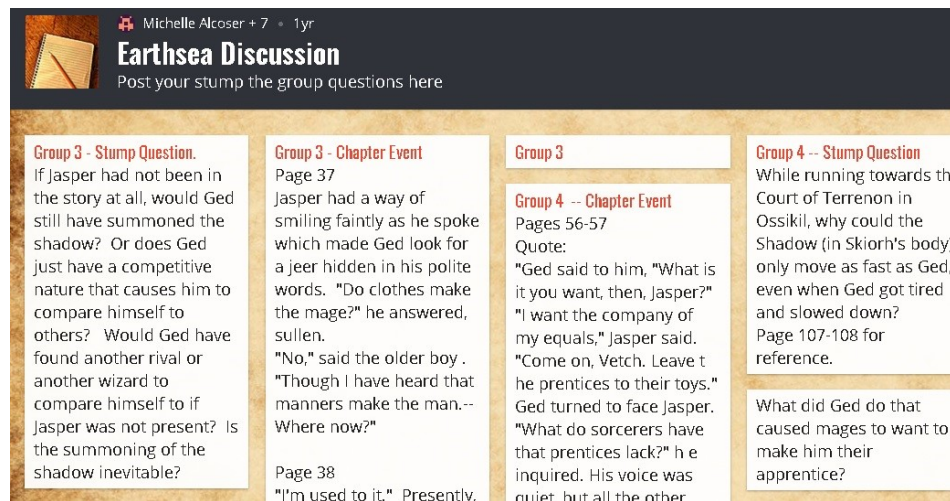


Figure 2. Example Padlet Posts on *A Wizard of Earthsea*

<sup>11</sup> Stump questions are questions that are designed to cause the other groups to think hard about the text in order to answer them. These questions are used to encourage the students to craft higher order questions that require students to draw on multiple events in the text when preparing to facilitate student moderated discussion.

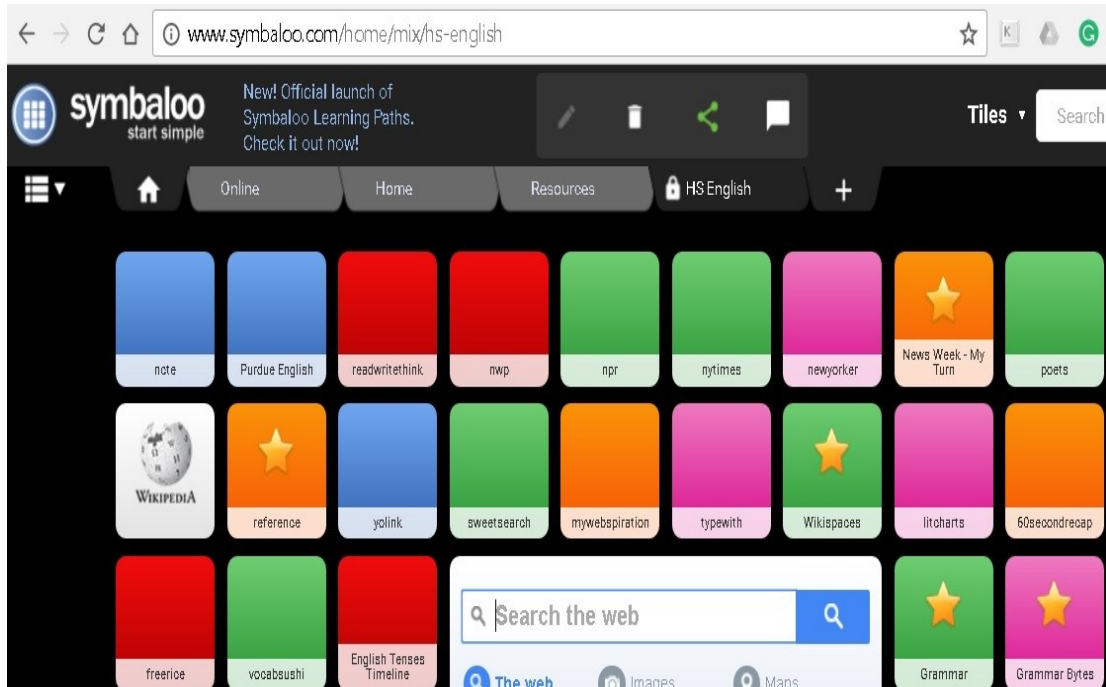
By limiting the posts to post group conversations, the number of unique post makers was decreased from 32 to 6. This limitation helped to reduce the overwhelming number of posts that cluttered the Padlet when individual students post simultaneously. By using the Padlet to report out the discussion and questions from the group conversation, the Earthsea Discussion Padlet provided a quick closure activity. It provided space for groups to report simultaneously to the class and set the discussion with their stump questions. These questions would be the opening questions for whole class discussion to occur at the next class session

I next tried using Symbaloo to help the students with selecting relevant, academically appropriate sources, by organizing resources for online research. I began with finding an existing, public webmix<sup>12</sup> related to my content and began to check the links. I was frustrated by many icons that linked to webpages that were no longer available or were not allowed by the district's web filter. An additional frustration was that the settings of the web filter were always changing and some resources that worked the day that I tested them were no longer available or were limited to teacher use and unavailable to students. Figure 2 is a screenshot of a Symbaloo webmix for high school English.

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<sup>12</sup> Webmix is the term that Symbaloo uses for the compilation of links to Internet based resources represented as icons on the webpage. The creator of the webmix can control the number of icons linking resources as well as the color theme of the webmix.





**Figure 3. Screenshot of Symbaloo of High School English Resources**

Kahoot was the next resource that I implemented. I chose to use it to review vocabulary words before a midterm exam. The students were very engaged with the quiz show style review and became extremely competitive. There are a variety of existing Kahoot quizzes available to teachers, but I found multiple mistakes in the quizzes that I previewed. Kahoot is fairly user-friendly, but I did not like how aggressively competitive the students became when they engaged with it. It was also difficult for some of the students to use Kahoot because they did not have a BYOD and I could not supply a device for every student in the class. Students who recorded their responses on paper complained that they felt left out because they could not have their scores posted with the others.

I decided not to use Peardeck with the students because it required one-on-one device access for students to engage in the presentation. Though highly interactive, the design of Peardeck reinforces the teacher-student-teacher work production loop.

A positive feature of Peardeck is that it is very user friendly and teachers can import PowerPoint presentations directly into the presentation. Peardeck currently offers free trials for 30 days. After 30 days teachers are allowed to sign up for another free trial. The site can decide at any time to discontinue the free trials, which created an additional hesitation for me.

Because my interest is supporting ways for students to engage in academic conversation, I returned my focus to the discussion boards with the hopes of recreating the success experienced in the previous two school years. As a student, I remembered dreading discussion board post homework assignments because they always felt forced. The instructors would typically mandate that the students needed to make three posts for a homework grade. But the conversations were forced as students posted just to earn their points. This is in stark contrast with my private life where I have found them to be extremely useful when researching my interests, for example, how to set up my home network or when researching automobiles. In deciding to use them in the classroom, I needed to make participating in them valuable to students. I decided to commit to the discussion board as a *real* space of academic discourse and allowed the students to cite one another in their essays. For this to be successful, students would need to be able to find information easily.

Proboards.com allowed for separate sub forums nested within the main forum. Each of the sub forums depicted in Figure 4 contain a folder for the student commentaries for discussion of the novel Atlas Shrugged and for questions.

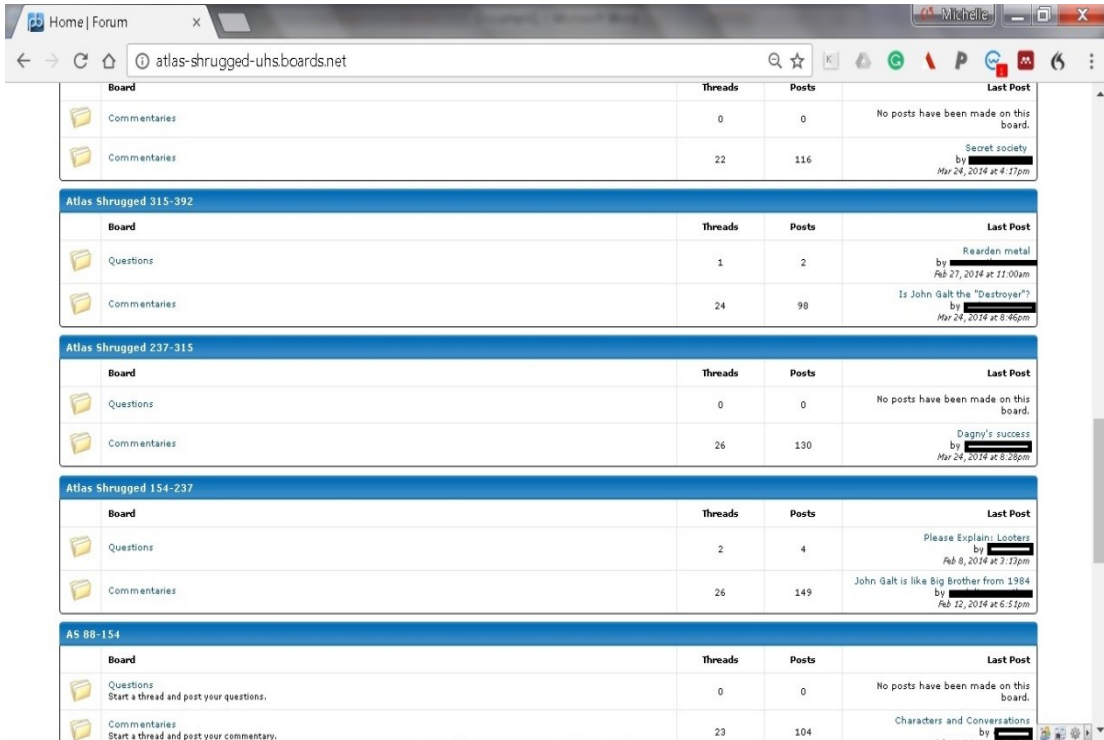


Figure 4. Main Page viewed upon entry Proboards.com

Within each commentary folder (as depicted in Figure 4) the specific comments and responses posted by the students are organized in subfolders (as depicted in Figure 5).

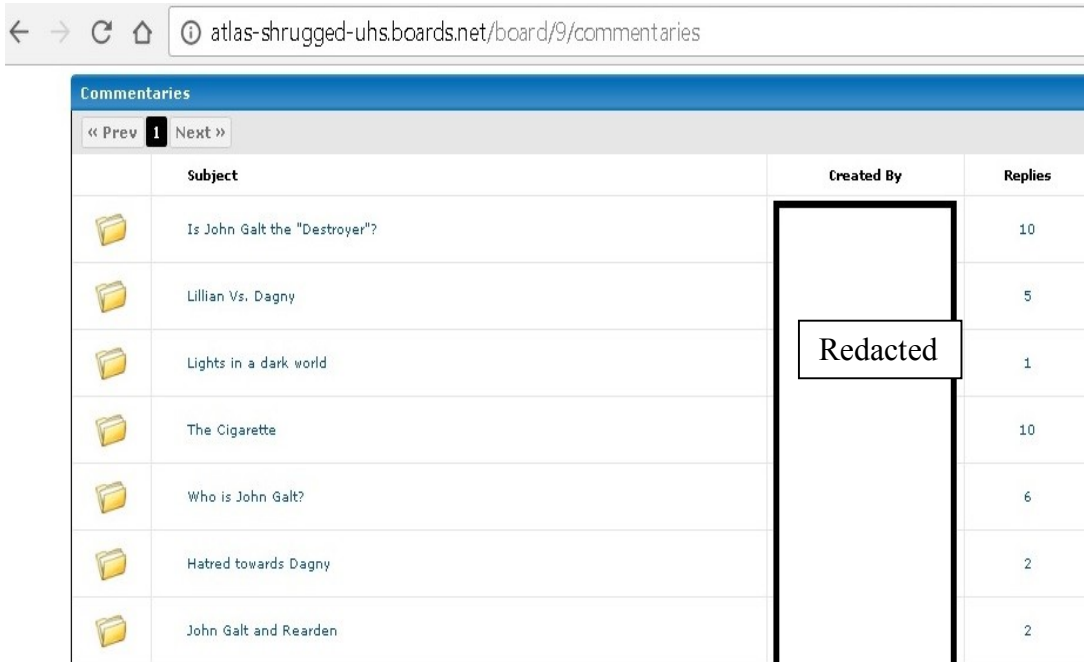


Figure 5. Example of a ProBoards.com board with individual threads.

Within each of these folders, the conversation is kept in a chronological flow. An example of students' engagement in one of the commentary conversations is shown in Figure 6<sup>13</sup> which depicts a typical discussion board exchange at the beginning of the course. In this thread, the student's initial post is a surface response to the text. The moderator's response encouraged the student to make connections between the moment and other events in the text. This is an example of a weak commentary because it does not integrate quotations or invite discussion. Notice the student response at the end of the thread that simply repeats the sentiment about the event being enjoyable.

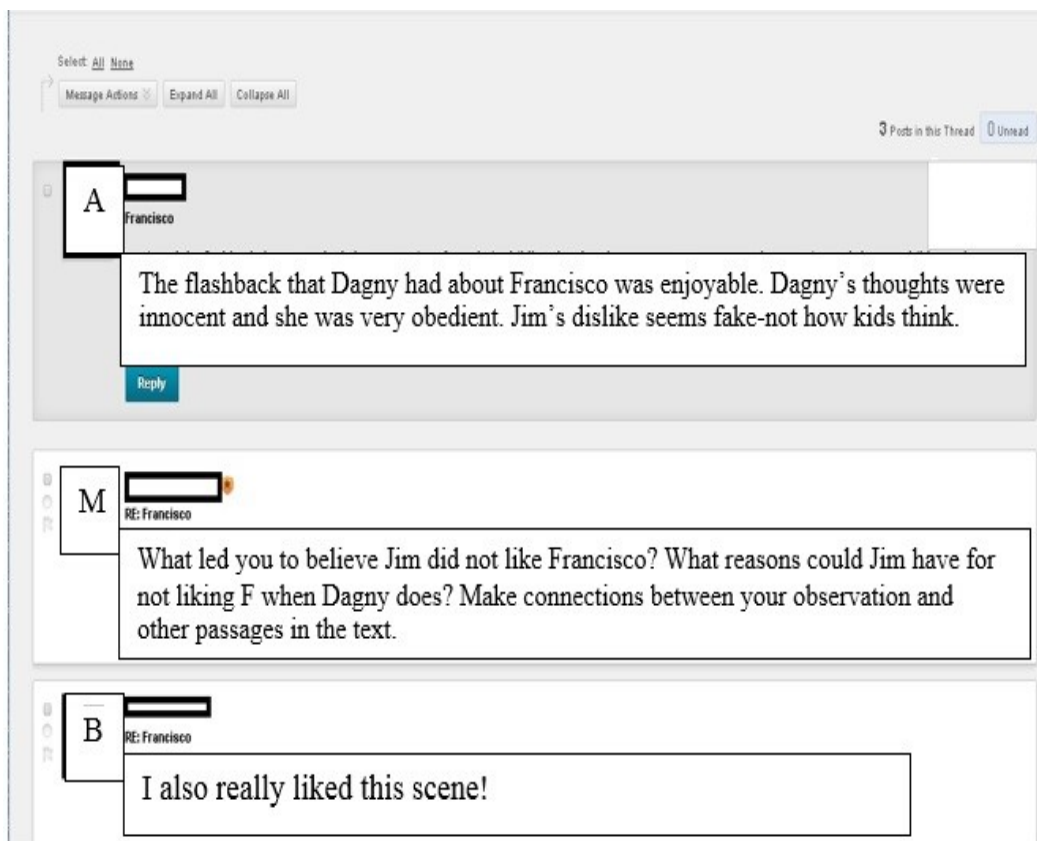


Figure 6. In this sample exchange, the moderator is suggesting a way to improve the commentary.

<sup>13</sup> Figure 6 has had student profile pictures and names redacted to protect student privacy. Paraphrases of student exchanges are placed in textboxes over students' original contributions.

By creating a discussion forum for different topics and literature selections in school years 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, I was able to create a digital space that met the needs of the students and supported the focus on increasing participation in academic discourse, but would need careful crafting if it were to succeed. In order to facilitate student motivation, I explained to the students that the purpose of the discussion board was to replace teacher-student-teacher static responses with a conversation amongst scholars, with the students as members of a scholarly community. “The advantages,” I explained, “are twofold. First, you will be able to participate in an active conversation around text, allowing you to clarify, analyze, and argue. Second, the conversation will be archived and you will be able to cite the conversation and by proxy each other as sources in your essays.” The students had difficulty accepting that they would be considered part of the academic dialogue and that their contributions to the discussion board would be considered viable sources for supporting their arguments in academic writing. This sense of being disconnected from the academic conversation transformed into membership of an academic community and brought a level of commitment to the quality of conversation that had been absent in their previous paper-based responses. The students were beginning to see the contributions they were making as those of active members of a digital academic community making well-supported claims and thoughtful responses. In this space, students engaged in conversations with one another and actively engaged with one another. Their questions were answered by one other and their answers were cited in essays as well as on in-class essay tests. The opportunity to be acknowledged

amongst their peers as an intellectual leader, able to influence the ideas and opinions of others, is similar to the role of leaders of social media movements.

No longer resistant to the implementation and integration of instructional technology, as observed by increased and sustained participation in classroom and discussion board interactions, it became apparent that the students recognized that the discussion board as a unique element of the classroom experience.<sup>14</sup> As I examined their writing that semester, I was impressed with the shift to academic discourse and the discernible difference in the students' writing as the semester progressed. The students were reading one another's posts, responding in analytic ways, extending the conversation, and asking questions. They were now taking part in an academic dialogue in their live and virtual discussions of text and connecting these conversations by citing them in their formal papers.

### **Essential Pedagogical Allegiances**

Rethinking my implementation of instructional technology led me to begin examining my essential pedagogical allegiances. When I think about the conversations Mrs. Thomas<sup>15</sup> and I had as our initial collaborative efforts failed, I am struck by how fundamentally we differ as educators in our views of how to teach writing. I was apprenticed into the practice 30 years after Mrs. Thomas and am interested in cultivating the thought process of recursive writing, where as she is places more emphasis on deadlines and product. I was guided through my courses with Applebee (1996), Dewey (1997), Fletcher (1993), Graves (1992), and Murray

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<sup>14</sup> The highly engaged and interactive discussion board activity evidenced in the two school years prior to the one researched for this dissertation proved to be a stark contrast to the discussion board activity studied for this dissertation and discussed in chapter 4.

<sup>15</sup> Pseudonyms are used for the names of colleagues and the school to protect their identities.

(1991) as arbitrators of meaningful education and writing instruction. The focus on authentic audience and purpose was ingrained as the most essential element for successful writing instruction. As a doctoral student I was introduced to the work of Paulo Freire (2005) and his theory of education as a liberating force. He gave voice and direction to the reason I became an English teacher; literacy is liberating. Effective reading and writing is critical to the liberating power of literacy.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this self-study is to address the critical junctures that I encountered in my practice as a consequence of recognizing the need for examining my teaching in an attempt to improve the implementation of digital tools in my high school classroom, address the disconnect between my classroom practice and the rapidly digitalizing world, and develop an understanding of what practices will best support the students' ability to engage in academic discourse. While the desire to improve the use of instructional technology is one that was shared by both Ms. Thomas and Mr. Ferguson at the inception of this study, both of them redirected their focus to another aspect of their practice over the course of the year. This self-study is a formal, systematic collection and analysis of data that continues my initial efforts to improve practice by studying the implementation of instructional technology in the classroom with my critical colleagues.

The dissonance between practice and belief that emerged from these critical junctures is addressed by this self-study examining the planning and implementation of instruction during the school year 2015-2016 at a fringe-rural public high school in the Potomac River Basin. Most educational research focuses on pre-service or novice

teachers' attitudes, beliefs and practices. As an experienced teacher, the routines of my practice were well established; as a consequence of this study I was able to view them in a new light and realign my policies and implement practices that were in harmony with my beliefs about learning and writing. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the conversation on the implementation of instructional technology by expanding the theoretical to include knowledge necessary to putting TPACK into practice. By examining the planning practices and the results of the implementation of digital tools to address academic writing, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the field by suggesting reflective practices and questions to support other teachers attempting to incorporate instructional technologies through the use of digital tools in their classrooms.

### **The Research Questions**

What is the best way to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of instructional technology? As I concluded another school year, I proposed to conduct a self-study of my teaching practices for the school year of 2015-2016 as my dissertation research and applied for Institutional Review Board approval from the University of Maryland, College Park and from the school district where the study was situated for the purpose of conducting dissertation research. By following the methodology established by Anastasia Samaras (2006, 2011), I seek to improve my implementation of instructional technology by answering the questions:

1. How can I foster the development of academic writing in authentic spaces using instructional technology?
2. What do I look for in student work to inform my teaching?



3. What do teachers need to know and consider when implementing instructional technology?

By continuing my collaboration with my critical colleagues<sup>16</sup> (Samaras 2011), I sought to improve my practice by making it explicit to myself and my collaborative group. Mrs. Thomas decided to implement Google Classroom this year. While she and I have continued our discussions of technology this year and met twice a month at the onset of each semester, she does not seek to implement anything else at this time. She is now able to assign, grade, and return work to students using Google Classroom. This is the extent to which she is willing to implement instructional technology at this time. Early on in our collaboration process this year, it became clear that Mrs. Thomas had no desire to move beyond this use of Google Classroom. As a self-proclaimed technophobe, Mrs. Thomas has made strides in “modernizing” her traditional classroom by including the digital extension of her classroom.

While Mrs. Thomas and Mr. Fredrickson originally decided to continue our technology collaboration into the fall, this commitment did not last. We established a climate of trust over the course of school year 2014-2015 that continues to present day, but the focus of this collaboration is no longer technology, as other district initiatives have taken priority. I collaborated with Mr. Frederickson for his capstone action research project in 2014-2015. Instead of a true collaboration, the relationship evolved into a mentoring of Mr. Frederickson as he revamped his instruction.

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<sup>16</sup> Samaras uses the term *critical friends*, but I believe that colleagues is more appropriate, emphasizing the professional dimension of the relationship.

While he states that his practice was revitalized by our exchange, I have benefited from having someone interpret my ideas into practice and refining the processes into their own. While he has credited the experience as being integral to revitalizing his love of teaching and revolutionizing his approach to his classroom, the dynamic needs to be more collaborative in nature and less of a mentorship. As we moved into this school year, Mr. Frederickson and I changed the dynamics of our relationship from mentor/student to equal colleagues sharing and refining our practices. He worked with me as I have refined my questions, and we have continued to collaborate to improve each other's practice. His insights have helped hold me accountable to my commitment to creating conditions that incorporate authentic academic voice.

Mrs. Thomas and I have had some success integrating technology into her classroom. She approached me again in the fall of 2015, after taking a break from her efforts to include instructional technology, and asked if we could begin working together again. This time, we successfully integrated the use of Google Classroom into her courses. She indicated that she values most the fact that she trusts me to provide her with support as she needs it and in a way that never makes her feel like she is stupid. As a teacher who is not confident in her technological expertise, she expresses a sense of being overwhelmed by most professional development sessions that are intended to support her use of instructional technology. Her role as a critical colleague is not to critique the implementation of instructional technology from the technology side but from the pedagogical. I benefit from her deep content knowledge and insights into district practices, policies, and history. She is a teacher with whom I

share a mutual admiration; while we may not agree on all aspects of philosophy and practice, we are both dedicated professionals with a deep commitment to our students and profession. Through our previous years of collaboration, we have discovered that there are aspects of each other, as professionals and individuals, which we deeply respect and admire.

These two critical colleagues continue to be the people that I collaborate and question pedagogy and practice with in a more general sense, but each was content with their current implementation of instructional technology and were not actively seeking to expand this practice. The changes made to the administration of district assessments for school year 2015-2016 were vexing for all of us. Each of the three assessments resulted in an additional 10 hours of grading, totaling 30 additional hours of grading per semester. In the fall semester, we were all so disoriented by these changes that we were very preoccupied with addressing these concerns.

This shift in the focus of my colleagues away from technology led me to a new question: Where does one turn in the absence of a network of critical colleagues interested in instructional technologies? While my dissertation committee served as an additional critical colleagues network, it cannot be ignored: conducting research as a satellite doctoral student, removed from campus, was an isolating experience and I as removed from my circle of critical research colleagues and academic community. Often, I found myself turning to the literature as a source of clarification and confirmation.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Overview**

This literature review begins by establishing the theoretical frames used in this study. It continues with an examination of the literature on teacher as researcher in teacher action research and self-study research. Self-study research is further defined and related to the proposed study. In order to best understand how teachers learn to use instructional technology, the literature related to professional development and writing instruction is reviewed. Sociocultural learning and approaches to teaching writing in collaborative digital spaces are then explored to establish what the field says about teaching writing in blended classrooms and virtual spaces. The review then proceeds with a focus on a review of research on discussion board usage. The chapter concludes by defining and exploring the concept of authenticity and identifying the contribution this study will make to the field.

### **Theoretical Frames**

#### **Ecological Adoption Theory**

The adoption of digital technologies into the discourse patterns of the modern global community is reflected in the ecological model of literacy (Bruce, 1998; Lemke, 2000; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004; Zhao & Frank, 2003). Under this model, technology is integrated into the fabric of social interaction. Zhao and Frank (2003) use the metaphor of the zebra mussel's explosive growth in the Great Lakes to help explain the reality of the rapid incorporation of technology into daily life and into schools. Both the zebra mussels and technology have appeared in new ecosystems and are having dramatic impacts on these environments. Technological

tools and innovation at first considered a unique feature became pervasive and assumed to be the new normal.

An example of the ecological adoption theory in the classroom is the move from the paper gradebook to the online gradebook. When the gradebook was kept in a physical gradebook on the desk, it was viewed only by the teacher on a regular basis. Teachers provided notice to parents at interim and end of term points to apprise them of the student's performance in class. A teacher could be asked to bring the gradebook in for a meeting by an administrator or asked to bring the student's grades to a parent teacher conference, but the gradebook itself was kept in the teacher's possession. The physical gradebook was used by teachers to account for the work and performance of the students. The online gradebook provides continuous access during the course of the school year to students, parents, administrators, counselors, and other authorized faculty in addition to the classroom teachers. Whether or not it was the intention, the online gradebook becomes a way of keeping the teacher accountable for the evaluation of students. Administrators can now review teacher gradebooks and analyze the frequency and distribution of grades in real time. Students can compare their assignment grades to those of their classmates on every assignment. Parents can contact the teacher to ask for information on every grade entered or pending entry into the online gradebook as well as question the time it takes for teachers to update their grades. Online gradebooks have become the new norm, with teachers not only documenting grades but also submitting grades this way.

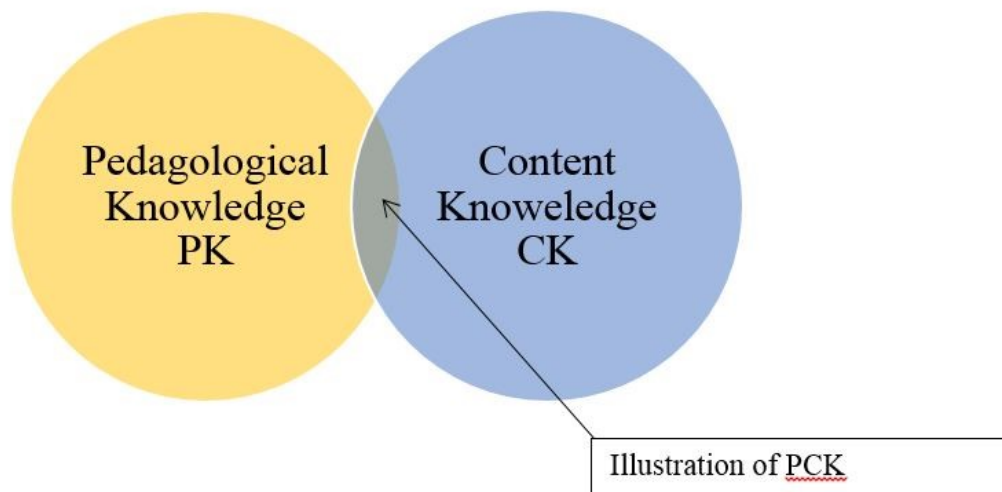
Technological tools that were once explicitly discussed become invisible, blending into the background. The tool still mediates the experience, but the

influence is not often explicitly considered as the tool is no longer seen by the user, until, like the Zebra Mussel, an environmental impact demands attention. This absorption of technology into daily lives significantly impacts the classroom. To examine the impact on classroom practice, a theoretical framework to extrapolate the interrelated arenas of technology, pedagogy, and content was needed to bring these absorbed tools to the surface so that their impact could be made explicit and better understood.

### **Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)**

Mishra and Koehler (2006) introduced the theoretical framework known widely as TPACK to the field. This framework articulated the three areas of knowledge, technological, pedagogical, and content, necessary to understanding the relationships and interactions between knowledge zones as teachers implement technology in the classroom. This work builds on Shulman's (1986, 1987) articulation of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which delineated the areas of knowledge necessary to teaching. Pedagogical knowledge refers to what teachers need to know in order to teach while content knowledge refers the knowledge of subject matter being taught. "It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners" Shulman, 1987, p. 8). PCK, depicted in Illustration 1, illuminates how to best teach that content to students (Banister & Reinhart, 2011; Beattie, 1995; Dawkins, Dickerson, McKinney, & Butler, 2008; Piccolo, 2008; Shulman, 1986, 1987). Shulman (2004) argues "the heart of teaching [is] the capacity for intelligent and adaptive action" (p. 4) and that

the study of cases to examine how this adaptation occurs is important for developing this capacity (Shulman, 1987; Shulman, 2002; Shulman 2004). The TPACK framework is a natural extension to the PCK framework given the ecological adoption of digital tools into the classroom.



**Illustration 1. PCK**

The body of research exploring the TPACK framework has grown rapidly since Mishra and Koehler first introduced the framework. The research has evolved beyond the articulation of the knowledge necessary to understand the use of technology by teachers in their classrooms to the development of measures to measure and evaluate this knowledge. In their effort to develop a survey instrument that examines and defines both the areas of knowledge and the interplay between them and to measure the beliefs of pre-service teachers, Schmidt et al. (2009, p. 125) define the seven distinct areas examined under Mishra and Koehler's TPACK framework, depicted in Illustration 2, elaborating on the three areas of content knowledge by defining the interplay between the zones:

1. Technology knowledge (TK): Technology knowledge refers to the knowledge from low-tech technologies such as pencil and paper to digital technologies such as the Internet, digital video, interactive whiteboards, etc.

2. Content knowledge (CK): Content knowledge is the “knowledge about actual subject matter that is to be learned or taught” (Mishra & Koehler, 2006, p. 1026).

3. Pedagogical knowledge (PK): Pedagogical knowledge refers to the methods and processes of teaching and includes knowledge in classroom management, assessment, lesson plan development, and student learning.

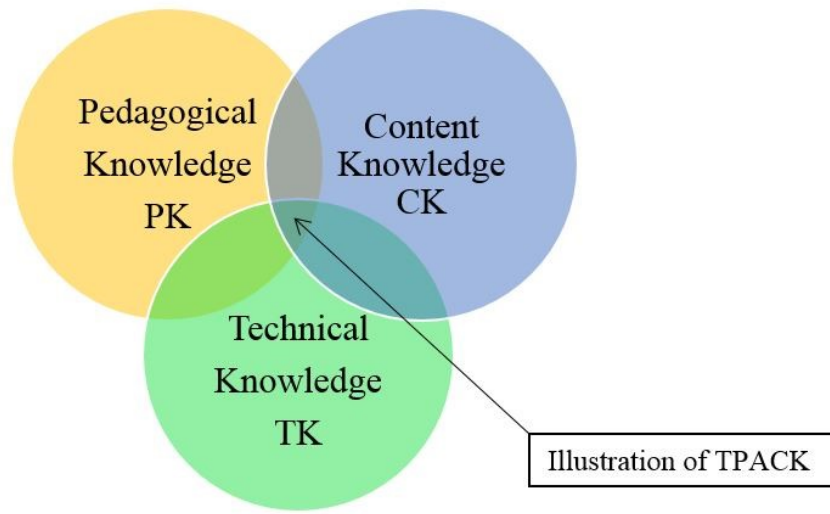
4. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK): Pedagogical content knowledge refers to the content knowledge that deals with the teaching process (Shulman, 1986).

5. Technological content knowledge (TCK): Technological content knowledge refers to the knowledge of how technology can create new representations for specific content. Suggesting teachers understand that, by using a specific technology, can change the way learners practice and understand concepts in a specific content area.

6. Technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK): Technological pedagogical knowledge refers to the knowledge of how various technologies can be used in teaching, and to understanding that using technology may change the way teachers teach.

7. Technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK): Technological pedagogical content knowledge refers to the knowledge required by teachers integrating technology into their teaching in any content area. Teachers have an intuitive understanding of the complex interplay between the three basic components of knowledge (CK, PK, TK) by teaching content using appropriate pedagogical methods and technologies.



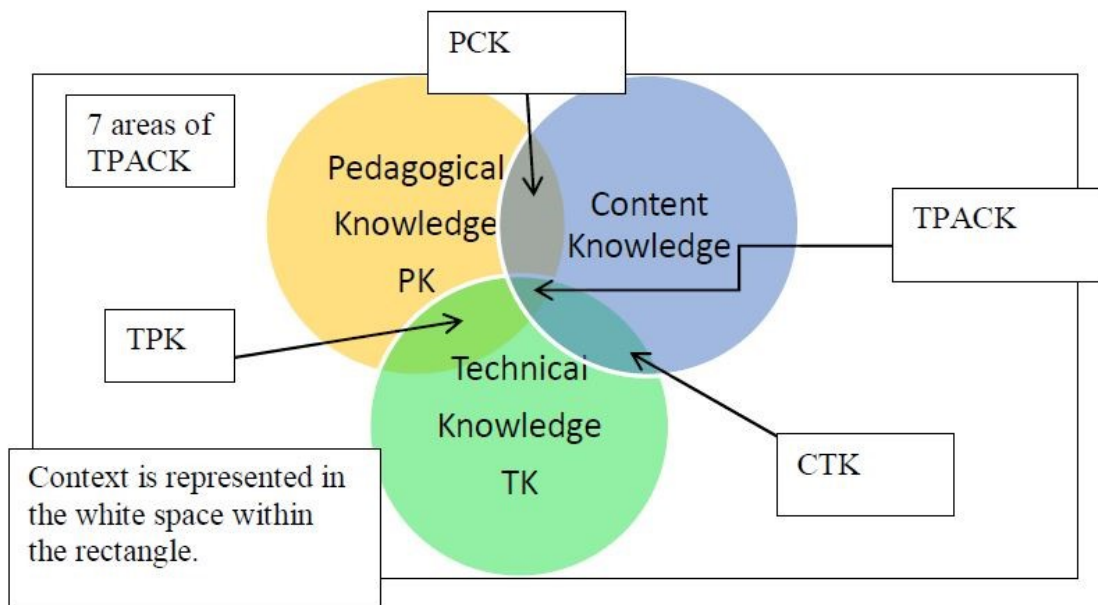


**Illustration 2. TPACK**

While under this description classroom management is considered to be an element of pedagogical knowledge, I question if this is the appropriate placement for classroom management. Some aspects of classroom management are related to pedagogical knowledge, but not all classroom management components are related to pedagogy. Classroom management is a broad umbrella containing operational, physical, and behavioral management. There are practical implementation issues that need to be addressed that do not seem to fit into the pedagogical knowledge zone.

Voogt et al. (2012) conducted a systematic review of the literature published between 2005 and 2011 related to the theoretical basis and practical applications of TPACK. Conceptually, they identified fundamental tensions in whether or not TPACK is an extension of PCK or simply a development of PCK for teachers as well as three different interpretations/definitions of TPACK. Angeli and Valandies (2005) and Cox and Graham (2009) both question the construct itself. Perhaps this stems from the lack of agreement about how to define what necessitates PCK. The space

encompassed below these two large knowledge umbrellas is open for debate. Voogt et al. conclude that TPACK is a separate body of knowledge and not subordinate to PCK, supporting Mishra and Koehler, who emphasize the notion, that technology exists as a separate domain. Teachers develop not only the three areas of knowledge, but the spaces between them, creating the seven zones articulated above. The context of the teaching event, where the learning was situated, was added in 2008 to the seven components as “an indispensable part of the TPACK framework” (Voogt et al, 4). Yet in their review of the articles published about TPACK, Rosenberg and Koehler (2015) found that only 70 of the 193 studies examined made mention of context and call for future research which is more attentive to context and the complex nature of teaching. Illustration 3 below uses the box surrounding the overlapping circles depicting the knowledge zones as the context.



**Illustration 3. TPACK in Context**

While as Voogt et al. (2012) assert “the discourse about TPACK may be seen by practitioners as a purely academic debate” (p. 11), this theoretical frame is used to create two types of assessments (survey and practice based assessments) to evaluate a teacher’s TPACK in practice. Teachers in the district are also being evaluated based on the interpretation of the SAMR model (Puentedura) shown in Illustration 4.

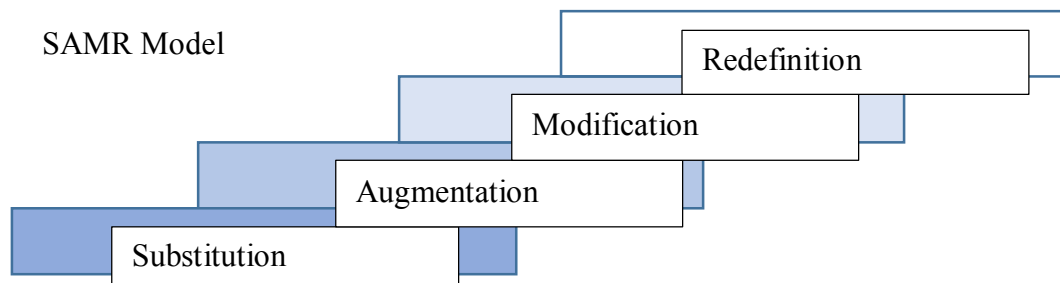


Illustration 4. SAMR Model

Puentedura’s framework evaluates the way in which technology is being integrated into the classroom. He asserts that the four ways technology appears in the classroom can be identified as substitution, augmentation, modification, or redefinition. This model is criticized (Hamilton et al., 2016) for its hierarchical structure, implying that the goal of technology integration is redefinition of practice and for its lack of attention to the contexts of learning or to the process of improving practice. Additionally, a central criticism of SAMR is the lack of context and its role in the implementation of technology in the classroom. Context is included in the figure, delineated by the box articulating space around the knowledge circles and their overlapping regions, thus representing the situation of TPACK in context.

While context was added to the TPACK framework in 2008, the question of its significance is still up for discussion and often neglected in research. In an attempt

to address this concern, Angeli and Valanides (2009) determined that discussing the context required understanding the micro, classroom based, meso, system based, and macro, community based, levels. They asserted that the dynamics at each of these levels impacts the classroom practice and the use of technology in the classroom. A recent review of the relevant research (Rosenberg & Koehler, 2015) found that 36% of studies did not discuss context. Much of the research related to TPACK does not discuss context and is theoretical.

## **Summary**

What do teachers need to know and consider when implementing instructional technology? The TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006) is widely used in the research literature to discuss what teachers need to know in order to implement instructional technology in classroom teaching. This framework builds on the foundation established by Shulman's (1986, 1987) work with PCK. As I examined the teaching journal, reflective journal, and classroom artifacts, I used the zones defined by the TPACK framework to code and begin the analysis of the data.

## **Research Practices**

### **Teacher Action Research**

Jain (2013) writes, "it is generally believed that theory is produced through systematic and intentional inquiry; in other words, through research. As a result, teachers who do not engage in empirical research or are unable to establish the systematic and intentional nature of their pedagogical inquiries are not viewed as capable of producing knowledge that could contribute to the field of education" (p. 2). Jain emphasizes that without conducting research on their practice teachers would

not have a voice in the research conversation. Such practitioner research has been criticized as subjective (Anderson, 2002). Tension exists between the communities of the teacher and the researcher. In my experience as a teacher, disdain for the researchers writing from the “ivory tower” is openly expressed. Educational theory and the authority of those who write about education are openly questioned. Perhaps this distrust emerges from the concept that researchers and teachers are separate and as belonging to two distinct communities of practice (Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2003; Wenger, 1998). Broekkamp and Van Hout-Wolters (2007), who conducted a literature review to examine this gap between research and practice, found that often that the results of educational research are often not practical beyond the context studies nor is educational research valued as practical by teacher practitioners. Their findings suggest that practitioners conduct research in their own classrooms and practice to determine what is appropriate to their specific educational context (Hammersley, 2007; Hargreaves, 1997).

Practitioner researchers bridge this division; they simultaneously explore teaching while researching, providing a practitioner research voice to the academic conversation of teaching and learning (Borko, Whitcomb, & Byrnes, 2008; Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The literature around practitioner studies has grown as more teachers engage in this practice. In the current educational climate, teachers “must take responsibility for contributing what they learn not only to their own practice but also that of their colleagues” (Darling-Hammond, 2006 p. 304). Practitioner research resonates with this charge. Practitioner research requires the situation of inquiry in one’s practice and can result in what

Cochran-Smith and Donnell (2006) discuss as the blurred boundaries in teacher research and educational practice, working to reduce the expanse between educational research and practice. The concept of engaging in this dialogic style of inquiry is explored by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009a). One form of this research is that of self-study research.

### **Living Educational Theory and Self-Study**

Developing living educational theory begins with the question “How do I improve my practice?” (Whitehead, 1989), arising from a critical juncture in practice. Whitehead advocates for the creation of living theory in his article “Living Educational Theory: Living Contradictions” (1989) in which he conveys his belief that traditional educational theories are “masking the living form and content” and that truth is relative to the question asked and the response to the question. He poses the question, “How can we encourage the conditions necessary for teachers to enter into a dialogue aimed at understanding?” Whitehead (2009) defines living educational theory as “an explanation for an individual’s educational influence in learning where the explanatory principles are not abstract generalizations. The explanatory principles are the energy flowing values and understandings the individual uses to give meaning and purpose to their life and to explain their educational influences” (p.110). To develop living educational theory, teachers must see themselves as knowledge-creators whose creation of knowledge can inform research that seeks to understand learning and enhance the knowledge-base of education.

Self-study research is an appropriate methodology for the development of living educational theory as it asks teachers to examine their own practice in action,

tend to the impact of their teaching on student learning, to account for their own learning, and results in an explanation of the knowledge generated through this process. In their text, *Self-study of Teaching Practice*, Samaras and Freese (2006) state that some self-study researchers define self-study as “an examination of the personal within a specific context” (p. 40). I assert that self-study research creates the conditions which encourage the practice of initiating a dialogue aimed at developing and advancing understanding of classroom practice and its related components.

Samaras and Freese (2006) define the five characteristics of self-study as: situated inquiry, process, knowledge, multiple, and paradoxical. These aspects are elements of Whitehead's (1989) methodology for creating living theory: questioning processes, identifying conflict between values and practice, creating solutions, enacting solutions, evaluating outcomes, modifying and repeating. He situates living theory in action research but points out that the *I* is a central element to the formation of claims of educational knowledge. The examination/observation of experience, reflection, and modification of teaching practice resulting in reflective practice is largely accepted as a positive teaching practice.

### **The Characteristics of Self-study**

#### *1. Self-study is situated inquiry*

While attending the national NCTE convention in 2012, I discovered that my implementation of instructional technology did not reflect the pedagogical practices and values that are central to my principles of teaching English. This conflict presented the questions: How can I incorporate technology in ways that are true to

these philosophical allegiances? How would I know that the students are benefiting from this inclusion?

This inquiry was driven by the questions that arose from my practice and was self-initiated. The concern that is of immediate relevance, not only my to own practice but to the field, arises as teachers grapple with simultaneously learning and implementing new technologies in their instructional practice, often with little support beyond initial exposure to these technologies. I must first acknowledge that dissonance does exist between belief and practice on a fundamental level. When implementing technology, I was beginning with the questions, what do I need to know and do to ensure that the technology would work, and what do the students need to know and be able to do in order to navigate and utilize the technology? Secondary was the content objective. In my hurry to add in technology to my teaching, I was placing more importance on the tool and demoting the learning outcome to second place. As I re-framed my approach through this study, I sought to understand, examine, and address the source of this dissonance.

## *2. Self-study is process*

Learning is a recursive process, and, as an educator, I need to create space that allows my teaching practice to be responsive and embrace a revision of practice without guilt. By participating in this self-study, I would be creating an intentional and necessary space to require reflection. When teaching, there are many demands on a teacher's time and energy. As a teacher, I needed to force space in my practice. I discovered during my failed implementation of Edmodo that I was, in some ways, on auto-pilot; teaching the curriculum through literature and writing was reflexive.



While change is not often comfortable, one can improve through honest, systematic, and sustained inquiry into practice. In this way, self-study is additionally authentic to my spiritual and philosophical outlook. I believe that change comes from discomfort, as discomfort brings attention to that which must change. Judgment or guilt is not needed, even when one is resistant to change. When one resists change, one must address the question of why one resists and the consequence of resistance.

I assert that it is necessary for the researcher to establish boundaries to the research project that are reasonable and do not take away from the role as teacher (Jain, 2013), while still large enough to examine the question posed but not so large as to lose sight of the question. In constructing this study, I have taken into consideration, as best as I can my habits of practice, commitments, and responsibilities. My role as educator supersedes my role as researcher when the students and administration require it.

### *3. Self-study is knowledge*

This study documents my creation of knowledge and reintegration of my two selves, practitioner and researcher. As a teacher, I am exposed to the rejection of educational research as coming from the “ivory tower,” and as a researcher, I have been in conversations with researchers who do not think that educators are in the right space to theorize about practice.

I am choosing to remain in the field as a secondary educator who conducts research after completion of my doctoral experience. While I have discussed with my administration my desire to work with other teachers to develop self-study research in aims of improving practice through reflection, my primary intention is to remain as a

classroom teacher. By finding living theory, I feel like I have found a method for unifying the practitioner and the researcher.

#### *4. Self-study is multiple*

This dissertation research required an exploration and understanding of the multiple, and sometimes conflicting, theoretical frameworks that influence my practice as well as allowing for multiple ways of exploring my practice to generate knowledge of self and practice. The goals are multiple, as the research seeks to improve my practice on an individual level, while contributing to the larger community of educators that I work with.

#### *5. Self-study is paradoxical*

Self-study like teaching is a simultaneously private and public act. While self-study is research conducted by an individual, that individual exists as a member of a community as a learner and leader of learning. The researcher works towards developing theory applicable to the collective and contributes to the collective discussion of practice by developing conceptions of theory that are applicable to the field as a whole. The act of writing a dissertation of this nature takes the private experience of reflective teaching and makes it public.

### **Summary**

Practitioner researchers bridge the division between the research community and the teachers in the classroom; they simultaneously explore teaching while researching, providing a practitioner research voice to the academic conversation of teaching and learning (Borko, Whitcomb, & Byrnes, 2008; Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Practitioner researchers, by

researching their practice, can work to build a living theory of education (Whitehead, 1989, 2009) through intensive study of themselves, their practice, and the impact on students. Self-study research is one example of research methodology that can be used to build living theories of education. Samaras and Freese (2006) define the five characteristics of self-study as: situated inquiry, process, knowledge, multiple, and paradoxical. For this dissertation, I use self-study methods to guide my collection and analysis of data.

## **Professional Development and Technology**

### **Professional Development and Writing Instruction**

Wei, Darling-Hammond, and Adamson (2010) identified key aspects for effective professional development, including: a focus on specific content; connection to and alignment with efforts supporting schoolwide reform; opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous, active learning; and encourage examination of praxis in collaborative contexts. McCarthy and Geoghegan (2015) identify the National Writing Project (NWP) as group that promotes collaborative professional development that meets this criterion and provides opportunities for teachers to improve their writing instruction. A unique feature of the organization is the active maintenance of university and K-12 school relationships. The teachers who participate in the summer workshops often return to take on coaching roles within their schools and districts (Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007). In addition to their summer workshops and professional learning opportunities, the NWP also maintains an active research presence, providing online resources for writing instruction and professional development.

Another type of collaborative professional engagement that supports professional development are school and district based *professional learning communities (PLCs)*. These PLCs are able to provide teachers with opportunities to examine practice in a common context. Lieberman and Miller (2008) indicate that successful PLCs will be based on trust, have a clear focus, engage in reflective practice and discussion, and put developing theory into practice. PLCs have been used to support professional development in the area of writing instruction independent of and with the NWP. While these PLCs groups were found to have positive impacts on teachers praxis, another style of PLCs named *Critical Friends Groups (CFG)* were found to have a positive collegial effect but limited impact on professional practice and instruction (Curry, 2008). The CFG studied by Curry included a multidisciplinary team and provided stronger cross-disciplinary conversations about writing, but resulted in less innovative practices including writing templates and product focus conversations.

An alternate to the live PLCs or CFG is an online collaborative space. Beach (2012) makes the case for online networks focused on professional development. In these communities, participants are able to collaborate with colleagues without regard to time and space. Beach indicates that online collaboration can provide a central networking and discussion forum to facilitate collaboration as well as support individualized learning networks. At the district or school level, online spaces can allow for the sharing of student work for collective analysis and the creation of schoolwide, cloud-based folders housing lesson plans and units. The sites available to teachers to collaborate online offer an opportunity for them to pursue their own

interests for professional development but do not document their participation in a way that is typically accepted by states as continuing education for the purposes of recertification. Perhaps as more research is done a way to account for this investment in professional growth can be accounted for this purpose.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

In their report on professional development, Wei et al. (2010) reviewed data from a national survey of teachers to examine the opportunities and engagement in professional development nationally. While they indicate effective professional development: focuses on specific content; should be connected to and in alignment with efforts supporting schoolwide reform; provide teachers opportunities to engage in intense, continuous, active learning; and encourage examination of the relationship between teaching and student learning in collaborative contexts, they found that this type of professional development was rare. More often, school districts and states continue to offer professional development that are short term and isolated in respect to time as well as lacking in ongoing support and engagement with coaches or facilitators.

Consequently, professional development provided by districts, rather than a productive event, is often perceived as yet another task added to an already overflowing list of things to do (Knight, 2000). When using professional development to support learning about instructional technology and how to implement it in one's practice, it is difficult to do so in the short-term, isolated professional development opportunities that states and districts often implement. Pella (2015) asserts that teacher professional development that promotes inquiry cycles is a positive influence

for professional growth. Classroom based inquiry can also support growth in professional practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). Given the time constraints that teachers feel they currently have in their professional lives (Melnick & Meister, 2008), classroom based inquiry is more likely to be perceived as useful and to promote professional growth.

Alternately, technology may pose a solution to providing ongoing professional development, by addressing the concern of isolated and unsupported learning. Hunt-Barron, Tracy, Howell, and Kaminski (2015) conducted a series of professional development activities to improve the use of digital tools with teachers and provided ongoing support as well as access to materials online using Google sites. They found that this availability, coupled with the perception of the online activities as being beneficial to both the students and themselves increased teacher motivation and interest. Teachers ultimately found this style of professional development “to be an effective support in their implementation of writing strategy instruction in their classrooms and reported downloading the information available on the site regularly” (p.11). Likewise, a teacher’s evaluation of the tool’s potential to meet instructional ends increases, the chance that the tool will be used also increases making convincing the teacher of the instructional technology’s value central in importance to effective professional development implementation (Shifflet & Weilbacher, 2015).

When implementing instructional technology professional development, Wright (2014) found that continued use of learned technologies depended on the perceived benefit of the technology. This example of continuance theory, adopted

from banking literature, indicated that if teacher's perceived a benefit to themselves or their students, they were more likely to persist in implementing the technology. As concern increases around developing digital literacies and student's competencies in multimodal spaces, it is likely that teachers' beliefs in the importance of digital tools to their practice will increase. "While the implications of the participatory culture radiating from Web 2.0 have far reaching implications across a wide range of disciplines, it is the digital texts produced in these places of participatory culture that are transforming our literacy practices, having an enormous impact on literacy education" (Gibbons, 2013 p. 57). This conception aligns with the ecological model of technology adoption (Zhao & Frank, 2003).

### **Summary**

Whether designed by the teacher, department, school, or state, professional development designed to prepare teachers to implement instructional technology in the classroom needs to be perceived as valuable by the teachers learning the new technology. When studying a group of teachers learning to use instructional technology, Barron, Tracy, Howell, and Kaminski (2015) found that ongoing, supported professional development with continued access to professional development materials and instructors increased the likelihood that teachers would implement the content learned through the professional development course.

Classroom based inquiry can also support growth in professional practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Lieberman & Wood, 2003) and be a form of professional development. Given the time constraints that teachers feel they currently have in their professional lives

(Melnick & Meister, 2008), classroom based inquiry is more likely to be perceived by teachers as useful and to promote professional growth.

Understanding what the research literature says about which types of professional development best supports the implementation of instructional technology can help to identify what types of challenges are faced when implementing instructional technology professional development. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the research conversation about what teachers need to know when implementing instructional technology in the classroom and needs to consider how teachers best learn these concepts.

### **Formative Assessment**

The use of data to inform instruction became pervasive under the government initiative, No Child Left Behind (Young & Kim, 2010). Young and Kim (2010) reviewed the research literature related to formative assessment and data driven instruction. They found that the terms formative assessment, classroom assessment and performance assessment were used to designate the same type of activity. They determined that the most current literature uses data and formative assessment when referring to assessing student work to inform instruction. Young and Kim explained that the terms themselves are imprecise and poorly defined in the literature.

Torrance and Pryor (2001) found that formative assessment primarily serves two purposes to determine if a student is learning concepts and what a student is learning about concepts. Daily classroom interactions provide a source for informal assessment that Goertz, Oláh, and Riggan, (2009) found teachers place great value on the informal information about student. The literature does not provide detailed



descriptions of the process teachers use process, understand and make use of formative assessment. Young and Kim (2010) found that teacher beliefs and constructs of teaching influence what the teacher deems valuable in shaping instruction and express concern that teachers may be overwhelmed by the move towards data-driven instruction.

According to Jones, Chang, Heritage, Tobiason, & Herman (2015), formative assessment is the ongoing process of evaluating evidence of learning and subsequently adjusting instruction during a lesson or in subsequent lessons. Jones et al. indicate that students and teachers engage in this process. While the majority of the literature examined by Young and Kim (2010) focused on teacher interpretation of formative analysis and its role in influencing instruction, I agree with Jones et al. that students need to be active in this process.

### **Summary**

Formative assessment is an ongoing process of evaluating evidence of learning and adjusting instruction as a consequence (Jones et al, 2015). Young and Kim (2010) found that there is little agreement or consistent terminology used in the research literature when examining formative assessment and that little is known about the practices of teachers using formative assessment in the classroom (Goertz, Oláh, & Riggan, 2009). An understanding of what the research literature states about formative assessment is necessary to the investigation of the second research question, what do I look for in student work?

## **Writing Research**

### **Sociocultural Learning, Technology and Writing**

Students, much like teachers, benefit from learning in collaborative contexts.

In virtual classrooms, teachers are afforded the opportunity to expand the collaborative options for students and for students to write in ways relevant to their everyday lives. Kwok, Ganding III, Hull, and Moje (2015) explain that writing is widely accepted as a social act. There are many ways that teachers can support writing and learning in collaborative activities in online spaces. In fact, McCarthy, Grabill, Hart-Davidson, and McLeod (2011) assert that technology influences not only the ways in which students engage with one another in the creation of text, but the types of text (including illustrative, video, and audio as multimedia creations) as well. Online-based text also expands the possible audiences of text, expanding the audience beyond the teacher. Leijten and Van Waes (2013) remind us that while online composition affords many advantages, it is important to consider how it changes the writing process. In their study of student writing using digital composition tools, they tracked the frequency that the students interrupted their writing to move into other digital spaces on the Internet. Several of these moves were for additional research. Further research is needed to understand how these interruptions impact student writing.

### **Collaborative Writing and Digital Spaces**

Writing in a Web 2.0 world increases the demand for writing in collaborative settings in digital spaces. One way in which online platforms allow collaboration both

in and out of school are cloud-based<sup>17</sup> files, where documents and files are stored in a remote virtual drive rather than a hard drive on one's personal computer. By applying a sociocultural approach to new literacy emphasizing the alteration of social literacy practices, Yim, S., Warschauer, M., Zheng, B., and Lawrence, J. F. (2014) investigated the way that cloud-based collaborative writing supports literacy practices that meet the demands of Common Core State Standards. Additionally, cloud-based collaborative writing was considered to generate authentic student writing. Ball (2014) suggests that cloud-based document sharing can support of cyclical revision and collaborative process. By encouraging asynchronous collaboration, the utilization of cloud-based documents can support the writing process and the development of academic voice. Cloud based document exchanges allows for a deeper conversation about student texts and encourages revision.

Another way that students can collaborate and discuss with one another is on a virtual discussion board. Sloan, C. (2015) and Zheng and Warschauer (2015) examined students' motivation and participation in this setting. Four factors: relevance, confidence, enjoyment, and usefulness influenced the students desire to participate. Students were found to place a high value on the comments they received in these settings, indicating that interaction is necessary for success in online discussion board settings. Writing in collaborative communities, both digital and physical, provides students with an authentic audience. Saidy (2013) worked with teachers to develop assignments that connected student research groups to the

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<sup>17</sup> The cloud is a term used to describe the location of data that is saved through web based storage as opposed to a physical drive.

communities in which they lived, extending the classroom experience and making assignments relevant to daily life. With the increased emphasis on active participation in social media contexts, it is likely that these virtual communities will be a part of students' lives in the years to come as well and that students may find that participation in a democratic society requires an awareness of and ability to negotiate these spaces.

McCabe, Doerflinger, and Fox, R. (2011) studied the continued use of digital documents and electronic feedback students received on these assignments, and what students did with the feedback they received. They found that students' perception of feedback on their writing, as well as the writing, improved. The difference between a paper-based grader's comment in the paper's margin and an e-grader's typed comment in a box linked to an exact point in the text that is displayed on the screen. Additionally, verbal feedback can be embedded in the document. The paper-based grader marks text should be changed, but an e-grader can turn on the "track changes" function, crossing out original text and replaces it with colored text, allowing the e-grader to model the desired change. Mack (2013) found that students expressed a preference for a simpler system of highlighting and commenting in color. She found that a color-coded system was more effective in providing students with feedback and was less time consuming for her as an instructor. She also found that if assessment is directly connected to the ongoing classroom, discourse that students are more likely to connect this context, supporting their understanding of teacher comments.

Keane and Russell (2014) utilized cloud-based collaborative practice to demonstrate how emerging technologies can bridge distance and replace in person writing conferences. While both students and instructors had to learn to use and become comfortable with the technology, the *telecollaborators* developed a coaching experience that they felt confident could be modified as needed to provide assistance in revising college writing assignments remotely. While these conferences most often occur in real time, digital technologies also provide ways to facilitate collaborative practices and discourse in asynchronous spaces.

## **Discussion Boards**

### **Asynchronous Participation and Supporting Collaborative Learning**

Teachers utilizing blended or exclusively online classes are likely to use discussion boards or threaded discussion forums (Blackmon, 2012). Discussion forums allow for students to participate at various times and from different locations asynchronously. Many believe that the capacity to participate asynchronously is a key benefit, extending the classroom not only beyond the physical room but also beyond the prescribed time in that space. Song and McNary (2010) found that students using discussion boards are able to reflect and refine their thoughts before arriving to class. They believed that this results in deeper, more reflective learning. To promote this engagement, address the course objectives, and ensure alignment with course content, discussion board prompts need to be carefully planned. Xia, Fielder, and Siragusa (2013) explain that carefully planning activities and prompts allows students the opportunity to show and refine knowledge of central concepts by discussing these in threads, sharing their ideas, having them questioned, and continuing the processing as a group.

Balaji and Chakrabarti (2010) emphasize that this discourse, one that does not have the teacher as the main audience, allowing for a community discourse that is otherwise not likely to occur. A main feature then of discussion boards is to create a community of learners, encouraging students to engage in the academic discourse and see themselves as member of an academic community. Threaded discussion boards are considered to be a strong support of increasing the presence of student voice (Breton et al., 2005; English, 2007; Jewell, 2013; Schmidt, 2011; Yu, 2009). This movement reflects the sociocultural nature of writing as well as that of the academic tradition. These digital spaces should encourage this collaborative practice and discourage isolated learning that keeps the transaction of ideas between student and teacher (Harris & Sandor, 2007). In order to encourage reflective activities that mandate students express their genuine thoughts, the teacher must be prepared to be exposed to open and honest responses. By allowing students to participate in activities to work together towards developing a group consensus, instructors can encourage authentic engagement with curricular concepts (Cheng, Paré, Collimore, & Joordens (2011). These types of writing activities encourage engagement in critical thinking within the group. By using questions and prompts that require of higher order thinking, students can gain critical thinking skills through the use of the discussion board. Additionally, Dringus and Ellis (2005) found that these types of discussion board activities developed student leadership, encouraging the development of student voice.

Johnson (2016) found that students engaging in an online classroom engaged in collaborative discussion and consequently, engaged more deeply in classroom

dialogue. These students were able to share insightful thoughts as the result of prompts specifically designed to promote collaborative thinking and knowledge construction.

### **Assessing Discussion Boards**

In their review of the research literature related to discussion board assessment, Dringus and Ellis (2005) found that there was no single standard for assessing students' participation. They suggest that the use of data mining, selection and analysis of the discussion board, is a useful tool for analyzing discussion board content when strategically applied to data related to the instructors objective in using the discussion board. For example, if the instructor is interested in using the discussion board to promote peer conversation around course materials, an instructor should examine the degree of engagement the students have with one another. By examining the engagement pattern, the instructor can determine if the student is engaging superficially in the dialogue by only posting to a thread once, or a deeper engagement revealed through multiple engagements within a thread.

Instructors can use this information to identify ways to monitor student engagement and encourage engagement in the learning activity as desired. These interactions can facilitate interactions between students and the instructor. AlJeraisy, Mohammad, Fayyumi, and Alrashideh (2015) found that instructors utilizing discussion boards had triple the interactions with students than they did in live contexts. Similarly, students' engagement with peers also is increased as a result of learning in a collaborative context (Dixson et al., 2006). As society becomes more immersed in digital technologies, teachers are learning to navigate these spaces as they learn them and instruct students in them (Klages & Clark, 2009). What this shift

will mean for praxis, pedagogy, and classrooms will unfold with technology itself. Reflecting on what these shifts mean for writing, considering what impact a technologically dense world will have on writing and expression of ideas is an area worth examining. Klages and Clark suggest that the dynamics of the classroom also have changed. New types of literacy are encountered when students engage with technology in all aspects of their life and in digital spaces that privilege their own story. Social media, its connectivity, and its rapid dissemination, as well as the commendation or condemnation of one's experience, are all factors that change the most powerful audience of students out of school writing. Klages and Clark remind us that "throughout their educational careers, they have been given impersonal, prescriptive writing assignments that punish them for incorrect grammar. Their conception of academic writing is limited to the rigidly constructed five-paragraph essay, something that spelled success in high school writing assignments and on the SAT writing examination" (p. 38). This sense of not being a part of the conversation needs to be addressed for students to conceive of themselves as part of an academic discourse.

Writing in digital spaces provides an exciting opportunity to extend the audience of student-produced work beyond the audience of the teacher to the class, the local community, and the world (Beach, Hull, & O'Brien, 2011). Teachers can use this space to create opportunities for students to engage with one another and concepts in a complement to and extension of the physical classroom that reflect awareness of local, national, and global issues.



## **Summary**

The first research question, how can I foster the development of academic writing in authentic spaces using instructional technology, requires the definition of academic writing. Throughout the history of the academic tradition, writing serves as the way to communicate one's ideas to others. Writing is, therefore, widely considered to be a social act. Discussion boards and digital cloud-based documents present instructors with two venues to foster academic written expression and promote continued engagement in course conversations.

## **Authenticity**

### **Defining Authenticity**

When I was apprenticed into the field of English education in the late nineties at the University of Iowa collaborative, project-based learning and attention to real audiences and writing for real purposes was central to my pedagogic grounding. The value of authentic learning is well documented (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Herrick, Reeves, Oliver, & Woo, 2004; McLellan, 1996, 1997; Wilson, 1996). Acknowledging the constructivist view of learning, Newman, Marks, and Gamoran (1996) define authenticity as “commonly refer[ing] to something as being genuine rather than artificial or misleading” (282). For education, this means defining “authentic academic achievement through three criteria: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school.” They argue that students engaging in an authentic education will create work that is a construction of knowledge not a reproduction of knowledge. Herrington, Reeves, Oliver, and Woo (2004) provide examples of activities that reflect the qualities articulated by Newman et al. (1996) and argue that participating in these activities provides knowledge made in context to

otherwise decontextualized knowledge, enhancing the transfer of deep and lifelong learning. The Vygotskian notion that words are a tool to mediate social discourse and the creation of knowledge through social interaction aligns with these claims. To be authentic, the public school classroom must create a space for students to engage in this collaborative construction of knowledge.

### **Authenticity in the Classroom and Digital Tools**

Arthur Applebee (1996) articulates four features of effectual curricula: high quality language episodes, sufficient breadth of content, activities that support connected knowledge creation, and instruction that moves students into participation into the curricular conversation. He asserts that education is one great conversation. Though he does not use authenticity to define his vision for curriculum, Applebee (1996) advocates for creating classrooms where students are members of an academic discourse, participating in conversations, through writing as well as classroom discussion, to create knowledge. Atwell (1998) advocates that the writing teachers' role is to provide opportunities for writers go public with their work.

Slagle (1996) cautions educators that teachers need to be careful not to invent contexts in an attempt to imitate the real world in the classroom. She reminds the reader that authentic includes students' real voices, responding to real situations, not pretending to be someone they are not or pretending the audience of teacher is someone else. When assigning writing, Slagle aims to develop prompts that clarify the audience, a letter to a local newspaper, but allow students to write from their own perspective. She reminds teachers that asking students to write from a perspective that

is not their own, she gives the example of pretending to be a movie critic, adds an additional task to the already, for some, cumbersome task of writing.

Putnam (2001) succeeded in having her high school students go public with their work by working with her students to create and market a book using an online publisher. She reports that students exhibited high levels of engagement in the task and were more aware of the importance of producing a quality, well edited, final product. The book was purchased by local businesses and made available to the public. Similarly, Buckmiller and Kruse (2015) documented their experience working with students to publish a book as a culminating course project. Using an online publisher and marketed on Amazon.com, this text was available for purchase globally.

The research discussed on discussion boards in this chapter provides a different form of publication. Threaded discussion prompts provide students with an audience and voice in classroom conversations (Balaji & Chakrabarti, 2010; Breton et al., 2005; English, 2007; Jewell, 2013; Schmidt, 2011; Yu, 2009). By encouraging students to engage in the classroom conversation, learning is supported through the construction of knowledge as a collective group.

## **Summary**

The first research question, how can I foster the development of academic writing in authentic spaces using instructional technology, requires the definition of authentic space. The value of authentic learning is well documented (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Herrick, Reeves, Oliver, & Woo, 2004; McLellan, 1996, 1997; Wilson, 1996). Newman, Marks, and Gamoran (1996) define authenticity in

education as possessing: construction of knowledge, disciplined inquiry, and value beyond school. Discussion boards are considered an authentic space because they provide students with an audience and voice in classroom conversations (Balaji & Chakrabarti, 2010; Breton et al., 2005; English, 2007; Jewell, 2013; Schmidt, 2011; Yu, 2009). To be authentic, the public school classroom must create a space for students to engage in this collaborative construction of knowledge. Authentic space can therefore be created by establishing practices that place student voice as contributor to knowledge generation.

### **Contribution to the Field**

Technology is a prevalent and powerful force in the modern world. The infusion of digital technologies, especially social media, into daily life is extensive. Public schools are working to increase the use of technology in the classroom, but they are challenged in this adoption by the rapid evolution of digital technologies and devices and by the fiscal limitations placed on them by their budgets.

By examining the implementation of digital tools to support authentic academic writing in a high school setting, this study seeks to contribute to the development of a living educational theory of instructional implementation of digital tools to support the development of academic writing in the high school classroom. The research reviewed here on discussion boards and cloud-based collaboration was conducted with college students.

As a veteran classroom teacher, I have experienced the infusion of technology over the course of my career. When I first began teaching, email was becoming a normal method of communication in professional contexts; gradebooks were still

physical books where teachers recorded attendance and grades. Because I have witnessed the adoption of technology and remember my practice before technology, I am able to see the presence and impact of technology on my practice and in the classroom that an individual who has not experienced life before technology cannot. As an early adopter, I have an open mind to the inclusion of technology in my practice, but I am tempered in my enthusiasm for all things digital and acknowledge that there are positive and negative sides to this adoption. This study contributes to the field by examining the implementation of digital tools to support academic writing in a high school context and builds on the body of research using the TPACK framework.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### **Overview**

In this chapter, I revisit the purpose for this self-study and then provide an autobiographical section to provide the reader with relevant information from my personal history as well as influences on my professional practice. After establishing the self in self-study, I describe the school the classroom context is situated in, the classroom, and the use of professional expectation of teacher research for professional evaluations in a state in the Potomac River Basin. I then explain how data was collected and analyzed. Ethical considerations, including privacy, the dual role of teacher as researcher, potential bias, and trustworthiness, are explored.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to systematically investigate the implementation of digital tools in tenth and eleventh grade English courses to improve academic writing. By examining my practice, as a secondary educator with experience teaching before, during, and after the infusion of digital tools and explosion of social media, I seek to contribute to the conversation regarding the theory of teaching with digital tools in the English secondary classroom and the larger conversation of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK) as a framework for understanding technology use in the classroom. Through continued engagement with the literature, I have worked to understand and keep abreast of evolving technologies and trends for inclusion of technology in the English secondary classroom.

## **Autobiography**

As a secondary English educator, I made a decision to improve my competency and to increase the technology used for instructional purposes in my secondary classroom seven years ago. In addition to my doctoral coursework, I engaged in technology courses offered by the district focused on using interactive whiteboards for instruction. As a high school English teacher and doctoral candidate, I began collaborating with colleagues in school year 2013-2014 to improve our adoption of instructional technologies in our practice.

I am considered by the English department to be a technology expert and the person to go to for questions with all concerns related to technology and instruction. Mrs. Thomas explained to me that she sought me out because she felt confident that I would take the time to explain technology to her at a pace and in a way that she could understand and remember, but almost more importantly that I never make her feel like she is a burden on my time and that I always make time for her. On her recommendation, other teachers struggling to implement instructional technology sought out my assistance. This has been the case since my return to the classroom from full-time graduate study in 2010.

Two factors dramatically impacted my teaching practice. The first, my completion of massage therapy school during my early teaching career, largely influenced my perceptions of subtle cues and awareness of how preconceptions can influence and in some cases obscure perception. Through this experience, I became attuned to the presence of the person and to “see” the students as well as hear them. In my massage therapy practice, a client may come in with a complaint about his/her lower back, but the source of the discomfort might be stemming from an issue within

the hamstrings or deep abdominal muscles. The client may not understand why I focus my treatment on these areas; but when they experience the relief from the treatment, they frequently ask me to explain the connection. Similarly, students may come to the classroom with beliefs about their own ability that I need to explore further to find a nonconventional way to address. The clinical experience, as well as that of learning, in a space that was holistic, encouraged the consideration of the whole person, helped me to perceive the complexity of each student, and prioritized my concern for how learning events would impact the student. While some might characterize this as practitioner's intuition, I would characterize it as awareness informed by attending to subtle cues and connecting to knowledge acquired through practice and instruction. My instructors in massage therapy school cultivated an observational mindset and encouraged monitoring one's own processing of situations and information through multiple perspectives and lenses. My awareness of the human condition was expanded to consider both Eastern and Western medical theories of wellness. When confronted with a problem in massage therapy school, knowing the answer was not enough; explaining and understanding the possible origins was necessary to develop a treatment plan.

My first pregnancy was the second life event that dramatically impacted my teaching practice. When I met with my obstetrician for the first time, she was clear that my pregnancy would likely to get more complicated as I progressed. Due to my pre-existing health conditions, my risk factors for problems increased in the second trimester as opposed to going down, as they would in a normal risk pregnancy. I suddenly was faced with the possibility that I might have to go on extended bedrest at



any moment. I needed to change my grading, planning, and classroom practice to prepare for this possibility and ensure that the students would have no break in their instruction. This was the year that I chose to fully blend the classroom. While I could not control when or if anything would happen to me or the baby, I could structure the classroom in a way that their learning would not be derailed by a surprise, extended absence.

By creating a virtual classroom space, I was able to post the term guides with an overview of the next six weeks of lessons, the lessons, and their attachments, as well as keep their assignments both with me and with them simultaneously. Fortunately, this happened at a time when blended learning was a possibility, and though ultimately unnecessary (my pregnancy was uneventful for the duration) the threat of an extended leave forced a change to my practice. I had never considered blending the classroom before it became a necessity; it always seemed to be burdensome and confusing. After having taught with a blended classroom, I recognized the potential for supporting the students' learning and providing them with consistent and timely feedback on their written work as well as new opportunities to increase collaborative learning. In order to fully take advantage of the opportunities this space afforded, I needed to realign the classroom procedures and policies.

Before I blended the classroom, my policies and procedures were similar to those that were expected of me as a student in the 1990s and to those of my current department members. For example, my syllabus stated that any paper not turned in by 7:30 am on the day it was due would have a 10% per day late deduction to the final

letter grade. There was no provision for revision or improvement after submission of the assignment. I remember feeling how important it was to define the exact time a school day started to prevent any confusion or debate about the number of days a paper would be considered late.

Policies like this one were implying that their writing was meant to be finished, left behind, and produced for an audience of one: the teacher. Each unit produced a product that was viewed as independent, not a moment of a continuum of learning, and evaluated as a final statement of learning for a specific unit to determine the level of mastery. While some might argue, as I once did, that this is the unavoidable consequence of producing writing in the high school English classroom, I could no longer do so. I had reached a critical juncture in my practice, where my beliefs were in direct conflict with the policies I was implementing. I realized that I needed to rethink the construction of my course and the learning events I selected to align with my belief that writing is a process and meant to be done for real audiences.

## **Revisions to Practice**

### **Planning**

I ascribe to the backward planning method. I begin with the goals that I want students to achieve, examine the relationship between these goals, and identify how they can build on and support one another. From there, I begin to plot a journey for my course, identifying the activities and texts that would support the students as they navigate this pathway of learning. Selecting texts for these activities is restricted by the list of texts approved by the school district for the grade level that I am teaching. The order of these texts, and thus the individual unit outcomes, is increasingly dictated by the suggested scope and sequence for my grade level.

When I first began embracing technology in my lessons as an element of learning activities, I merely added it into existing lessons. I incorporated group webquests for building background knowledge in preparation of reading texts in lieu of reading the prefatory material in the textbook, researching in the library, or lecturing. I had students create PowerPoint presentations to share their research with the class. I found that I was focusing almost exclusively on whole class and group level activities. I did not think about how these activities related to the learning goals or if the activities were supporting the objectives for the course. They were, in essence, just digital replacements for already existing analog practices.

By rethinking my planning with the student learning objective in mind and asking how I could use instructional technology to support the students achieving that outcome, I was able to blend the instructional technology into the fabric of the classroom as opposed to bedazzling the classroom practice with instructional technology. In order to do this, I needed to spend significant time and effort investigating and experimenting with these technologies and tools to develop my own proficiency and competency in their use.

### **District Expectations**

At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year I was provided with a schedule to collect and submit my eleventh grade students' responses to the new district assessments. These essays as well as their answers to the multiple choice questions were scrubbed of individual student information and submitted to the district's curriculum office for the purpose of evaluating the quality of the multiple choice questions and to create a bank of anchor papers. These papers would be used to support consistent application of the district rubric in subsequent school years. One

consequence of this request on my practice was the personal pressure I placed on myself to make sure that my students were well prepared for these assessments in order to provide useful anchor essays and multiple choice responses. The new eleventh grade district assessments were challenging, asking the students to conduct a rhetorical analysis of Locke's treatise on slavery in relation to other historical text. I did not typically teach this type of analysis the first six weeks of the semester and needed to revise my courses significantly to prepare students for these assessments. I made the decision to adopt the suggested scope and sequence after considering the impact to the course grade of not performing well on the district assessments (20% of the students' course grade).

### **Grading**

The most radical change to my teaching policies is seen in my grading policy. To fully embrace and encourage revision, I allowed students to write for new scores on each revision attempt as opposed to averaging the scores of the attempts together. I was initially concerned with the amount of time it would take to regrade assignments multiple times. Already, I have eight major papers to grade per student for each of the three courses that I teach each semester; how would I find time to regrade multiple versions of the documents? What I found was that the papers did not come in all at once and I was better able to pace the evaluation of student work. I encouraged students to schedule meetings about their papers before they were due when they struggled to begin. The quality of the writing improved and I found grading to be easier and more rewarding.

## Description of the Setting

All the names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the privacy of individuals and the community. Sweetrock High School (SHS) is a large high school educating students in grades nine through twelve in a fringe-rural environment in the Potomac River Basin. SHS has a small population of students, fewer than 10%, receiving free or reduced meals. The demographic breakdown of the SHS reveals a 70% Caucasian majority.

**Table 1**

**Demographic data for Sweetrock High**

Ethnicity:	Number of Students:	Percentage of Population:
African American	81	5%
Hispanic	138	9%
Asian	159	10%
Caucasian	1063	70%
2+ Races	81	6%

In school year 2014-2015, the school became a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) friendly building with the launching of a school wide Wi-Fi network. The district has increased its emphasis on expanding technology for instructional use. Professional development sessions over the course of the school year consistently promoted websites for classroom use. This implementation approach is top down in initiative. Teachers were not asked for input when the district decided to move to Google classroom nor were we asked what technologies we were using with our students.

Because it is a BYOD school, SHS does not provide devices for the students. The English department has one Chromebook cart with 30 Chromebooks (even with

access to a Chromebook cart as many as six students would be without their own device due to class size) that English teachers can reserve on a first come, first served basis for classroom use. The library has one Chromebook cart with 30 devices that any teacher in the school can reserve on a first come, first served basis. When planning on using the Chromebooks, teachers need to have contingency plans in the event of network connectivity outages, which happened six times over the course of the year. Most of these outages impacted the entire district's digital network and all of its servers were down for the day.

In each of the classes, three to six students did not have a tablet or smartphone of their own. At the beginning of the fall semester, only seven out of 105 students reported not having Internet access at home. During the course of the semester, four other students reported losing Internet access at home, while other students lost smartphone privileges. The school did not have a system for students to check out a device to take home with them, and Chromebook carts were in high demand and required signing up for them well in advance, potentially weeks before the intended lesson dates. Fortunately, due to my long term planning habits established during my pregnancy, I was able to secure Chromebooks for all of the lessons I planned for with the exception of rearrangement of lessons as a result of school being cancelled due to snow.

## **Courses**

For the school year 2015-2016, as shown in Table 2, I have been assigned two sections of eleventh grade honors American literature, three sections of tenth grade British and world (one on grade level and two honors), and one section of twelfth

grade Advanced Placement (AP) Literature. I documented and analyzed my implementation of instructional technology for the American and British and world literature courses. I decided not to include the AP literature course in this study because it was the first time that I had taught an AP course and included twelfth grade students who would graduate after only 14 weeks in the course. There were sixty-six students enrolled in American literature and seventy-five students in world literature. The courses meet for ninety minutes each day on an accelerated block schedule, completing a yearlong course in one semester.

**Table 2**

**Teaching Assignments**

Fall - 2015	Spring - 2016
11 <sup>th</sup> grade honors American Literature	AP Literature and Composition
11 <sup>th</sup> grade honors American Literature	10 <sup>th</sup> grade British and World Lit.
10 <sup>th</sup> grade honors British and World Lit.	10 <sup>th</sup> grade honors British and World Lit.

**Classroom Description**

The physical classroom is arranged so that students face the back wall so that the projector displays on a larger surface. There is one whiteboard at the front of the room. Bulletin boards are decorated with information about American authors and the unit names. There are 36 student desks arranged in a U with an inner and outer row. In the center of the interior U is a media cart with the projector, DVD player, speaker, and a sliding shelf for a laptop. Three desktop computers with Wi-Fi access are set up on the perimeter of the room and are available for student use. Student painted ceiling tiles decorate the room with landscapes, trains, and scenes from Atlas Shrugged.

The virtual classroom is hosted on Coursesites.com (see Figure 7), a free platform provided by Blackboard.<sup>18</sup> The classroom website has a navigation menu vertically on the left side of the screen with links to course documents, calendar, discussion, assignments, PowerPoints, journal, feedback, and tools. By clicking on the link, students are taken directly to the page with the activities and resources for that unit (see Figure 8).

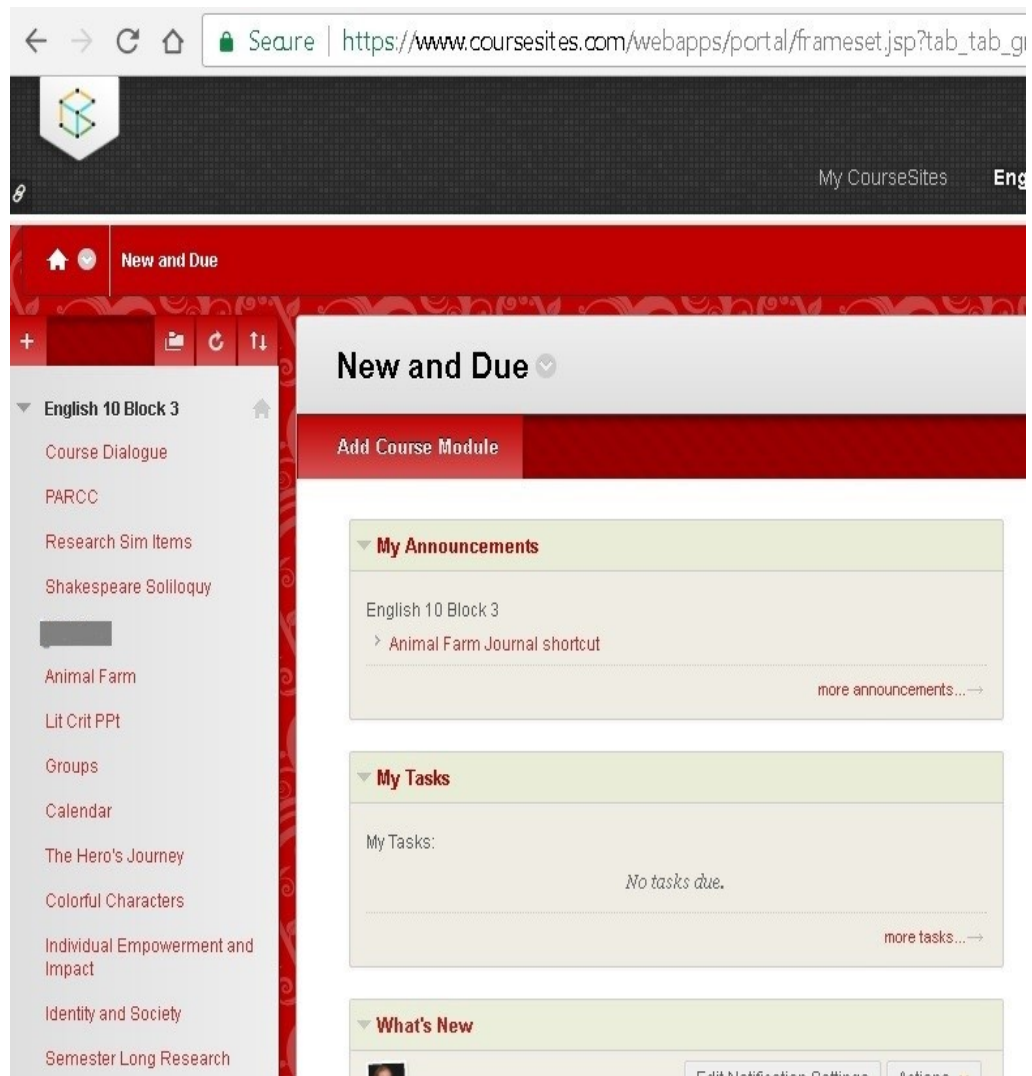
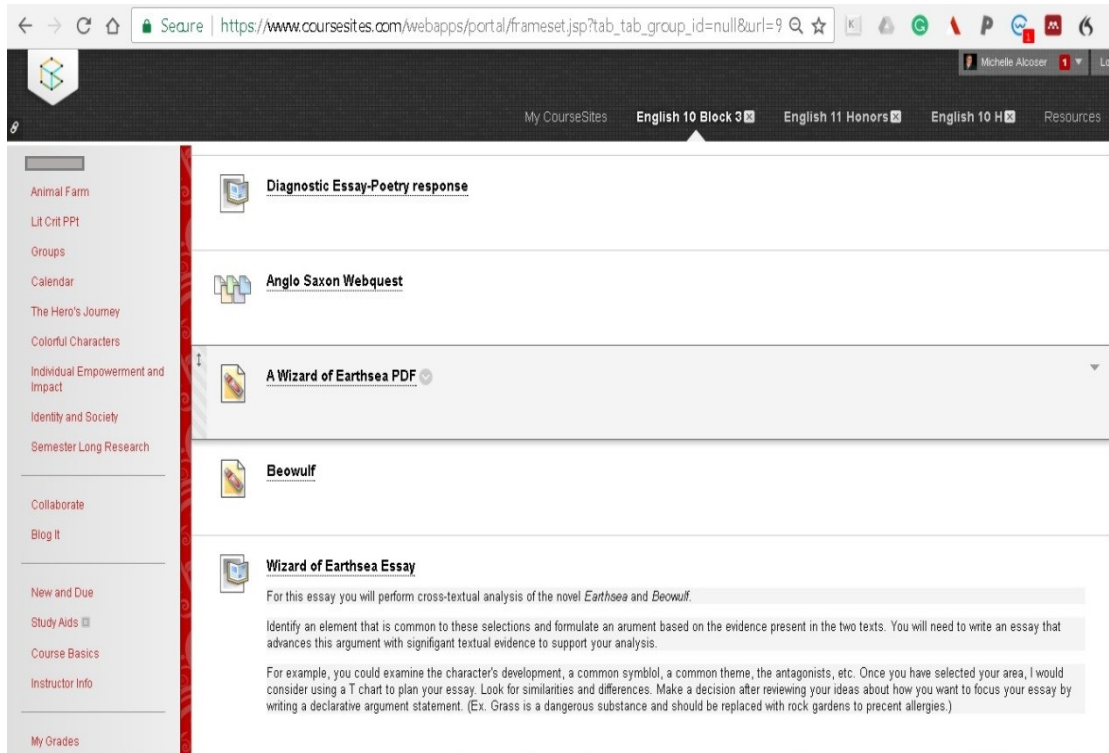


Figure 7. Screenshot of Coursesites.com, showing the navigation menu

<sup>18</sup> Blackboard is a company that provides web-based platforms to both K-12 and collegiate institutions. <http://www.blackboard.com/about-us/index.aspx>





**Figure 8. Screenshot of the Hero's Journey Resources and Assignments.**

In addition to the class site on coursesites.com, students utilize vocabularyworkshop.com and their grades online through the district gradebook.

### **Teacher Research as part of Professional Practice**

In 23 states, including the state where this study was situated, teachers complete Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as part of their professional evaluation (Lacireno-Paquet, Morgan, & Wested, 2014). Each state has its own specifications for how the SLO will be created and the role it will play in the teacher's professional evaluation. Some states allow districts varying degrees of freedom to determine the exact composition and impact of the SLO on the teacher's professional evaluation. In the district this study is situated in, each teacher must identify either two specific learning objectives that would be evaluated by one or more measures or one learning objective that would be evaluated through multiple measures. While this is an

example of inquiry situated in practice, it is not organic to the teacher. Teachers are supposed to set their own SLO goals, but they need to connect to the school improvement goals, which the teacher may have not been instrumental in selecting.

When I proposed this self-study to the district, I was able to demonstrate its alignment with the district's stated goals for improving teacher use of technology for instruction and demonstrate that the study was in line with the spirit of the required SLOs which, according to the State Department of Education coursework,<sup>19</sup> are intended to foster reflective and responsive teaching practice by examining learning outcomes as a measure of successful teaching intervention.

### **Data Collection and Limitations**

In order to thoroughly document and analyze instructional decisions in real time, I kept two separate journals during the school year 2015-2016. These journals reflect what Jain (2013) explains as the different conceptions of *practitioner inquiry* as opposed to *practitioner research*. In my teaching journal, I documented my practitioner inquiry and made explicit the planning and implementation of instructional technology, the lessons, additional planning decisions, and factors influencing decisions in real time and on an ongoing basis. I typically plan my lessons at least six weeks in advance of implementation. Consequently, the journal includes periods intensely focused on planning followed by the evaluation of the implementation of lessons and the impact on pacing and planning. Journal entries were made on a weekly basis for the duration of the school year and include my teaching notes and lesson plans. I started with the research questions in mind, but did

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<sup>19</sup> I am not citing this coursework directly to protect the identity of the school district.

not attempt to limit these entries to my research topic, allowing them to reflect the complexities of my teaching practice in its entirety. A sample teaching journal entry from the week of 8-24-15 (Table 3) follows. It represents one of the 30 teaching journal entries. While I originally intended to keep a daily journal, as the demands of the semester increased, it became more realistic to keep a weekly journal that I added to as the week progressed. Every weekly journal includes a column for themes and insights.

**Table 3 Sample Entry from Teaching Journal - Raw**

<p>Monday 8/24</p> <p><b>How can I best use the technology available to help me to facilitate my teaching?</b></p> <p>Several of the teacher work sessions last week focused on using the GAFE and classroom add ons. I have decided not to use classroom because it doesn't provide a good option for discussion board and I think that the collaborative elements inside of coursesites are easier for the students to use. I don't like the way Google classroom is organized. I don't find it to be as user friendly as coursesites. I will have to decide before next semester to see if I am going to use it in the Spring.</p>	<p>Tuesday</p> <p>Chromebook cart Introduced and registered the kids for coursesites. Kids liked the organization</p> <p>Tonight we had back to school night for the parents. I went over two key things in my classroom, the use of Blackboard for assignment management and collaboration and my revision policy. The parents indicated in their comments that they can tell that my classroom is set up to emphasize learning to write, which they like. I also made the parents aware of my research, outlined the types of data that I am collecting, and the focus on instructional decision making re: instructional tech. Parents responded well to my area of focus. No concerns expressed. I am optimistic that parents support the revision policy and will help students understand and take advantage of the policy.</p>	<p>Wednesday</p> <p>Used the projector to review student submission procedures to the discussion board. Students collaborated to create standards of conduct for the forums.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Must pose a unique obs. –or-answer</li> <li>2. Can elaborate on previous idea with a question or extension</li> <li>3. Should use proper grammar</li> <li>4. Need to cite where the information is coming from</li> </ol> <p>This seems like a good list. They talked about how embarrassing it is to have “stupid” mistakes seen by the whole class. I let them know that examining the comments as a class is a common occurrence and to remember that anything posted here is like posting to the whole class.</p>
<p>Thursday</p> <p>As I help students learn to use BB I can't help but think about how glazed over I felt after the full day of PD on the instructional resources and tech they want us to use this year. In most of the sessions they had some technology for us to practice with or utilize the information while we were learning it, but several of the sessions did not.</p> <p>What is the instructional value? At our opening meeting ** spoke on the importance of using tech to transform teaching, but most of the tech tools that they are sharing are redundant. <b>What does it mean to have technology that enhances instruction, is this the same as transformation?</b></p>	<p>Friday</p> <p>The Media Specialist is giving me a hard time because I am using Coursesites which she seems to think is outdated. But it supports everything that Google Classroom does in a more organized and efficient way. GC lacks a discussion board that is threaded. It only has chat forums. She said that kids today don't need to know how to navigate those spaces that they should be having those exchanges in G Hangouts... but aren't handouts more like living meeting spaces? If you aren't there live streaming how do you know where in the conversation to look? If the students are going to cite conversations with one another in their papers and tests, shouldn't they be able to find what they are looking for consistently? Having the threads supports citation.</p>	<p>Themes/Insights/ ?s/Other</p> <p><b>What does it mean to have technology that enhances instruction, is this the same as transformation?</b></p> <p><b>What is the goal of implementation? Is it to be transformative or to teach? Does one preclude the other?</b></p> <p><b>What does it take to be current in instructional technology? Is there a balance between cutting edge, current, and consistent that needs to be struck?</b></p> <p><b>How many ways do I need to have to do the same thing?</b></p> <p><b>Would back channeling work? Is this a classroom management nightmare?</b></p>

In the reflective journal, I engaged in practitioner research. In this space, I focused on the research questions examining instructional implementation of digital tools in my practice. I posed and responded to additional reflective questions as I examined my teaching journal. In the reflective journal, I revisited questions of pedagogy, morality, and theory. By examining the teaching journal, course artifacts, and student input, I documented, analyzed, and evaluated the effectiveness of interventions at the conclusion of learning units, mid-term, and at the end of the course. An excerpt from the December-January (conclusion of the fall semester) reflective journal follows.

**Table 4**

**Sample Reflective Journal - Raw**

Reflective Journal- December 2015/January 2016
What do teachers need to know and be able to do with technology? As I look over the themes, questions, and insights from the fall semester, I noticed a reoccurring tension that seems to be central to my inclusion of technology-is it better to have a deep understanding and commit to learning a specific technology, mastering it- Would this lead to masterful teaching with this technology? What would masterful teaching with different technologies look like? –OR- is the goal to be cutting edge, always innovating. There seems to be a push, not necessarily intentional, from the district to be constantly innovative, but continuous advancement, consistent change of digital tools, does not promote a deep understanding. I keep returning to the idea that intentional implementation requires a deeper understanding of the digital tool, its purpose, and its impact on the students, their learning, and the classroom experience than can be developed if one is always seeking to constantly be cutting edge.

In addition to my journals, I obtained permission from the district to examine the artifacts from the classroom, including student evaluations of the course, student

reflections on their learning, essays, and other classroom activities. I also examined the students' work and participation patterns produced in our virtual classroom, including discussion boards, wikis, etc., as preserved on our class course website. A condition of securing the district's approval to conduct this research was to restrict the usage of student data for this dissertation to an analysis of and commentary on trends in student writing and performance general to the class rather than specific to individual students or student demographic groups traditionally used in desegregating data. No responses, observations, or findings particular to individual students are permitted. Due to the district's stance on student privacy, I comment on trends in student work and my feedback patterns to students as opposed to commenting on specific student responses. This restriction explicitly stated I could not desegregate my data to examine the impact of digital tools on specific demographic subgroups.

While this prohibition limits the ability of the dissertation to address the impact of instructional interventions specific to these populations, the limited number of students representing each population would prevent the generalization of any conclusions to other students of similar demographic subgroup. While I did use individual student data to inform my planning practice as part of the classroom planning for differentiating instruction, tutoring, re-teaching, and extending instruction, the students' names were redacted from course documents during analysis. Instead of these traditional subgroups, I used groupings that emerged organically during analysis of the classroom artifacts.

Teachers use both formal and informal assessments to make planning decisions. My journals allowed me to document this thinking on both micro (teaching

journal) and macro (reflective journal). I used this information to inform planning (for reviewing and extending concepts) and pacing. By asking questions like: Does the material need to be retaught? Are students able to engage with the lesson as designed? Is the lesson providing a challenge that is reasonable for each learner? Are connections between concepts and assignments being made? I am able to adjust my instruction to meet the learning needs of the students. My instruction was more responsive to students' needs during the course of data collection as a result of the dissertation returning the focus of my professional growth to continual reflection on my instructional practice.

### **Data Analysis**

Before analyzing my journals, teaching notes, and classroom artifacts, I redacted all information that would identify any individual student, colleagues, the school, or the district from the artifacts and written records. My knowledge of and interactions with students, from this and previous years, exists in memory and informs my description and analysis of the data collected in school year 2015-2016. These interactions prompt and inform questions and reflections in my journals, notes, and influence my teaching. I was vigilant in my efforts to ensure that no personally identifiable information about the teachers, students, school, or district is included in the dissertation.

Data analysis of the research journals then occurred in three rounds. In the first round, I reviewed my teaching journal and reflective journal to identify and code for evidence related to the seven elements of TPACK. I created a spreadsheet in Excel to document and organize my findings by these seven areas: TK, PK, CK, TPK,

TCK, PCK, and TPACK. Entries related to instructional technology, but not related to one of these seven categories, were placed in a category labeled “other.” In the second round of data analysis I examined the spreadsheet and coded the entries for their relationship to the research questions. In the tables that follow, I have included the raw data from the teaching journal (see Table 5) and a section of the spreadsheet with coding entries from February 22, 2016 (see Table 6).

**Table 5**

**Teaching Journal Week of 2/22/16**

Monday 2/22	Tuesday	Wednesday Chromebooks	Thursday	Friday	Themes/Insights/ ?s/Other
<p>Cross text analysis: Identification of texts for critique of portrayal of women in course readings – How do I want students to display their understanding? What is my goal- development of clear argument, support of appropriate detail, balance of evidence? Does the end result impact what I am looking for?</p> <p>Chromebook cart is need by Mr. F between my classes- In planning for this week I need to figure out how to get the Chromebook cart to Mr. F for his third period class while still supervising the bathroom and the students coming into my third period. As cloning is not likely available, it looks like we could do a class field trip 2 minutes before the end of class, walk the Chromebook cart to Mr. F as a class, leave my room locked, and head to my duty while escorting my class back towards the room. At which point the bell will have rung and they can head to their own third period... This would be so much easier if students were allowed to walk the Chromebook carts between teachers’ rooms instead of requiring the teacher to do this.</p> <p>An interesting issue cropped up for the first time this week. A student rotated the screen on the Chromebook, how do I fix this? Thank you Google! For future reference: hit ctrl+shift+refresh, but be careful- CTRL + ALT and arrow button on your computer sets this as the <b>screen</b> default</p>					<p>How does the medium of the final project influence the construction and representation of the argument?</p> <p>Finding a way to fulfill competing supervision responsibilities is becoming more complex with the Chromebooks, but the issue of walking the cart would not be an issue if each classroom had its own set.</p>



**Table 6**

**Excerpt from Coding Spreadsheet**

Code	Comment	Date Source	Research Question
CK	Cross text analysis: Identification of texts for critique of portrayal of women in course readings	2/22/2016 Teaching Journal	Maybe Q1
TK	Student rotated the screen on the Chromebook, how do I fix this?	2/22/2016 Teaching Journal	Q3-teachers need to know how to TS
OK	Chromebook cart is need by Mr. F between my classes	2/22/2016 Memo in planbook	Q3- balance resource management and supervision
PK	Based on the discussion board analytics, students are not developing their responses in terms of length, is this also true of complexity?	2/22/2016 Reflective Journal	Q1, Q2- use of formative data

I then examined the two key digital tasks focused on this school year: the discussion board and digital submission for feedback and revision. I identified three bands of student participation for the discussion board used with the English 11 course: active (10 or more posts), moderate (5-10 posts), and low (fewer than 5 posts). I then examined the trends in performance of these student groups, according to these performance bands, on district assessments, teacher designed tests, and course grades. To examine the impact of the digital submission and revision, I identified students as active (those who submitted papers for revision for at least three essays) and inactive (those who either did not utilize revision opportunities or did so on fewer than three assignments). I calculated the average percentage score earned on each essay assignment, the average score for thesis and development of ideas as evaluated on the District English Language Arts Rubric<sup>20</sup>, the average score for organization as evaluated on the District English Language Arts Rubric, and the total

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<sup>20</sup> A copy of this rubric and the course syllabi are attached in the appendix.

number of submissions for the assignments that allowed for revision and resubmission for all students and then for each subgroup.

Lastly, as part of their midterm and end of course reflections and feedback survey, students reviewed the two different digital tools used in the courses and evaluated their own performance. Student responses were explored to identify trends and themes in their responses. Responses were then divided into content knowledge, technical knowledge, content technical knowledge, metacognition, and other to examine patterns in student responses.

## **Ethical Considerations**

### **Privacy**

Pseudonyms have been used throughout this dissertation to protect the identity my colleagues, students, school, and district. Online privacy and security is a very important consideration when working online with students. Standard classroom privacy procedures include the use of a password-protected, private online course space. Even though this space is private, students were allowed to choose their own user information and were not required to provide personal email addresses when creating their accounts with Coursesites. My colleagues were informed of the nature of my study at the beginning of the school year and the students and parents at the inception of each course. I emphasized to the parents that I would examine trends in student performance as they related to my instruction and would not be analyzing data on a student level, include excerpts from student work, nor create any work for the student other than what the student would typically experience in the course. Several of the parents were fellow educators and expressed enthusiasm for the study.

None of the parents asked for me to refrain from studying my practice or expressed concern about the study.

Throughout the project, data was stored on a password protected and encrypted USB drive. This drive was kept locked in a file drawer when not in use or on my person. The first step in data analysis was to redact any information that could be used to name the district, school, or students used in this study including district acronyms for its assessments, the name of the local library on the syllabus, and district specific jargon.

### **Teacher as Researcher**

My motive for examining my implementation of instructional technology arises from my continued desire to improve my teaching practice and support student learning. As part of securing permission from the district to conduct this study, I agreed that I would not ask the students to do anything beyond the normal experiences and activities required for the course. I did indicate that a possible benefit of conducting this research would be a positive impact on instructional practice as a result of reflective practice and data-driven decision making. The question of how best to implement instructional technology is one of importance to both the school and the district.

Conducting teacher research requires one to be prepared to examine both the successes and failures of praxis. Self-study helped me to foster a responsive praxis that was pedagogically moral through the required reflection. By creating the space in my practice for mindful, reflective practice I improved my teaching not only for the students enrolled at that time but for future students as well.

## **Potential Bias**

As a practitioner researcher I engage in the study of my practice in the context of real teaching, with real students, in the real and virtual world. My professional commitment is to the education of the students. As both the teacher and researcher I have to be willing to engage in a critical analysis of my work and be open to the possibility that I am not engaging in best practice. Like most qualitative research, practitioner research is inherently subjective and it is the responsibility of the researcher to be vigilant in checking one's own assumptions, prejudices, and beliefs.

I acknowledge that I am concerned about the rate at which technology is evolving, the ability of English educators to keep up with this evolution, and my ability to understand the ramifications of this technology on students, learning, and society. I am concerned, that given the explosive growth and ecological nature of the manifestation of digital technology in daily life and the lack of experienced guides to help establish boundaries for health and happiness. While breaking down the fourth wall of the classroom and extending it into virtual spaces and opening it up "24/7," what expectations are being created for access to the educator? As traditional classrooms shift to blended learning, what types of knowing and habits of mind need to be developed, let go of, or preserved in practice? While these issues are not specific to this dissertation, I want to be clear that though I am an early, enthusiastic adopter of instructional technology, I am also concerned about the pace of this adoption and murky vision of where it is moving instruction. As I write this dissertation, I continue to ponder these issues.

The students that I included in the study are public high school students in tenth and eleventh grade. The students are not necessarily representative of the

national student population. Only 13% of the students were enrolled in on level instruction at the tenth grade level. The other 87% of students were enrolled in honors classes.

### **Trustworthiness**

Whitehead argues that (2009), “To enhance the validity of accounts I advocate the use of Habermas’ (1976) criteria of: comprehensibility – does it make sense; truth – does it contain sufficient evidence to justify assertions; rightness – is there an awareness of the assumptions in the social and cultural background within which the account is written; authenticity – does the writer show, over time and interaction, that they are committed to living the values they espouse” (p 109). Using Habermas’ (1976) criteria, this dissertation aims to be comprehensible, truthful, engage in respectful and reflexive knowledge generation, documenting a commitment to the values that gave rise to the critical juncture in my practice. The procedures implemented aimed to meet these characteristics which Habermas asserts “are characteristic of sciences that systematically reconstruct the intuitive knowledge of competent subjects” (p. 9). In this dissertation I have attempted to reconstruct the classroom experience as I present the findings in Chapter four in such a way that the lived experience comes through to provide the reader with a vicarious experience of being in the classroom space, so that the reader can better understand the classroom context and my interactions with students in that space.

Collecting data over the course of the school year allowed me to examine my practice with two cohorts of students and to examine the developing patterns over time. This research arose from my desire, as an educator with over ten years of high

school experience, to discover the effectiveness of instructional technology implementation in my teaching practice. The setting of this project is in a public high school and the assignment of students to these sections was the result of scheduling software used by the school. While engaging in this research, I confronted my own assumptions about the inclusion of instructional technology, the nature of writing instruction occurring in the classroom, and attended to the critical juncture in my practice. Through conversations with my critical colleagues and review of the literature, I was able to identify that my concerns about the implementation of instructional technology in the classroom were not limited to my own classroom experience but are happening in other classrooms as well.

Another way of establishing validity is explained by Creswell and Miller (2000) who define triangulation as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). The data analysis from the three areas of data collection: journals, score analysis, and course feedback is used to triangulate the data and illuminate the findings.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### **Overview**

In this chapter, I begin with a review of the research questions. I then introduce a narrative introduction to document how I familiarize students with the virtual classroom component of the course. I then review and discuss the student feedback from the midterm and end of course conferences to explore what students say about their writing and experience in the course. These statements are considered as I examine the pattern of student graded performance and participation in digital tools examined in the second section. Next, I review the findings from the coding and analysis of the teaching notes, teaching journal, and reflective journal. I conclude with a summary of the findings in context to the research questions.

### **The Research Questions**

What is the best way to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of instructional technology? By following the methodology established by Anastasia Samaras (2006, 2011), I seek to improve my implementation of instructional technology by answering the questions:

1. How can I foster the development of academic writing in authentic spaces using instructional technology?
2. What do I look for in student work to inform my teaching?
3. What do teachers need to know and consider when implementing instructional technology?

## **Blending the Classroom**

What do teachers need to know and consider when implementing instructional technology? When addressing this question, I reviewed the classroom artifacts, notes from coded journals, and student participation patterns. The teaching journal provided insight into how to establish and familiarize students with the blended classroom. I have used the comments from my teaching journal, my lesson plans, and student work to inform the narration that follows detailing how I introduced the virtual components of my blended classroom.

In my teaching journal, I carefully documented the opening of the school year. I reserved a Chromebook cart for the second day of school (8/25/15). Before I allowed the students to select a Chromebook from the cart, I introduced the students to Coursesites.com, the virtual classroom space that I had selected for the course. My lesson plan required me to explain that we would be using this online platform for the course this semester and model logging into the site while examining the website projected onto the wall. I used a combination of PowerPoint presentation and live examination of Coursesites.com. When I opened the classroom interface for them for the first time, I made note of the tension and the skepticism in the room evidenced in the rigid body language and lack of conversation. As I navigated from the log-in screen to the class page, I asked them to close their eyes and to open them when directed. I told them that when they opened their eyes I wanted them to evaluate what they saw before them, to examine the layout, and to write down their first impressions and questions. I clicked the link, displayed the course page, and requested that they open their eyes. Students quietly examined the display; the pens began to move.



In my teaching notes on 8/25/2015, I noted that several students throughout the day questioned, “Are we going to have to use this?” Many students expressed skepticism when I responded that yes, we would be using this space to organize our class. All major assignments would be completed and turned in using our class coursesite. Other students asked: Had I used this before? What if they hate computers? Why were we using this site? The questions came fast, asked in anxious voices. I asked them to wait a moment and directed their attention to the initial task that I had asked them to do and questioned, “What is the first word that you wrote down?” A young woman next to me raised her hand and said in a serious voice, “Organized.” I asked the students how many of them had written something similar and was pleasantly surprised that a third of the hands went up; they saw what I saw when I looked at Coursesites.com on comparison to other virtual classroom platforms. I asked them what they meant by organization and they identified the features: the menu to the left of the page that includes the link to their grades, the assignments button, and the calendar (see Figure 7 and 8). These students were starting to calm the anxious ones as they identified each feature. I then had them select a Chromebook from the cart and guided them through the process of creating an account and accessing their first assignment

By August 31<sup>st</sup>, after a week of daily use, the students who had used other platforms were comfortable with Coursesites and their preference for its organization was reiterated (Teaching Journal entry 8/31/2015 relevant text bolded in the Table 6).

Table 7

Teaching Journal Excerpt 8/31/15

Monday 8/31
<p><b>Students who have previous experience with/or are currently using Edmodo and Google Classroom are noticing that they are having a much easier time navigating Coursesites.com than the other sites. This seems to hold true across grade levels. Students mentioned-organization and ease of finding assignments specifically.</b></p> <p>The first discussion boards are showing a wide range of interpretive, analytic, and basic response. What skills did the kids come in with, what do they need to get them where I want them to go? What am I preparing them for?</p> <p>Several non-participants. Is the nonparticipation an issue because of coursesites or it is because of not doing homework? Need to confirm home access with all classes, remind that I offer 4 computers that I have provided before and after school. Is access the issue or something else?</p>

As students brought up their previous experiences with online classrooms they identified that they had previously used, or were currently using, Edmodo and Google Classroom to varying degrees in previous courses. I noted that when asked about using these platforms the students revealed that they liked having access to assignments but largely had difficulty finding information. I shared with them that I too had difficulty finding information on other platforms and that the organizational features were a key reason I had chosen to use Coursesites over the other platforms that they mentioned.

Throughout the course of the semester, most students would successfully adapt to submitting their documents digitally, but a few did not. An examination of the Coursesites participation records revealed that ultimately, three of the 136 tenth and eleventh grade students (2%) were adamant that they would not use the online classroom. The most frequent reason stated for not using the online classroom was that it was too complicated and/or that they just did not “get technology”. All but one

of these students would submit typed work, printed on paper by the appropriate deadline. I accepted their assignments and graded them the old fashioned way. Even though these students were offered the same revision opportunities, they did not take advantage of them.

By accepting their responses in paper as opposed to digital form, I faced one of the first challenging professional decisions of implementing a blended classroom. Whether or not to require students to participate in the online components of the course is one that teachers using digital spaces in their classrooms need to be prepared to address. I do not know if it was the right call, but I chose not to force the students to conform to the blended classroom. I printed paper copies of assignments for them and allowed them to abstain from the digital classroom. I decided not to force them to engage in the digital space because the ultimate learning goals of my course did not require that they participate online. I did ask that they utilize the classroom coursesite to review the discussion board posts and asked them to turn in their responses to me on paper, but they would not have an opportunity to engage in the peer revision process. This group of students did not take advantage of the revision and resubmission policy, opting to turn in assignments on or after the last day of the submission window. The one student who did elect to take advantage of the resubmission and revision opportunity met with me face to face to discuss written work.

While this small group of students refused to participate in our online course space, the majority of students actively participated in both the real time and virtual classroom spaces. Using this platform, students participated in collaborative

webquests, the writing process, journaling, and peer evaluation. I wonder what was lost in allowing them the choice to submit work in person as opposed to through the classroom. Would they have taken advantage of the revision and resubmission opportunities? What would it have required to make them comply? I would have been within my authority to not accept the assignments unless they were submitted through Coursesites, but would that battle have been worth the cost to the students' grade? How would such a decision impact their ability to trust me to teach them? As I explored the implementation of digital tools for instructional implementation, I came to realize that yes, it would have been worth the battle at the beginning; the tenth grade students who expressed significant improvement in their writing and, in their confidence in their writing were active participants in the digital features of the course.

### **Student Feedback: Midterm and End of Course**

Student feedback is an important influence on the construction of my curricular design. Student work as well as their direct feedback, expressed through email and conversation, and their indirect feedback, expressed through activity or inactivity, are all forms of input that I use to guide my implementation of instruction. Research question two asked, "What do I look for in student work to inform my teaching?" As I examined the course artifacts in relationship to this question, I realized how limiting the word *work* was. The word *work* did not adequately capture the robust contribution and impact students had on my instruction while *input* is broad enough to include the student feedback provided directly and indirectly. I

decided to refine the research question by replacing *work* with *input*. The new research question asks, “How do I use student input to inform my teaching?”

### **Indirect Student Feedback**

My teaching journal included my reflection on my responses to student writing when grading both formative and summative assessments and guided my development of subsequent classroom activities and writing prompts. For example, when I noted in my teaching journal on 9/3/2015 that students struggled with articulating a central argument, I planned an inductive reasoning jigsaw activity for 9/8/2015 where students read essays to identify the central argument in their own essay and collaborate with their group to identify a thematic link between the texts provided.

Similarly, I noted in my teaching journal on 10/8/2015 that students struggled with writing strong conclusions. For this activity, the students read a set of student essays, without names and from other course sections<sup>21</sup>, and evaluated the conclusions. The students generated the criteria for what makes a “good” conclusion and moved back to their own writing. I provided students with the option of working with their groups, partners, or independently as they returned to their own work, making space for different learning preferences and comfort levels.

The teaching journal was a useful tool for tracking student performance and documenting interventions to address composition concerns that arose for the class. Student performance data was an indirect influence on instruction because the

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<sup>21</sup> I find that it allows students to focus on the writing, not on trying to figure out who wrote which piece if I use work from other sections of my course.

students were not identifying concerns in their writing and informing the teacher. Classroom conferencing and end of course feedback provided students with an opportunity to directly communicate their needs and views.

## **Direct Feedback**

### **Midterm**

As part of my classroom practice, I routinely ask students for feedback on their classroom experience and an evaluation of their own performance at midterm and at the end of the semester. I ask the students at midterm to think about their goals for the course, which frequently, and understandably given the emphasis on grade point average (GPA) placed in high schools, are grade focused, and ask each to consider what adjustments are needed in the coming weeks to achieve or maintain progress towards these goals. I ask them to think about their writing, how it is developing, and to identify an area of focus for improvement. While the questions began as a general writing prompt the conversations focused on specific student work from the first term.

I conducted conferences with each student and we discussed these goals and developed a plan of action. These conferences occurred in the fall semester the week of 11/2/2015 and in the spring semester the week of 4/4/2015 during class. While conducting these conferences, students engaged in individual research projects.

Often in my previous years of teaching, in these conferences, the students default to identifying a need to improve grammar and spelling as a writing goal. This year, there was a noticeable difference in the identification of writing goals related to ideas and their development. The attitude that writing improvement is about editing and a lack of understanding about revision and ideas development, often conflated

with editing by the students, was noticeably different with the tenth grade students participating in the online resubmission process. The complete prompt and a breakdown of student responses are shown on Table 8.

**Table 8**

**Midterm Prompt and Responses**

Midterm Prompt: Now that we are half way through the course, think about where you want to go in the coming term. What are your goals? What do you need to do to reach these goals? How can this course support you in reaching these goals? What are your goals for your writing this coming term?		
Goals	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Midterm 92	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade Midterm 66 students
Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 52 (57%) students seek to earn or maintain an A in the course</li> <li>• 29 (32%) students seek to earn a B or better</li> <li>• 9 (10%) students seek to earn a C or better</li> <li>• 2 (2%) students seek to pass</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30 (45%) students seek to earn or maintain an A in the course</li> <li>• 27 (41%) students seek to earn a B or better</li> <li>• 8 (12%) students seek to earn a C or better</li> <li>• 1 (1%) student seeks to pass</li> </ul>
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 57 (62%) students plan to continue accessing resubmission</li> <li>• 24 (26%) students indicate that they need to start taking advantage of the resubmission opportunities</li> <li>• 36 (39%) students want to work on completing work on time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 53 (80%) students plan to maintain their completion of major assignments on time</li> <li>• 42 (64%) students plan to do homework more consistently</li> <li>• 13 (20%) students indicate they need to do assigned readings</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 36 (39%) students indicate a need to improve the focus of their thesis</li> <li>• 29 (32%) students want to improve their use of supporting quotations</li> <li>• 23 (25%) students indicate a need to improve organization</li> <li>• 15 (16%) students need to improve grammar</li> <li>• 10 (11%) no response</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 32 (48%) students have no specific goal for improving their writing; keep up current writing</li> <li>• 20 (30%) students want to focus on improving grammar</li> <li>• 10 (15%) students want to improve spelling</li> <li>• 6 (9%) want to improve the focus and organization of their writing</li> <li>• 4 (6%) no response</li> </ul>

I met with each student and discussed their responses to this prompt. While I met with them, I kept a record of the conversation on a spreadsheet so that I would be able to review their reflections to inform the focus of my lessons and formative assignments addressing writing. During the midterm conference conversations, I also helped students flesh out a plan to reach their course goals and asked them to elaborate on their writing goals and explain their thinking in selecting these goals. When conferencing individually with each of these students about the midterm reflection, I did not initially realize how drastically different the attitudes about writing diverged. Through the reflective journaling process and data driven planning, I became aware of how the two levels diverged in their response to the revision and resubmission policy.

I met with two sections of eleventh grade students and one section of the tenth grade students in the fall semester and the second section of the tenth grade students in the spring semester. My impression of the students noted in my teaching journal was confirmed in the fall conferences; the students who were engaging in the revision were concentrated in the tenth grade section, and those in the eleventh were more interested in discussing the average grade that each was earning in the course as opposed to the process of learning. Eleventh graders universally expressed distaste for the discussion board and lamented its uselessness. I was surprised when 13 (20%) of eleventh grade students complained specifically that the discussion board didn't connect to the classroom activities and felt like a separate course.



While it might appear that the eleventh graders were more motivated by grades than the tenth grade students, may be explained by the inclusion of the on level students at the tenth grade level broadens the pool of students to include students whose post high school plans do not often include academic study (see Table 9). Several of these students are taking advantage of auto technician training provided by the district and while other students in the on level section intend to go into family businesses, including farming. Of the 66 eleventh graders, only three (5%) indicated a post high school plan that included mastering a trade. Fifty-eight (88%) indicated that they would pursue at least a bachelor's degree, 17 (26%) of eleventh grade students intend to earn advanced degrees in medicine, engineering, law, and science. None of the eleventh grade honors students were interested in pursuing farming as a profession; the agriculture focus of these students was large animal veterinary or agriculture crop science. These students were frank in their evaluation of the relevance/irrelevance of a high school education to their professional plan. With the students who had not identified a plan or those who were focused on a professional trade, I focused the conversation on the practical importance of being able to write clearly and effectively for personal advocacy and professional purposes.

**Table 9**

**Students' Post High School Plans**

11 <sup>th</sup> Grade Honors <sup>22</sup> 66 Students	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Honors 72 Students	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade On Level 20 Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 58 (80%) students indicate they will pursue at least a bachelor's degree</li> <li>• 17 (26%) students indicate an academic plan pursuing advanced graduate work including: law, medicine, engineering, or agricultural science</li> <li>• 2 (3%) students are enrolled in a career and technical program while in this course (Nursing)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24 (33%) of these students plan to take a college level English class in eleventh grade</li> <li>• 40 (56%) plan to enroll in eleventh grade Honors English</li> <li>• 8 (10%) are unsure which English they will select next year</li> <li>• 16 (20%) of the students indicate a plan to pursue an advanced academic degree in science, medicine, or law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 (40%) students are currently in a career and technical program:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 4 Automotive</li> <li>○ 2 Computer</li> <li>○ 1 Nursing</li> <li>○ 1 Media Production</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 5 (25%) plan to work for family businesses including: farming, restaurant trades, and beauty</li> <li>• 7 (35%) have not selected a career</li> <li>• 100% plan to take on level English 11</li> </ul>

Forty-two out of 56 (75%) of the tenth grade honors students utilized the opportunity to revise and resubmit their assignments compared to seven of the 66 (11%) of the eleventh grade honors students (see Table 8). The comments the tenth grade honors students made about their writing echo the comments that I made to them on their papers during the online revision and resubmission process. The eleventh grade students who participated in the revision and resubmission process also evidenced this language I used when providing feedback on their papers when discussing their writing at the midterm conference. As a result of reflecting on these

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<sup>22</sup> As part of the course, the eleventh graders completed an extensive college and career research project. This information comes from their research. The tenth grade curriculum does not include this focus. As a result, I do not have detailed data on the tenth grade post high school plans for the honors students. I obtained the grade level section of tenth grade English through a reflection the students did at the end of the semester.

conferences, I wonder: what helps a student identify an area improvement in their writing? These students, when asked, in the spring conferences cited specific teachers or other significant adults commenting on their work as informing their perception of their weaknesses and strengths as a writer.

It became clear through these conversations that many of the eleventh grade students have been told by other teachers, current and former, that they need to work on their grammar. By asking them to clarify what they mean by grammar, the students indicated run-on sentences and punctuation errors frequently. What surprised me about this focus is that the majority of comments I made on student work during the previous term addressed organization, focus, evidence, and analysis. I tend to provide macro level feedback about ideas, their development, and organization. While I do identify common errors in usage and mechanics that interfere with meaning, this is not the emphasis of my feedback and I do not mark every error. When evaluating student writing, I will mark the first two mechanics errors of the same type. On the second error, I include the comment: proofread to correct additional errors in (the specific issue in mechanics).

When meeting with the tenth grade students for their midterm conferences, I was impressed by the difference in how they discussed their writing. These students predominantly were discussing their writing in terms of large scale revision and talked about their writing process for the different assignments. These students talked about how their writing changed between their papers completed in the previous term and how they were approaching their writing differently as a result. Had these

students not received similar criticism about their grammar from other teachers and significant adults? Many students confessed, that prior to this course, they would write their papers in one sitting unless their teacher made them turn in each step of the prewriting for a grade and rarely took time to proofread. A few students in the course had Mr. Frederickson for their ninth grade teacher and had experienced a similar revision based writing instruction practice. It is possible that having the class seeded with students who had previous experience with this model may have improved the adoption rate of the revision process. On future versions of the student intake form utilized at the beginning of the semester,<sup>23</sup> I will add a question asking about the students' prior experience with revision to explore this question.

While the revision and resubmission policy was identical, as stated in both course syllabi (for tenth grade see p. 152 and for eleventh grade see p. 158), for both the eleventh and tenth grade courses, the utilization of this practice was polar opposite. To explore how I might have engendered this disparity I examined the unit and instruction occurring during the assignment of the first essay for each course, including the way it was introduced and how much class time was spent on the content of the essay. In the eleventh grade section, the first essay assignment the students wrote was an informative essay comparing the rhetorical style of two of the founding fathers and colonial authors. The skills needed for this essay were introduced in class lecture and were the subject of class discussions; we analyzed a variety of documents individually, in pairs, and in small groups. The students were

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<sup>23</sup> I collect information about the students' perceptions about English class, their concerns, their ability access to Internet outside of school, their strengths and weaknesses, and the learning accommodations that they find useful.

able to draw on their in class writing and graphic organizers when developing their essays. None of the eleventh graders utilized the revision and resubmission window on this assignment.

In the tenth grade section, the first essay asked the students to select an archetype or an element from the epic tradition and write an analysis of the element as it appeared in both the epic poem *Beowulf* and the novel *A Wizard of Earthsea*. The students read the novel independently while I introduced the epic tradition in class. We explored the elements of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey/monomyth, epic elements present in excerpts from epic poetry, and symbolic archetypes. While the students were able to use their classwork to help clarify their understanding of archetypes and epic conventions, they still needed to apply that knowledge to *A Wizard of Earthsea*.

I provided both tenth and eleventh grade students two, 15 minute sessions for students to talk with one another about their ideas for the essay in pre-writing peer conferences. For this assignment, both sets of students developed their own ideas applying classroom conversations and assignments, but the tenth grade students had to apply these concepts with limited support, and no class time was devoted to drafting or peer editing. I believe that the extension of the classroom analysis to include the out of class novel provided a level of complexity that reduced the students' confidence in the ability to successfully complete the assignment, prompting them to seek out feedback before the final deadline. These students were equally grade-focused when compared to the eleventh graders, even in tenth grade

they made frequent comments about needing a high GPA to gain acceptance to the college of their choice.

### **End of Course Reflections**

At the end of the semester, students write a final reflection about their performance in the course. I ask the students to identify the assignments that they are most proud of as well as those that they wish they had a chance to do over and to evaluate their own learning this semester (for questions used see Table 10). These reflections never fail to surprise me; every semester several students provide insight into their work and growth in their application of analysis beyond my course. Through these reflections, I often learn about the students reading and writing outside of the classroom even though I do not ask explicitly about their reading and writing in other courses. Why do students share this information? How have I established a climate that fosters the understanding that when I ask about their learning I am interested in their overall learning and not bounded by the content or the start and end dates of the course? These are questions that I am interested in exploring in future research to ensure that I maintain this element of my course; personally and pedagogically, I view English and the arts of analysis and communication to be essential to human existence and do not want to lose this emphasis.

**Table 10**

**End of Semester Feedback Questions**

End of Semester Questions
1. Reflect on your learning and progress this semester. What should I know that I do not learn by looking at your grade report?
2. What assignment are you most proud of?
3. Which assignment do you wish you could improve? What would you do?
4. Did you utilize the revision and resubmission opportunities?
5. How did you find your experience in this course?
6. Should I continue to use Coursites.com as the online platform for this course?

In order to analyze the student responses to these questions within and between the grade levels, I created a table with the questions listed in the order asked in the first column to define the rows. I placed a row to identify tenth grade responses and on for eleventh below each question row. As I reviewed the responses, I added a new column for each new response to that question. I kept a tally below the responses of students repeating the comment next to the original comment in the appropriate grade level row. Table 11 is an excerpt from this spreadsheet.

**Table 11**  
**Sample of End of Course Feedback Spreadsheet**

What should I know that I do not learn by looking at your grade report?	Noticed an improvement in other courses	Noticed improvement on SAT	Noticed an improvement on AIOCS Practice tests	Even though I my grade didn't change much, the time it took for me to do assignments was shorter
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students	39	X	12	18
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students	24	16	9	6
What assignment are you most proud of?	religion research paper	survival kit proposal	epic narrative	hero essay, worst grade but I learned the most
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students	18	35	22	3
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students	X	X	X	X
Which assignment do you wish you could improve?	hero essay	Atlas Essay Tests	college and career research project	poetry performance
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students	32	X	X	9
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students		18	19	X

Students often wrote multipart responses to the questions and each part was accounted for as a separate response. For example, a student might indicate that in order to improve their Atlas Shrugged essay tests he/she needed to read, participate in the discussion board, and come in for office hours for help understanding the text. The students' responses to their course experience confirmed my sense that the eleventh grade course felt rushed and disjointed. I believe that this sensation was a consequence of the adjustments I made to the course in response to the imposed timeline for the district assessments<sup>24</sup>.

What causes the sense of being rushed and overwhelmed? As I looked over the term guides from previous semesters and compared them to this semester, one clear factor was time lost to the preparation for and administration of tests for the

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<sup>24</sup> The tenth grade course had identical timeline for the administration of district assessments and AICCS exams, but these tasks did not require significant revision to the structure of the course to accommodate them.



district assessments and the Assessment Instrument for Common Core Standards<sup>25</sup> (AICCS) exam. Eight class periods were devoted to the administration of these tests and one to preparing students to take the AICCS exam online. In addition to the recalibration of the course to align with the district level assessments, the course was forced to compact the instruction by almost two weeks to accommodate testing. 33% of the students in eleventh grade responded that there was too much testing and that the class felt rushed. Twenty-five percent of the tenth grade students expressed frustration with the district assessments as well, but the students stated that their frustration was in response to the fact that they were not able to revise their responses composed for these writing events, which impacted 20% of their course grade. Table 12 depicts the students end of course feedback about their overall course performance and their feelings towards the revision and resubmission practice.

**Table 12**  
**Overview of Students End of Course Responses**

Students	Total number of students	Content with writing performance in the course	Took advantage of revision and resubmission process	Expressed regret over not accessing revision and resubmission policy
10 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students	86	60 (86%)	43 (50%)	24 (3%)
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade Students	66	50 (76%)	12 (18%)	8 (12%)
All students	158	110 (70 %)	55 (35%)	32 (20%)

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<sup>25</sup> I have renamed the state assessment used in the district where this study was situated to help protect the identity of the state and the district.

Seventy percent of the students expressed that they were content with their writing development and performance in the course. Thirty-five percent of students felt that they had taken sufficient advantage of the opportunities to improve their writing and analysis by participating in the revision and resubmission process. There was a stark difference in the utilization of this practice between tenth and eleventh grade students. Only 12 (18%) eleventh grade student expressed that they took advantage of the opportunity while 43 (50%) of tenth grade students indicated that they took advantage of this process. While 20% of all students expressed that they wished that they had taken advantage of the opportunity to revise and resubmit their work. Thirty-two students (24 tenth grade and 8 eleventh grade), 20% of the 158 students enrolled the course, expressed regret that they did not take advantage of the revision and resubmission policy. These students represent 41% percent of the students, who stated that they did not participate in the revision and resubmission process and regret this decision.

**Table 13**

**Breakdown of student responses explaining nonparticipation**

Students	Did not participate	Procrastination	Forgot about the option	Saw improvement in others	Expressed Regret for this decision
10th Grade Students (86)	24 (3%)	18 (21%)	X	15 (17%)	24 (3%)
11th Grade Students (66)	54 (82%)	X	20 (30%)	3 (5%)	8 (12%)

The most frequent reason tenth grade students indicated for not participating in the revision and resubmission process was procrastination. Of the 24 (26%) tenth grade students of tenth grade students in the course who indicated that they did not participate in the revision and resubmission process, 18 (20% of tenth grade students) indicated procrastination as the primary reason for not taking advantage of this course feature. Nine of the 18 students commented that they regretted this decision because they could see that the process worked for their peers, and they could see improvement in the writing of their peers. This improvement was noticed not only within the tenth grade but by three eleventh grade students who studied with some of the tenth grade students at sports study tables after school and commented on this in their reflections, expressing regret that they did not remember that they could revise and resubmit.

Fifty-four eleventh grade students (82%) did not take advantage of the revision and resubmission opportunity (see Table 13). While the tenth grade students largely expressed regret over this decision, most of the eleventh grade students did not see the value in the activity. Thirty-three of the eleventh grade students (50%) believed that the process sounded more time consuming and that there would not be sufficient benefit to outweigh this cost. Twenty-seven eleventh grade students (41%) indicated satisfaction with their course grade as the reason for not participating in the revision and resubmission process. Additionally, 20 (30%) eleventh grade students commented that they forgot that they could revise and resubmit their work (see Table 13). Of the eleventh grade students that took advantage of the revision and resubmission policy, five did so on in class essay tests and one for both essay tests

and essays. A key difference between the two courses was the amount of class time spent developing the writing assignments in-class collaboratively as opposed to independently at home. This may have influenced the attitude of the eleventh grade students toward the revision and resubmission practice and the stark different from the tenth graders' attitudes toward the revision and resubmission practice.

**Table 14**  
**Reactions of students who participated in Resubmission**

Number of students who participated/grade total	Keep the policy, it helped.	Positive Benefits	Negatives
10th Grade Students( 43/86)	43 (100%)	28 (65%) Noted improved writing 43 (100%) improved grade	9 (21%) found it frustrating
11th Grade Students (12/66)	12 (100%)	5(41%) improved writing 12 (100%) improved grade	8 (66%) found it frustrating

All 55 students (35% of all students), 43 (50%) tenth grade, and 12 (18%) eleventh grade students, who participated in the revision and resubmission policy, expressed positive responses. All indicated that it improved their writing and, even though 34 (57%) of the students who participated in this process found the it to be time consuming and 17 (28%) identified it as being frustrating, they valued it as being worth the investment (see Table 14). The positive benefit identified by the eleventh grade students was to their grade, while the majority of the tenth grade students, 65%, identified the improvement in their writing instead of or in addition to the improvement to the course grade.

**Table 15**

**End of Course Reaction to Coursesites**

Attitudes	Reasons
Positive: 71 (45%) of all students 65 (76%) tenth grade students 6 (9%) eleventh grade students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easy to use, 32 (45%)</li><li>• Ability to access course content, 28 (39%)</li><li>• Clarity of comments on work, 32 (45%)</li></ul>
Negative: 11 (8%) of all students 4 (5%) tenth grade students 7 (11%) eleventh grade students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Confusing to use 2 (11%)</li><li>• Unnecessary 4 (36%)</li></ul>

The response to the use of Coursesites.com as the platform for the virtual classroom was largely positive (see Table 15). Seventy-one of the 158 students (45%) responded that I should continue to use Coursesites.com in coming semesters. The most popular reasons they gave for continuing the use of Coursesites.com were ease of use, 32 students (45%), and ability to access course materials and content, 28 (39%). Additionally, 32 (45%) students mentioned the clarity of comments on their paper and the ability to clarify these comments through Coursesites.com as a positive reason to keep this platform. Only 11 (8%) students were in opposition to the platform, 2 (1%) of which felt the platform was confusing, and 4 (3%) felt it was unnecessary. Fifty-four (40%) students expressed ambivalence towards the selection of the platform for the virtual classroom. Of the 11 (8%) students who expressed a negative response to Coursesites.com, only 4 (5%) were tenth grade students, while 76% of tenth grade students indicated that I should continue to use Coursesites.com.

Perhaps the strong, enthusiastic response to Coursesites.com in the tenth grade class is a result of how frequently these students engaged in tasks on Coursesites.com.

## **Discussion**

Student responses at the midterm and end of term feedback points provide insight into what students are thinking about the inclusion of digital tools, their reasons for choosing to utilize them or not, and their perceptions about the benefit or lack thereof to student learning. By examining these conversations after the fact, I was able to see how the implementation of the courses impacted the students' utilization of the digital revision and resubmission practices. While the tenth and eleventh grade students appear to be vastly different, I believe that this is a consequence of the implementation of the eleventh grade English course more than a difference in the students. Eight(12%) of the eleventh grade students in my classes were active participants in the revision and resubmission practice as tenth grade students in my tenth grade course the year prior. Only four of these students participated in the revision and resubmission opportunities in the eleventh grade course. While this could be an indication of other factors outside of my control, I must consider how I might have influenced this change with the assignments and lessons designed in my course.

Through this examination, I believe that a factor that supported adoption of the digital classroom and its affordances was the blending of in school and out of school activities. I did a better job of ensuring that students were given an opportunity to explore concepts in class and build on that knowledge in the digital classroom. With the eleventh grade, I felt an increased level of anxiety about ensuring that they

would be prepared for the district assessments. Even though these are administered at all grades, the tenth grade assessments aligned with the way the course was structured and the assessments were not as challenging in my opinion.

It is also worth noting that I was selected by the district as a teacher whose eleventh grade students would provide anchor papers for the district assessments. All of the students' essays and multiple choice answers were sent to the district. This increased the pressure for me to administer them in the prescribed window and adhere to the directions the district provided.

### **Student Participation in Digital Tools** **Student Participation in Online Revision and Submission**

Students expressed skepticism when I introduced my revision and rewrite policy. While they liked the idea that they would be able to revise as much as needed to earn the grade that they wanted, they were open about the fact that they thought that meant I was going to be an unreasonably hard grader. It had to be too good to be true, right? What teacher would actually let all students earn a one hundred percent on an essay? The key word in that sentence is earn. What they quickly learned is that revising and resubmitting did not mean simply going back and correcting some editing marks related to capitalization and comma splices, but required rethinking, reworking, and reorganizing their papers. In Table 16, the columns highlighted in blue underwent in class revision and those in yellow assignments where revision was not allowed. Students were evaluated on the district rubric, which converted the average score to a percentage. Each category of the rubric has is rated on a scale of zero to four.

**Table 16**

**Student Resubmission Rates and Scores for Tenth Grade Honors Students.**

Measures	Essay 1	Essay 2	Essay 3	District Assessment Argumentative Task	Essay 4	District Assessment Research Simulation
Attempts	111	90	89	50	50	50
Students <sup>26</sup>	50	50	50	50	50	50
Score	75%	82%	88%	82%	87%	87%
Ideas	2	3.1	3.3	2.7	2.7	2.8
Organization	2.5	3.3	3.3	3	3	3.1

As I examined the resubmission attempts, average scores on the assignment, and the average scores earned on the ideas and organization elements on the rubric, it was clear that students benefited from the revision practice most in the development of ideas category. As the course progressed and students continued to submit online, the frequency of revisions went down, but the initial quality in the area of the development of ideas in the essays went up. Students who struggled in these areas continued to need support through the revision and resubmission process to develop their ideas. This might be why there is improvement across the board in the development of ideas, but the average score on this item when students are not able to revise is almost a half point lower on the four point rubric than when students are actively revising their essays.

The lack of revision on the fourth essay is very interesting, as it conforms to the eleventh grades students' non-use of the revision and resubmission practice. This essay, unlike the other three, was one that included time for peer feedback and discussion before submission. Time was scheduled for students to bring in drafts for

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<sup>26</sup>Students who did not attempt assignments are not included in this table.



peer conferencing for this paper. Perhaps students did not realize that they could submit the essay early for teacher feedback because the peer conferences were scheduled, though my intention was to allow for both feedback channels. It is also possible that having printed the paper for the peer revision day, the students felt that the paper was now published.

Though both the tenth and eleventh grade students peer conferenced papers in class, the conversations that I documented in my teaching journal the week of April 18<sup>th</sup> recorded my observations of the tenth grade conversations during the peer workshop of essay 4. These conversations were starkly different than those the eleventh grade students engaged in. As I moved through the tenth grade class, I heard students talking about the focus and strength of the thesis, the quality of analysis, the clarity of argument, organization, and textual evidence used to support ideas. Very few students were focused on proofreading each other's essay and were engaging in revision conversation. Both classes had copies of the rubric out to refer to while conferencing, but only the tenth grade class moved beyond the mechanics and usage section into the ideas and structure of the essay.

### **Discussion Board**

Most students participated successfully in the online classroom and were able to submit their assignments through the class coursesite. Students were not as willing to participate in the discussion board. I implemented the discussion board with my eleventh grade students for the purpose of discussing their outside reading of the novel Atlas Shrugged. Due to the difficult and philosophical nature of this text, students in previous semesters found having the online discussion forum to be

beneficial. This semester, I didn't see the growth in the quality of discussion board posts in analysis or craft. The number of words, number of integrated quotations, and the percentage of posts that were repetitive or predominantly summary was fairly consistent over the course of the novel. Two key differences in the course this semester may have influenced participation rates and the quality of the posts.

At this school, students are allowed to sign up as a teaching assistant for student service learning credit. One of the key requirements for this enrollment is working directly with students. Previously, I utilized such a student teaching assistant as a discussion board administrator who was in charge of reading and responding to posts and moderating the discussion boards for appropriate academic language in posts. I did not have a student moderator this semester and found the task of personally keeping up with responding and moderating the posts difficult to manage with the additional course revisions due to curricular changes at the district level and AICCS preparation.

Additionally, the pacing of the course had to be adjusted to accommodate strict windows for administering and grading the district assessments. My critical colleagues and I struggled with retooling our courses mid-stride to try to ensure sufficient exposure to and refinement of key skills evaluated on these assessments was built in. One consequence for my course of these adjustments was a reduction in the frequency of expected discussion board posts. Students in the low group posted fewer than five times over the course of the novel, in the middle group five to ten times, and in the high group over ten times. Table 17 examines the relationship between posting frequency and student course performance. I identified the break

points for discussion board post after examining the discussion board threads. A pattern emerged; students who engaged in a dialogue with other students posted the most frequently. I labeled this group the high group and established a cut off of more than ten posts. The students, who posted relevant but weak responses did not tend to engage with one another, fell into the middle group of occasional posters and posted five to ten times on the discussion board. The least active students, posting fewer than five times, tended to have repetitive or inaccurate posts. Across the table, the grades are consistent and indicate that the participation on the discussion board may have been a reflection of factors not related to the task. While this activity correlates to the average scores on major assignments and course grades, this may be due to the fact that students who are more concerned with their grades are more likely to do all of their assignments.

**Table 17**

**Discussion Board Participation and Grades**

	Number of students	Atlas Test Score	Atlas Novel Essay Score	Average Course Grade	District Assessment Research Simulation	District Assessment Argumentative Task
High	36 (55%)	91%	97%	92%	94%	95%
Middle	17 (28%)	78%	80%	86%	83%	85%
Low	13 (20%)	58%	64%	75%	68%	74%

As I reviewed the course at the end of the semester, I began to realize how significantly different the structure of this course was compared to previous semesters. This semester, though the district said that the sequence of the course was up to the teacher, the district assessment tests themselves required specific

knowledge, including terminology, content, and analytic skills that would only be provided through the “suggested” scope and sequence. We teachers all had to decide whether to continue with our established course construction, at the potential cost of students’ performance on district assessments, or to adopt the untried, suggested scope and sequence to the benefit of the students’ performance on the district assessments, without time to examine the cost and benefit of this plan to the students’ learning. Mr. Frederickson, Mrs. Thomas, and I were all very frustrated with the situation. I made the decision to adopt the suggested scope and sequence after considering the impact to the course grade of not performing well on the district assessments (20% of the students’ course grade). The impact of the date specific district assessments was clear. This was my third year utilizing discussion boards and my second using Coursesites as the online platform for the course, and neither was integral to the course this semester. While some time was spent using Coursesites for collaborative group work and submission of major assignments, it was not utilized weekly. As I adjusted the scope and sequence for the course to accommodate the assessments and the assignments necessary to prepare the students for the district assessments, I reduced or removed several learning events from the course that I believe would have been beneficial to the students if time had allowed them. Included in these were several homework assignments, including discussion board posts. In previous years, the discussion board was the primary purpose of Coursesites with the secondary purpose being online submission of major assignments.

Why did I reduce the discussion board assignments? In the previous year I had assigned prompts that activated prior knowledge before engaging in a topic and used

these threads to begin small group discussions in class and to provide a space for students to contribute to concluding a conversation, demonstrating their synthesis of ideas and concepts. My concern for my student's performance on district assessments led me to want to hear the conversations students were having about ideas so that I could more quickly remedy misunderstandings. The students were on a limited timetable, and I was very concerned about guiding the conversations toward the prescribed destination. In retrospect, the course felt much like the marathon road trip fixated on reaching destinations as opposed to experiencing the journey. This realization confirms my disquiet with the implementation of the course.

### **Discussion**

Like Xia et al. (2013), I found that students posting rates and final course grades were related; students who participated actively earned higher course grades than those who were not active on the discussion board. I did not have enough participation data to conclude, as Balaji and Chakrabarti (2010) did, that the discussion board was beneficial to the students. The implementation of the discussion board as well as the revision and resubmission policy was largely impacted by the modifications to the eleventh grade course in order to align with district *suggestions*. While I did not intend to have an experimental model with one class participating in a blended environment and the other in a traditional setting, the different roll out of the two courses resulted in the tenth grade course receiving the blended instruction and the eleventh grade students receiving a more traditional classroom experience. This difference provides a unique and unexpected insight into the different ways in which students responded to the opportunity to revise their work as well as their attitudes

towards their writing. While the writing process is used in most classrooms in my building, I am left questioning whether or not the implementation of the revision and resubmission cycle is supporting a revision mindset in students. The difference in the attitudes of the tenth and eleventh grade students leaves room for additional research on a larger scale with future classes.

Tenth grade students who participated in the digital submission process were more likely to revise than students who did not. Students were likely motivated by the change in course policy that allowed students to write for the highest grade that could be earned by the student on each assessment as opposed to an averaging of scores earned on the attempt. Students expressed enthusiasm for this feature in both tenth and eleventh grade sections. The online gradebook also provided a simple way to remind parents of the students' opportunity to revise and resubmit the work. I added a comment to each grade, visible to the parents, which stated the revision window and reminded parents that revisions could be made to improve the score. I did not specifically ask the students in the end of course feedback if their parents put pressure on them to take advantage of this opportunity, but parent emails expressed gratitude for this opportunity on three occasions. The commitment to improving writing through practice evidenced in the tenth grade students is similar to one of the mantras of SHS athletic department, "Practice like you play." I adopted this mantra with my students and extended it to development of their writing habits now to their future plans by making a direct link to college and professional writing (see Table 9).

## **Journal and Artifact Analysis- Types of Knowledge**

After analyzing the classroom artifacts, 30 teaching journal entries (counted by week) and six reflective journal entries, I coded them for the types of knowledge represented in the TPACK framework. I initially identified the larger knowledge zones of pedagogical knowledge (PK), content knowledge (CK), and technological knowledge (TK). The next stage of coding identified the overlap knowledge areas of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK), technological content knowledge (TCK), and technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK). For the purposes of numeration, only unique instances were counted. For example, I am counting utilizing comments tools on Coursesites.com to provide feedback on student writing as one instance, even though I accessed this option multiple times per essay for most students. This instance also appears in the reflective and teaching journals, but I will only count it once.

Likewise, references to student tutoring appointments, memos reminding myself to update grades, were counted as one instance. I decided on tabulating unique comments because the frequency of an instance does not necessarily reflect its prioritization. For example, I do update the gradebook every 48 hours and make it a point to have all student work graded within three days of receipt. This habit does not show up in my teaching journal because I have prioritized it to the point of reflex. An example of this coding method follows. The selected entry is an excerpt from the week of April 18<sup>th</sup> in the teaching journal. I selected the entry from the week of April 18<sup>th</sup> because it is a week in which I used a digital tool with a clear intention and it is richly populated with a variety of distinct knowledge zones. Not all of the entries were this rich or related to technology.

Table 18 provides a coded excerpt from teaching journal entry from the week of April 18<sup>th</sup> and includes coding for the seven zones articulated under the TPACK framework as well as an item coded “OTK” - Organizational technological knowledge, which will be examined in more detail later in this section.



**Table 18**  
**Coded Teaching Journal Entry**

<p>Chromebooks- Survival Webquest Lord of the Flies</p> <p>1  This was by far one of the most successful activities to date with using a webquest with my on-level students. <b>The students accessed the instructions on Coursesites and are submitting their projects each class so that I can review their progress.</b> They are all actively engaging in the research and working together to plan their kits. While planning for survival kits and manuals that would ensure survival if they were to crash land on a deserted island like the characters in <i>Lord of the Flies</i>, they are doing a good job of identifying resources, but are not documenting their sources well. I will introduce the students to easybib tomorrow to help them organize their sources.</p> <p>2  The students seemed to be really motivated by planning a survival kit. Reviewing the choices they are making helps the students get a sense of the predicament the characters in the novel will face.</p> <p>3  By focusing more on a critical issue that helps understand the tension in the story, am I more productively focusing the interest of the students in the class and better preparing them to read? Previous webquests have focused on understanding the socio-historical and political context of text as well as author’s backgrounds. These did not engage the students in the same way the survival activity appears to be.</p> <p>4  I also feel like this activity connected me better to some of the students who have been more resistant to English as a class. Some of the most resistant students were the most active today. These boys were leading other students to resources and demonstrating their expertise in hunting... they were using ELA skills, but it didn’t feel like English to them.</p>	<p>Coding of Teaching Journal Entry 4.18-22</p> <p>TK- selection of a webquest for student research (paragraph 1)</p> <p>PK- Collaborative learning (paragraph 1), selection of high interest project that connects to students out of school interests (paragraph 4)</p> <p>CK- Demonstrated knowledge of novel <i>Lord of the Flies</i> –crash, island, jungle survival (paragraph 1)</p> <p>PCK- The activity engages students in meaning making that helps support their understanding of the specific elements of the text (survival on a deserted jungle island)(paragraph 1); Questioning if the research focus on an issue of critical importance to the characters in the text to help (paragraph 3)</p> <p>TCK- Identification of web resources that support understanding of the novel (paragraph 1)</p> <p>TPK- The awareness that students are not citing sources and the selection of the web based citation creator (paragraph 1)</p> <p>TPACK-The webquest was used to collaboratively build knowledge and connect prior knowledge to <i>Lord of the Flies</i></p> <p>OTK- The students accessed the instructions on Coursesites and are submitting their projects each class so that I can review their progress.</p>
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I identified 132 examples that clearly represented the distinct knowledge domains articulated by TPACK. The breakdown of these domains was 26% TK, 21%

PK, and 32% CK. Only 12% of these incidences contained the presence of the three distinct knowledge groups of TPACK. I discovered that a large portion of the posts that I deem essential to the classroom implementation of technology were not falling under these knowledge groups. For example, in the example coded excerpt from the week of April 18<sup>th</sup> teaching journal, the comment, “the students accessed the instructions on Coursesites and are submitting their projects each class so that I can review their progress” (bolded in the sample teaching journal) does not clearly fit the knowledge zones articulated by TPACK but does represent an understanding of how technology can facilitate classroom routines, by providing instructions to the students, and support teacher monitoring of student progress by having students submit their work at the end of class.

The placement of the instructions in the digital classroom and the submission for review of the assignments to Coursesites.com is a decision to monitor student progress that I initially categorized as other and subsequently as OTK. Upon further examination of this subset, I realized that they were observations, questions, and reflections on what I have identified as organizational knowledge (OK). By including the number of entries identified OK in the group, the breakdown of the types of knowledge in the entries explored (see Table 15) shifted to 24% TK, 20% PK, 30% CK, 15% OK, and 11% TPACK.

**Table 19**

**Types of Knowledge Observed and Examples**

26 entries	PK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiating lessons to address different levels of competencies</li> <li>• Evaluation of pre-assessments to determine necessary scaffolding</li> <li>• Analysis of post assessments to determine growth towards mastery</li> <li>• In preparation for the research simulation, I need to give students multiple opportunities to synthesize text</li> <li>• Review selecting evidence to support thesis</li> </ul>
32 entries	TK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will students demonstrate their individual work on group projects using Google Slides?</li> <li>• Should I have students produce a wiki or Slides presentation to reflect their research?</li> <li>• Introduce the students to the tools used on the AICCS</li> </ul>
39 entries	CK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of specific language that students might find difficult</li> <li>• Identification of rhetorical techniques present in works</li> <li>• Selection of literary lens for analysis of specific texts</li> <li>• Selection of supplemental videos and texts to provide additional representations for literary analysis</li> </ul>
15 entries	TPACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to review reports from coursesites to evaluate students participation and writing development</li> <li>• Need to look at discussion board posts to address text analysis and support</li> <li>• Preparing students to create presentations using Google Slides, what do they know, need to know, and need to consider to be successful</li> </ul>
20 entries	Other-Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to discuss appropriate voice for public posts (discussion board)</li> <li>• Upload assignments to coursesites</li> <li>• Update term guide</li> <li>• Notes on progress in text, video, or discussion</li> <li>• Clarify expectations for accessing coursesites for absent students</li> <li>• Can I reduce the visual load on the main course page?</li> <li>• What should I have students do in the event that the Internet is down?</li> <li>• How can I adjust my lessons to accommodate district/AICCS/</li> <li>• Need to create a procedure for retrieving and returning Chromebooks</li> </ul>

When assessing the TPK, CPK, and TCK, the grain of analysis becomes finer. While entire entries may focus on examining CK, often a single line contains the overlap in knowledge evidenced as TCK. Conversely a single decision in the zone of PCK may surface in multiple entries and artifacts. For the purposes of numeration, only unique instances were counted. For example, I am counting utilizing comments tools on Coursesites.com to provide feedback on student writing as one instance, even though I accessed this option multiple times per essay for most students. This instance

also appears in the reflective and teaching journals, but I will only count it once.

Ninety-eight distinct instances were coded in the overlapping sections of the TPACK framework with 33% TPK, 45% PCK, and 21% TCK. Table 20 provides examples of instances are included with each knowledge zone.

**Table 20**

**Overlapping Knowledge Groups Considered under TPACK**

25	TPK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilizing comments tools on Coursesites.com to provide feedback on student writing</li> <li>• Creating a group wiki assignment for collaborative student research</li> <li>• Creating digital journal assignments for students to respond to text</li> <li>• Creating an online discussion forum, blog, or journal assignment with settings that require students to post before they can read other students' work</li> <li>• Creating Safe Assign assignments to detect plagiarism on Coursesites.com</li> </ul>
34	PCK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scaffolding student learning by selecting more accessible text to introduce a complex task and then moving towards</li> <li>• Utilizing think pair share strategies to have students analyze passages from Shakespeare</li> <li>• Creation of text specific graphic organizers for students to utilize while reading complex texts</li> <li>• Pairing modern and classic text to examine archetypical elements</li> </ul>
16	TCK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of different productions of <i>The Crucible</i> available on Youtube.com for students to analyze the impact of staging and director's decisions</li> <li>• Selection of film <i>Baghban</i> to compare with <i>King Lear</i></li> <li>• Usage of spreadsheets to organize research notes</li> <li>• Observing differences in versions of resubmitted essays side by side using Coursesites.com assignment view options</li> </ul>

I then commenced an examination of OK and its overlapping zones, three additional areas of knowledge identified include: organizational pedagogical knowledge (OPK), organizational content knowledge (OCK), and organizational technological knowledge (OTK). I then included OK in the analysis, examining the technological organizational pedagogical and content knowledge framework (TOPACK). The total number of instances increases to one hundred and seventy-five:

14% TPK, 19% PCK, 9% TCK, 27% OPK, 5% OCK, 13% OTK, and 12% TOPACK. As I further examined the thoughts that were represented in these knowledge areas (see Table 21), I realized that the majority of concerns about introducing technology in the classroom expressed to me by my colleagues related to these zones.

**Table 21**

**Proposed Additional Overlap Zones under TOPACK**

48	Organizational Pedagogical Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assignment of reading groups</li> <li>• Ordering of learning events to scaffold students towards independence</li> <li>• Development of term guide</li> <li>• Establishing procedures for students to access work when returning from absences</li> <li>• Modeling procedures</li> </ul>
8	Organizational Content Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection of text for literature circles</li> <li>• Identification of reading selections for independent reading and those for classroom analysis</li> </ul>
23	Organizational Technological Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of PowerPoint presentations to display and archive learning objectives and agendas</li> <li>• Posting of lesson materials on Coursesites.com</li> <li>• Use of time release settings on Coursesites.com for test security</li> <li>• Using course menu options to simplify navigating the class website on Coursesites.com</li> </ul>
21	Technological Organizational Pedagogical Content Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creation of PowerPoint presentations that include daily activities and objectives, prompts, notes, activities</li> <li>• Creating, with students, expectations online behavior in and requirements of posting on discussion board</li> <li>• Creation and management of blogs and discussion boards to create space for academic writing and discourse</li> <li>• Creating, updating, archiving course events, assignments, and materials in the virtual classroom</li> </ul>

When I reflect on my experience working with new teachers, supervising student teaching internships, and my own apprenticeship into the profession, the most common concern about teaching expressed by educators was classroom management. Many of my colleagues express concerns when considering implementing

instructional technology that include managerial, custodial, and disciplinary aspects of classroom practice. The ground work for classroom management was laid in the organization of the classroom: operational, physical, and chronological. If this knowledge zone is added to the seven areas of TPACK, at minimum it would require a definition of organization knowledge and its overlapping areas with the existing TPACK framework. Table 22 provides the definitions for suggested additions.

**Table 22**

**Suggested Definitions in Expanded Framework**

TOPACK	Teachers use organizational knowledge to implement teaching practices that utilize appropriate technology and pedagogy to help learners practice and understand concepts in the content area
OK	Organizational knowledge and decisions that impact both the physical and virtual classrooms, including behavior management, resource organization, data management, physical and virtual layout and design, etc.
OPK	Organizational knowledge and decisions that impact both the physical and virtual classrooms to support teaching practice
OCK	Organizational knowledge and decisions that address the ways in which learners practice and understand concepts in a specific content area
OTK	Organizational knowledge and decisions that influence how technology is included in classroom practice

A key theme that emerged in the teaching journal was specific to the eleventh grade course. A preoccupation with the alignment of the course to prepare students for district assessments with fixed testing windows was apparent from the first week, 8/18/2015 through the conclusion of district testing 11/23/2015. This theme was evidenced by references to the impending testing window, evaluations of student

work related to readiness for district assessments, and reminders to integrate specific skills that would support student performance on the district assessment.

Additionally, included in the classroom artifacts are memos reminding me to prepare the students finished exams, I removed their names from both the file and text before sending the students exams to the curriculum specialist, who was tasked with the developing a set of anchor papers for future assessments.

### **Discussion**

There was a substantial amount of data documenting teacher decision-making that did not fit neatly into the prescribed knowledge zones under the TPACK framework. By including an additional area of knowledge, organizational knowledge (OK), the framework would be expanded to include the operational and managerial elements necessary to implement instructional technology in the classroom. While some might assert that these are tangential to the pedagogical knowledge, I would argue that several tasks in organizational and classroom operations are accounting in nature and do not influence instruction. Additionally, TPACK is very clear that the nature and purpose of an action is precisely defined to delineate between TPK, TCK, and TPACK. Is it reasonable, therefore, to argue for the study of this additional knowledge zone, as it does not meet the fine grain test placing it in outside of the other knowledge zones? The resulting acronym would be TOPACK.

### *Summary of Findings*

#### **Research Question 1**

- How can I foster the development of academic writing in authentic spaces using instructional technology?

Out of the two digital tools implemented in the courses to support the development of academic writing, the utilization of digital documents and comments positively influenced student writing by allowing them to receive teacher guidance at all stages of the writing process and to access this fixed record of instructor guidance outside of the fixed time and space of the traditional classroom. Student feedback indicated that a majority (62%) of tenth grade students found the revision and resubmission process to be worth continuing at the midterm (see Table 8). The student feedback concurred with my observation of the tenth grade students noted in the March/April reflective journal and in the teaching journal entry from the week of 3/29/17 documenting the midterm conferences. By reviewing the writing submissions archived on Coursesites.com of the group of seven students who struggle with the development of ideas and initiating writing (see Table 16) tasks that took advantage of the resubmission and revision practice in relation to their attitudes towards and evaluations of their own writing (see Table 12 and Table 14), the students expressed increased confidence in their writing that was evidenced in improved initial quality of ideas present in first draft submissions.

Conversely, though I expected the discussion board to reveal the improvement in academic writing over the duration of the course, it did not. As explained in the findings, the student participation patterns were lower than expected and reflective of the negative student attitudes towards the discussion board expressed at midterm conferences. The participation patterns did correlate with overall course performance (See Table 17). By electing not to participate in the discussion board, students sent



indirect feedback that the discussion board was not perceived as valuable that was confirmed during the midterm conferences.

## **Research Question 2**

- How do I use student input to inform my teaching?

This research question was revised after an examination of the data revealed that focusing on student work privileged indirect student feedback over direct student feedback. While analyzing student work archived on coursesites.com allowed me to adjust my instructional plan in response to student work, it was not the only influence. Student feedback and self-evaluation was documented during the midterm conferences and on the end of course feedback survey. The conversations provided influenced instruction by informing me of what the students perceived to be important course goals.

The teaching journal and lesson plans document the modification of lesson plans in response to student skill needs. Examining student progress towards mastery of specific skills and concepts across assignments, as well as through stages of revision, allowed for a longitudinal understanding of how students respond to different activities and teacher input over time. Triangulation of the student performance data, the teaching journal, and student direct feedback supports the importance of both indirect and direct student feedback informing instructional practices.

### **Research Question 3**

- What do teachers need to know and consider when implementing instructional technology?

In addition to the TPACK framework, the area of OK is necessary to implement and support continued monitoring and use of instructional technology in the classroom. Throughout the school year, organizational concerns are mentioned in the teaching journal. An excerpt from the teaching journal (see Table 18) provided an example of OTK. An analysis of comments coded in the journals and classroom artifacts that fell into the category of OK revealed 100 entries that reflect OK. When all of the entries are analyzed with OK included, the breakdown of the percentage of entries based on knowledge zone is: 14% TPK, 19% PCK, 9% TCK, 27% OPK, 5% OCK, 13% OTK, and 12% TOPACK. By examining the discussion board implementation through the TOPACK lens, a better understanding of OPK and TPK might have created the conditions for a more successful inclusion of the discussion board. The lack of relationship between the discussion board and the live classroom could be addressed by applying OPK and examining the construction of the two separate course components and considering how the course organization led to this separation and the perception that one was not as valuable to the student. TPK would be applied to the analysis of what specific changes moving a discussion from the live classroom to the discussion board space required to be successful. This examination might find that students needed additional support in understanding how discussion boards work, instructor revision to prompts that are more likely to facilitate discussion in virtual spaces, or offering a variety of teacher and student created prompts for initiating discussion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

### **Overview**

This chapter opens by revisiting the importance of digital communication in modern social communication and review the methodology and procedures used in this study. I then revisit the key findings. By triangulating the findings from the student feedback, the analysis of student participation with the digital tools, and the teacher journals, I discuss the convergence of these data sets that address each of the research questions. I then extend the conversation to recommendations for individual praxis, district implementation of digital tools, and make suggestions for further research. The chapter ends with an articulation of the knowledge gained and unanswered questions that remain as related to the developing theory of the implementation of instructional tools that support the development of academic writing.

### **Revisiting the Study**

#### **Purpose**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital spaces are becoming a powerful medium for social change. In the first chapter the prevalence of social media as both news source and socialization medium was presented (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Greenwood et al., 2016). Digital communication is increasingly central to the human experience, whether in communicating with friends and family, networking with professionals, or engaging political activism (Clinton, Jenkins, & McWilliams, 2013; Tufekci, 2014). Composing on a social media platform privileges the individual's narrative. In the traditional classroom, writing assignments and academic conventions obviate the "I,"

a stark contrast to new digital communication norms (Klages & Clark, 2009). Klages and Clark suggest that the dynamics of the classroom change as a consequence. New types of literacy are encountered when students engage with technology in all aspects of their life and in digital spaces that privilege their own story. Social media is the most powerful audience of students' out of school writing. Schools are faced with a unique challenge, responding to rapid social change that at times runs counter to its traditions.

### **Methods**

The impetus for this study arose from a critical juncture (Whitehead, 1989) that I encountered in my teaching practice. I realized that the classroom practices and policies did not create the circumstances for of good writing instruction, nor did they cultivate a revision mindset in the students. From this pedagogical moral crisis, I developed a self-study using the methods outlined by Samaras and Freese (2006) and designed a research study that documented my attempts to address this critical juncture and reshape my practice with the goal of contributing to the evolving theoretical conversation around the implementation of digital tools in the secondary English classroom. I chose to focus on the implementation of digital tools for the purpose of developing academic writing to work towards the developing theory of how teachers can implement digital tools in their classroom practice.

Samaras and Freese (2006) define the five characteristics of self-study as: situated inquiry, process, knowledge, multiple, and paradoxical. The context of this dissertation is multiple. The research for this dissertation was not only situated in a public high school classroom and in which I was the only educator, but also within a society that's culture is becoming increasingly intertwined with technology. The

study documented the process of continuous reflective practice informed by teacher insight and student input. By examining this documentation, coding and analyzing the data, knowledge about my instructional practice was generated and examined in relation to student learning outcomes.

In their text, *Self-study of Teaching Practice*, Samaras and Freese (2006) state that some self-study researchers define self-study as “an examination of the personal within a specific context” (40). This dissertation pushes my personal reflection, struggle, and evolving conception of my instructional practices with technology to the public domain, with the intent that this work will inspire discussion of the importance of OK and its importance to the implementation of instructional technology in secondary classrooms.

### **Key Findings**

The emergence of organizational knowledge (OK) as an addition to the existing TPACK framework, resulting in TOPACK, is a key finding of this study. OK is defined as the knowledge necessary to make decisions that impact both the physical and the virtual classrooms. This knowledge zone includes behavior management, resource organization, data management, physical and virtual layout and design, etc. As indicated in chapter four, the area of OK is necessary to implement and support continued monitoring and use of instructional technology in the classroom. Throughout the school year, organizational concerns are mentioned in the teaching journal and appear in the classroom artifacts including teacher generated memos and reminders.

In addition to OK, the implementation of course policies allowing for revision and resubmission of students’ writing and the use of digital document submission

through Coursesites.com was examined. My findings confirmed those of Ball (2014) that cloud-based document sharing can support cyclical revision and collaborative process. By encouraging asynchronous collaboration, the utilization of cloud-based supported the writing process, encouraged revision, and the development of academic voice. Turning in assignments through Coursesites.com and returning them to students the same way allowed for a deeper, ongoing, archived conversation about student texts. As students participated in this process, students who initially prioritized grammar and did not conceive of themselves as being agents in the academic conversation shifted their perceptions of their work and themselves. This finding with high school students confirms McCabe, Doerflinger, and Fox, R. (2011) findings of their study conducted with college students.

My implementation of the discussion board with the eleventh grade students did not result in the expected improvement, based on previous experience with implementing discussion boards with eleventh grade students, to academic discourse. While the eleventh grade students did not actively participate on the discussion board as previous semesters, the participation bands identifying level of posting activity correlated to their course performance on teacher generated and district generated assessments (see Table 17). This failure to improve academic discourse may have resulted from the lack of engagement with the medium and points towards a flaw in implementation.

To promote this engagement, address the course objectives, and ensure alignment with course content, discussion board prompts need to be carefully planned (Song & McNary, 2010). Xia, Fielder, and Siragusa (2013) explain that carefully

planning activities and prompts allows students the opportunity to show and refine knowledge of central concepts by discussing these in threads, sharing their ideas, having them questioned, and continuing the processing as a group. The eleventh grade students provided clear direct and indirect feedback that they did not perceive the discussion board to be a useful component of the classroom experience or as beneficial to their learning. Teachers need to be prepared to refine and revise discussion boards as the district curriculum changes, ensuring alignment with current course content.

Threaded discussion boards are linked to several positive outcomes in the literature including a deeper understanding of course materials, a strengthening of academic, the development of critical thinking skills and academic voice, and increased discussion of course concepts in the live classroom (Aljerais, Mohammad, Fayyumi, & Alrashideh, 2015; Blackmon, n.d.; Cho, Cheng, Paré, Collimore, & Joordens, 2011; Chou, 2012; Dringus & Ellis, n.d.; Johnson, 2016; Zion, Adler, & Mevarech, 2015). Harris and Sandor (2007) and Song and McNary (2010) found that discussion boards improved live discussions because students engaged in virtual discussion prior to course conversations, thus having time to reflect on and refine their understanding of course concepts.

The positive potential benefits for the discussion board warrant additional future attempts as implementation. Viewing this practice through the TOPACK, as opposed to TPACK, lens will bring classroom practices related to physical and virtual organization and coordination into focus. By attending to developing OK, I am

confident that I can implement discussion boards more successful in the secondary classroom in future semesters.

## **Conclusions**

### **Revisiting the Research Questions**

#### **Research Question 1**

*How can I foster the development of academic writing in authentic spaces using instructional technology?*

The implementation of two digital tools in the courses to support the development of academic writing was examined. Course policies were revised to allow for revision and resubmission of students' writing and the use of digital document submission through Coursesites.com. This practice was examined through two data sets, the participation in the revision and resubmission process using digital documents and instructor comments and direct student feedback obtained at midterm and end of course. This practice was found to positively influence student writing, confirming the findings of Ball (2014) and McCabe, Doerflinger, and Fox, R. (2011). By allowing students to receive and reference teacher guidance, from all writing assignments and at all stages of the writing process, students were able to apply previous feedback to current projects resulting in a reduction of teacher supported revisions. Having access this fixed record of instructor guidance outside of the fixed time and space of the traditional classroom is a unique benefit of utilizing digital submission of student work.

Student direct feedback indicated that a majority (62%) of tenth grade students found the revision and resubmission process to be worth continuing at the midterm conferences (see Table 8). The student direct feedback conforms to the



student indirect feedback, utilization of the revision and resubmission process (Table 18), and concurred with my observation of the tenth grade students noted in the March/April reflective journal and in the teaching journal entry from the week of 3/29/17 documenting the midterm conferences.

Additionally, a group of seven tenth grade students, who struggled at the beginning of the course with the development of ideas and initiating writing tasks, took advantage of the resubmission and revision practice and expressed increased confidence in their writing and stated a sense of improvement. This self-evaluation was confirmed by the evidenced of improved initial quality of ideas present in first draft submissions on Coursesites.com.

In previous semesters where I have not had the pressure to conform to a district testing schedule and where I've had a student aid acting as board moderator, I have observed students actively participating in the discussion board experience similar gains. Conversely, although I expected the discussion board to reveal an improvement in academic writing over the duration of the course, it did not. As explained in the findings chapter, the student participation patterns were lower and reflective of the negative student attitudes towards the discussion board expressed at midterm conferences. By examining the discussion board threads and the frequency of posts, it was clear that student participation rates were very low and minimal engagement occurred between students in this space. It is worth noting that the level of engagement in the discussion board did correlate to a student's overall course performance. At midterm conference, students expressed that they felt the discussion

board to be extraneous to the classroom activities and that the discussion boards were not aligned well with course content, finding them to be redundant or irrelevant.

This failure to engage students indicates that it is likely the prompts for the discussion board failed to be carefully constructed and planned to align with classroom practices (Xia, Fielder, & Siragusa, 2013). The teaching and reflective journals provide some clarity as to how this happened. My concern over ensuring that the eleventh grade students were prepared for the new district assessments was a reoccurring theme during the fall semester beginning on 8/18/2015 and concluding 11/24/2015 with the completion of the last district assessment. This preoccupation contributed to a perceived need to closely monitor the students as they learned to conduct a rhetorical analysis of writings by Colonial American authors.

The independent reading of Atlas Shrugged did not connect to the rhetorical analysis that the class engaged in during our in person sessions and students allowed themselves to fall behind in their reading. The discussion board could not carry the weight of nurturing an academic conversation independent of the classroom partially because not enough students, documented during midterm conferences, were prepared to discuss the text and because it felt like a separate entity. Discussion board assignments designed to extend classroom conversation, but not requiring the synthesis of new information, assigned later in the semester did not have a greater participation rate than the Atlas Shrugged discussion board prompts. This may be a consequence of a dislike of discussion boards developed during the Atlas Shrugged assignments. The disconnect from the earlier part of the semester between the virtual

and digital classrooms may have fostered a resistance to the virtual classroom space that improved curricular alignment later in the course could not overcome

This failure supports Applebee's (1996) assertion that an effective curriculum needs to be interrelated and that a connection between the classroom activities and the virtual activities needs to be present and indicates a need for the development and application of OK specific to creating the circumstances that support this task. It also suggests the need for an integration of additional input beyond the live classroom conversation to promote dialogue that is meaning generative as opposed to repetition. Students expressed frustration during the midterm and end of course conferences with virtual classroom tasks they felt were redundant or irrelevant to other classroom activities occurring in the physical classroom. Research examining the implementation of carefully aligned virtual classroom tasks is needed to confirm and refine this assertion. In my future classroom, I would like to experiment with using student ratings of discussion board activities to incorporate timely student feedback on assignments to improve my ability to adapt the discussion board planning and make prompts more responsive to student interest and course corrections.

### **Research Question 2**

*How do I use student input to inform my teaching?*

Creating a classroom that provides responsive dynamic instruction requires frequent assessment of students, both informally and formally. Student feedback, both direct and indirect, is an important component to designing responsive instruction. This research question was revised after an examination of the data revealed that focusing on student work privileged indirect student feedback over direct student feedback. Prior to this study, I conceived of formative assessment as mostly

evaluating student work. Through this research experience I have broadened my conception to include the indirect feedback and observational data (Jones, Chang, Heritage, Tobiason, & Herman, 2015; Young & Kim 2010).

Direct student feedback was formally collected at two points in each course, at midterm conferences and at the end of course, including students in the development and evaluation of their learning process (Jones et al., 2015). The data from the midterm conference conversations was documented in a spreadsheet while the conferences were conducted (see Table 11). These conversations were introduced with writing prompts and then individual student conferences with me followed. These conversations allowed me to discuss their progress and responses to the prompts. I found this form of feedback to be helpful in two ways, it gave me a chance to ask clarifying questions and it provided an opportunity to confirm or disprove my interpretation of indirect feedback.

Students provide indirect feedback through their participation patterns as well as through their body language. Student participation patterns and level of engagement in tasks is a valuable measure of how important or enjoyable a student perceives a task to be. These observations help to inform how I engage students in the classroom and contribute to the intuitive understanding teachers have of their students abilities (Goertz, Oláh, and Riggan, & 2009). While analyzing student work archived on coursesites.com allowed me to adjust my instructional plan in response to student work, it was not the only influence. Student feedback and self-evaluation was documented during the midterm conferences and on the end of course feedback survey. The conversations influenced instruction by informing me of what the

students perceived to be important course goals and provided me with an opportunity to examine how I contributed to those conceptions.

The teaching journal and lesson plans document the modification of lesson plans in response to student skill needs. Examining student progress towards mastery of specific skills and concepts across assignments, as well as through stages of revision, allowed for a longitudinal understanding of how students respond to different activities and teacher input over time. Triangulation of the student performance data, the teaching journal, and student direct feedback supports the importance of both indirect and direct student feedback informing instructional practices and develop TOPACK.

### **Research Question 3**

*What do teachers need to know and consider when implementing instructional technology?*

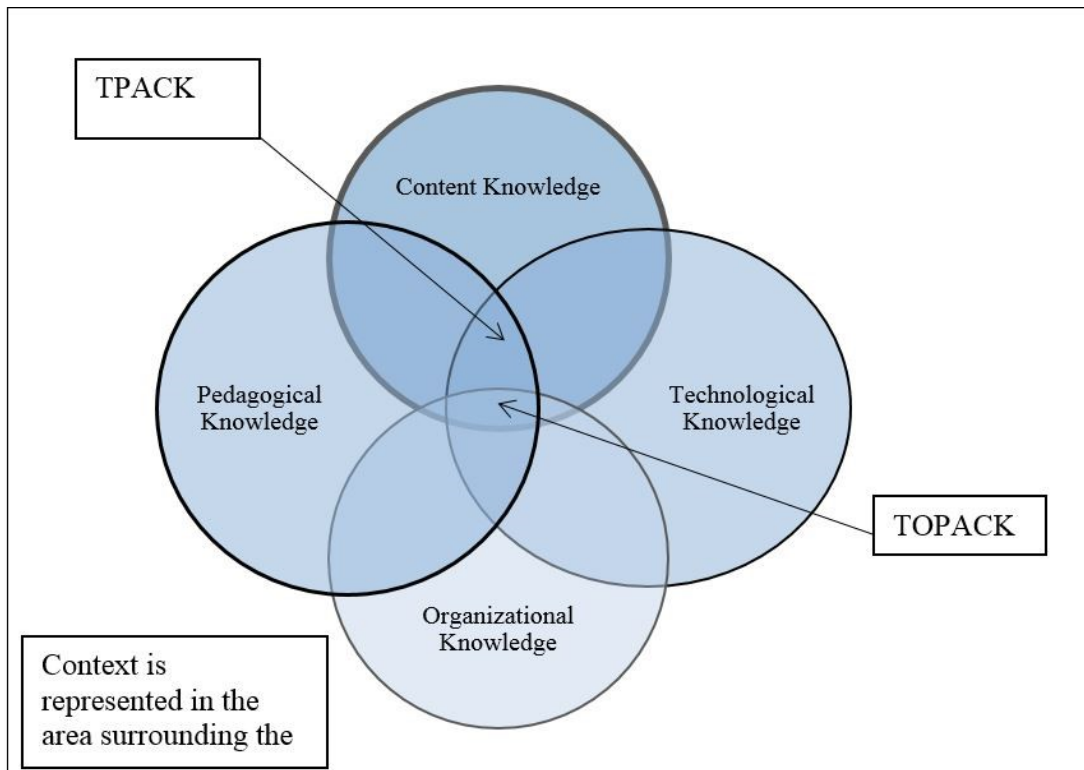
Mishra and Koehler (2006) identified three knowledge zones essential to the implementation of instructional technology: technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK). The TPACK framework indicates the interrelated nature of the knowledge zones working together as teachers implement instructional technology in the classroom, but these zones do not adequately reflect all areas of teacher knowledge essential to the successful implementation of instructional technology.

In chapter two the theoretical components of TPACK were discussed as well as the history of its development. But what are the practical applications of TPACK? In recent research, TPACK is used to develop survey instruments to assess what pre-service and in-service teachers' beliefs, abilities, and attitudes towards instructional

technology are examined. Concern was raised about the minimal attention paid to the context when researchers examine TPACK.

In my coding and analysis of my journals and classroom artifacts it was clear that many of the instructional decisions I was making related to technology did not fit into the defined zones of TPACK. While some of these questions were related to classroom management, they were not directly related to act of teaching. TPACK places classroom management within the bounds of Pedagogical Knowledge. Are these concerns significant enough to warrant their own knowledge zone? If so, these concerns can be ascribed to the area that I have identified through this dissertation and labeled OK zone. When considering the development of the theory of TPACK, Graham (2011) based his analysis of TPACK on Whetten's (1989) work which articulated three important prongs for theory development: identification of the elements considered in explaining the phenomena one is trying to understand, exploring the relationships between the elements the -theory is explaining, and establishing why these are worthy of attention and examination by the field.

From an implementation point of view, the area of OK is necessary to implement and support continued monitoring and use of instructional technology in the classroom. This knowledge addresses the components of classroom practice that are very important to the practitioner including: organization of materials, means of assessing, collecting, and disseminating course content, monitoring of behavioral expectations, creation and enforcement of classroom norms.



**Illustration 5. TOPACK**

In order to implement digital tools in the classroom, teachers need to develop an understanding of the affordances of the technology being considered and integrate it into the curricula intentionally and specifically to address a curricular and pedagogical need. My move to providing digital feedback on assignments to students was in no small part motivated by my illegible handwriting. Students had a much easier time reading and implementing feedback that was typed. After beginning to provide feedback through Coursites.com, I was able to encourage students to review comments on previous assignments that they found beneficial in the early stages of writing. Using Coursites.com as a means for providing prompt, clear, and actionable feedback fostered a collaborative, revision focused writing experience for the students.

Through my experience blending the classroom, I developed a better understanding of the dynamics of this space and improved my ability to anticipate the impact to my managerial tasks. Expanding TPACK to include TOPACK and exploring the OK needed for implementing instructional tools promotes a better understanding of what teachers need to understand and do to manage the implementation of instructional tools.

In addition to the TPACK framework, the area of OK is necessary to implement and support continued monitoring and use of instructional technology in the classroom. Throughout the school year, organizational concerns are mentioned in the teaching journal. An excerpt from the teaching journal provided an example of OTK. An analysis of comments coded in the journals and classroom artifacts that fell into the category of OK revealed 100 entries that reflect OK. When all of the entries are analyzed with OK included, the breakdown of the percentage of entries based on knowledge zone is: 14% TPK, 19% PCK, 9% TCK, 27% OPK, 5% OCK, 13% OTK, and 12% TOPACK. By examining the discussion board implementation through the TOPACK lens, a better understanding of OPK and TPK might have created the conditions for a more successful inclusion of the discussion board into the course. Successful inclusion of the discussion board as a valued course component would be evidenced by high levels of student engagement with course concepts on the discussion board that evidenced the knowledge generated through these virtual threaded conversations.



## **Limitations**

One of the limitations of conducting research in a public secondary school is that the district needs to be comfortable with the research being conducted. The current conversations at the local, state, and national level regarding the excessive amount of time students are spending taking assessments had the district reluctant to approve research involving students. The district also did not want any individual student work to be used as an example. I was able to gain approval for this study because it documents my existing teaching practice and did not ask the students to do any work beyond that normally assigned for the course. The inability to use student work is a limitation of this study as it does not allow for others to confirm my analysis of student writing. Similarly, the composition of the research site and the prohibition against conducting a demographic analysis of the results limits the ability of this study to indicate how students from different cultural backgrounds responded to the digital tools used to support academic writing.

The curriculum in the school district where this study was situated was semi-rigid and allowed for individual teacher curricular design to some extent. I selected the novel Atlas Shrugged as a lengthy text to use alongside other district suggested curricula. In previous semesters, the novel was more successfully integrated into the course and a greater concentration of students participated successfully in the activities related to the text. While individual novel selection from a list of district approved texts is up to the classroom teacher in the district studied, not all teachers will have as much flexibility in designing curriculum. The curriculum described and instruction explored for this research included only students fluent in English and high school students. These students were not familiar with the use of discussion

boards and had not been exposed to them in previous coursework. Their inexperience with this format may have contributed to their lack of engagement in this task.

By nature, discussions of TPACK or TOPACK are going to be nuanced and highly specific. As there has not been a previous study of OK, the coding evolved over the course of the study and contributed towards its definition. The decision to count only unique examples, made to avoid conflating frequency with importance, may influence the findings.

Self-study research provides the opportunity to bring the classroom teaching experience public for consideration and review. This study was conducted over the course of one school year, allowing for the examination of patterns over extended interactions. It includes both successes and failures. It reflects my analysis of my practice and its progression over the course of the year. Student direct feedback was included to check the validity of my impressions against those of the students.

## **Recommendations**

### **Individual Praxis**

This study was inspired when I encountered a critical juncture in my practice. It is beneficial for teachers to take a step back from their practice and critically examine what they are doing periodically. Through this reflective practice, teachers can verify that they are implementing the practices that they believe are best and are currently relevant. It is easy for an instructor to fall into a rhythm or pattern with a course and to lose sight of some of these practices. In my own practice, I took a hard look at how the writing process was implemented in the classroom. I realized that in reality, I was “doing” the process without allowing students to engage in the process. I needed to rewrite the classroom policies so that they supported a revision mindset.

By selecting this element of the classroom as a focus, I was able to address this critical juncture and adjust my teaching to align with my pedagogical allegiances. Without reflection on my practice, I do not believe that I would have identified the disconnection between what I believe to be important for teaching writing and what I was doing when teaching writing.

I encourage other teachers to step back from their practice and consider what they believe about best practices in English education and question to what degree they are implementing them in their classroom. Navigating the tensions and expectations of local, state, and national curriculum is demanding. Working within the confines of the school calendar; department, school, and district policies; the nature of school and need for grades are all challenges. Implementing best practices within these competing complexities is demanding. Reflective, periodic review of practice, thinking about what one is doing and whether or not it is a best practice, can improve teaching. Starting with this reflection allows teachers to focus on a particular facet of praxis that technology can help them address in their classroom instruction and set the stage for a meaningful implementation of technology.

Designing and implementing digital tools to effectively support student mastery of course content will require time. Moving into this space requires one to immerse oneself in becoming competent not only in the digital tool, but also in understanding its affordances and limitations. Revisiting existing lessons and considering what is changed with the utilization of the digital tool in this context is a starting point for planning. Developing OK will help teachers as they plan and design their courses with digital tools. Teachers should adopt technologies within their

tolerance, adding in features as they can manage and in a way that is consistent with their pedagogical allegiances.

### **District Implementation of Digital Tools**

In order to implement digital tools effectively, collaborative practices within and among schools should be encouraged. Teachers need opportunities to work in professional learning communities to share knowledge with one another and think through concepts. Working together with Mr. Frederickson and Mrs. Thomas, critical colleagues familiar with the context of my practice at a curricular, school, and district level, allowed us, as a group to tackle problems with our combined areas of expertise, refine our own perceptions and practices, all with district initiatives and curriculum in mind.

Districts and schools also need to review their established policies to identify which policies need to be revised as digital tools increase not only in the instruction but also in the evaluation of students. As teachers navigate their digitally infused classrooms they need district guidance in whether or not students should be required to participate in digital course spaces and whether or not consequences are appropriate in nonconformance. Perhaps the shift in expectation from traditional classroom spaces to digital spaces for instruction is similar to the shift in expectation from the submission of handwritten to typed work. Over time, it became the standard for students to submit final work in typed form. It is possible that submitting final work in its electronic version will become the new norm.

As teachers work to develop their TOPACK, it would be helpful if districts would maintain a focus in technology implementation beyond one semester or school

year. While districts want to stay current with rapidly evolving technology, it is important to take the time to consider what they want the technology to accomplish and strategically focus professional learning in support of that goal. If the focus for improvement is meaningful, the development of a multi-year plan for implementation, allowing teachers to develop the necessary TOPACK, would be a beneficial use of professional development. As Applebee (1996) and Dewey (1997) assert, effective teaching requires experienced guides. Acquiring the depth of TOPACK to be a highly effective teacher of technology does not happen in one semester or one school year, but like the rest of teaching is a constant evolution of learning. Teachers need time to become experts to include digital tools intentionally and expertly in their practice.

I also encourage districts to strengthen their research relationships with university departments of education and become affiliated with their research programs. School districts are the gate keepers for educational research in the secondary classroom. Districts would benefit from allowing space for and encouraging teachers to conduct research in alignment with district and school improvement goals on their practice; teachers would benefit from the guidance of experienced researchers. By working with departments of education and participating in research, districts will have access to innovative practices and teachers will be able to engage in the larger conversation about their professional practice. Whether through partnership with research institutions, site based research PLCs, or self-study research, it is essential that districts provide pathways for teachers to conduct research on their practice if teachers are going to contribute to research conversations and

contribute to the theoretical and larger academic conversation in the field of English education. Without university affiliations, teachers in the field risk losing access to research databases, full text articles, and the current research conversation.

### **Responding to the Infusion and Managing Expectations**

As technology changes the ways in which we communicate and mediates our social experiences, it is necessary to clarify what the expectations are of teachers for responding to email and monitoring students. As the traditional classroom becomes blended with the virtual classroom, which is always open, teachers need to define what hours they will be available and have a plan for how to handle student behaviors that are not acceptable in these spaces.

The ecological nature of the infusion of digital technologies into the daily life allowed its prevalence into social discourse to occur without an awareness of how things were changing. It is not known the impact that this infusion will have on the social ecosystem in the future. As educators, we are expecting students to demonstrate restraint and set boundaries on the use of digital devices that have not been modeled for them by adults.

As an early adopter of technology, I am now tempered in my enthusiasm and articulate very clear boundaries on my time. I do not carry my cell phone on weekends, unless I am traveling. I do not check work email after four in the afternoon during the week and will not check it on the weekend. These boundaries are beneficial in ensuring that I have space in my life for a balance between work and family. Establishing these boundaries requires one to realize that an overstep, or blurring, has occurred. Self-study research has the potential for making the invisible

visible through the careful and thoughtful examination of existing practices and norms.

When I began providing feedback to students on their papers through Coursites.com I was concerned about losing the face to face conversations with the students about their. I was pleasantly surprised that the inverse occurred; students were coming in more frequently to talk about their papers, similar to the findings of AlJeraisy, Mohammad, Fayyumi, and Alrashideh (2015). Through encouraging a revision mindset students were aware that I was actually reading their work and responding to it, not simply grading it for errors. They responded well to the process and moved away from asking what I wanted them to do (as the grader) to looking at what would make their argument the most effective. Developing this mindset is an essential part of becoming a writer who writes for real purposes.

### **For Further Research**

The modification of TPACK to TOPACK is a potential step in addressing the implementation of instructional technology and digital tools. In order to better understand the implications of integrating OK into the TPACK framework additional qualitative research is needed to identify what this knowledge zone entails in other teachers planning practices. Survey data is also needed to quantify the significance of OK to the implementation and inclusion of instructional technology in practice.

Additionally, longitudinal research situated in the secondary classroom examining the planning for and implementation of instructional technology is needed to better understand how to integrate this new dynamic into curricular planning. As

Dewey (1997) and Applebee (1996) argue, teachers need to be experienced guides, creating the course that students will navigate in their construction of knowledge.

The majority of educational research reviewed related to instructional technology often focuses on the implementation of and attitudes toward instructional technology in either university courses or with pre-service teachers. These studies need to be examined and their findings tested in secondary contexts with experienced teachers. By engaging secondary educators in this research conversation, through collaboration or through self-study research, the existing findings can be applied to the secondary context so that the generalizability can be determined and their value to secondary praxis explored.

Incorporating digital tools into the secondary English classroom is a complex task requiring a deep understanding of the digital tools, the curriculum, and pedagogic practices. Through a consistent, reflective, focused exploration of their practice, teachers can learn how to best use digital tools to support their students' academic writing and discourse in their classrooms. Moving beyond a text based discussion board, future research could examine the use of podcasts, webcasts, and asynchronous audio files as avenues for student academic discourse.

### **Using OK**

Activating OK, teachers consider the implications as well as direct consequences of the organization of their courses. When thinking about how best to organize their digital course spaces, teachers need to think about the relationships between units, are they discreet or intertwined? How can I emphasize the discreet or interconnected nature of assignments and content through my construction of the



digital space? For example, when using Coursesites.com, I organize the contents into discreet units. Concepts that students carry over between units are linked together visually within these folders with transition activities. As I transition from one unit to the next, I reorder the table of contents so that the current unit is always on top. This adjustment allows students to easily identify which unit the class is on and which unit, the one now in the second position, has been completed.

Teachers using OK are encouraged to consider the organization of their digital and physical spaces to ensure that the arrangement of the digital space aligns with the expectations for learning. Teachers can only develop this understanding by investing time in learning the features and functions of the digital space. This awareness then needs to connect back to the physical classroom, ensuring continuity with live classroom practices.

### **Looking to the Future**

It is an exciting time to be an English teacher. It is the nature of the English classroom to evolve and respond with social norms and cultural shifts. I am left with several questions as a consequence of this inquiry and my current experiences in the English secondary classroom. As the increased presence of social media and digital engagement makes its way into classrooms, teachers need to decide how they want to approach it. Is academic language going to evolve as well? Will students continue to write and engage in traditional essay writing? What will be considered quality and valuable writing in the future? I wonder, will students who learn to engage in academic discourse might be more critical of social media news and become critical mediators of this medium? Will the traditional classroom be replaced more frequently

with virtual courses? What is the impact on student learning under these new circumstances?

Learning to implement instructional tools is an ongoing process. This dissertation identified the existence of a fourth zone of knowledge. The identification of OK is an important start to understanding what teachers need to know in order to implement digital tools in their classrooms. Further research is needed to refine the definition of what belongs in the zone of OK and to confirm its importance in other teachers practices. Identification is a good first step, but more needs to be known about how OK influences instructional practice.

# Appendices

## District English Language Arts Rubric

Construct Measured	Score 4	Score 3	Score 2	Score 1	Score 0
<b>Reading/<u>List</u> <u>ening</u>: Comprehension</b>	Demonstrates <b>full comprehension</b> of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially by providing an <b>accurate analysis*</b> and supporting the analysis with <b>effective and convincing</b> textual evidence*.				
_____ Score	<input type="checkbox"/> full comprehension of ideas (stated explicitly <b>and</b> inferentially) <input type="checkbox"/> accurate analysis <input type="checkbox"/> effective and convincing textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )	<input type="checkbox"/> comprehension of ideas (stated explicitly <b>and/or</b> inferentially) <input type="checkbox"/> mostly accurate analysis <input type="checkbox"/> adequate textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )	<input type="checkbox"/> basic comprehension of ideas (stated explicitly <b>and/or</b> inferentially) <input type="checkbox"/> generally accurate analysis <input type="checkbox"/> basic textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )	<input type="checkbox"/> limited comprehension of ideas (stated explicitly <b>and/or</b> inferentially) <input type="checkbox"/> minimally accurate analysis <input type="checkbox"/> limited textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )	<input type="checkbox"/> no comprehension of ideas <input type="checkbox"/> inaccurate analysis <input type="checkbox"/> little to no textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )
<b>Writing/<u>Spe</u> <u>aking</u>: Development of Ideas</b>	Addresses the prompt and provides <b>effective and comprehensive</b> development of the claim*, topic*, or narrative elements* that is <b>consistently appropriate</b> to the task by using <b>clear and convincing</b> reasoning supported by <b>relevant textual evidence*</b>				
_____ Score	<input type="checkbox"/> effective and comprehensive development of the claim, topic, or narrative elements <input type="checkbox"/> consistently appropriate to the task <input type="checkbox"/> clear and convincing reasoning supported by relevant textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )  <input type="checkbox"/> <i>purposefully uses appropriate voice and body language (Speaking Only)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> mostly effective and comprehensive development of claim, topic, or narrative elements <input type="checkbox"/> mostly appropriate to the task <input type="checkbox"/> clear reasoning supported by relevant textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )  <input type="checkbox"/> <i>satisfactorily uses appropriate voice and body language (Speaking Only)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> some development of claim, topic, or narrative elements <input type="checkbox"/> somewhat appropriate to the task <input type="checkbox"/> some reasoning and textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )  <input type="checkbox"/> <i>inconsistently uses appropriate voice and body language (Speaking Only)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> minimal development of claim, topic, or narrative elements <input type="checkbox"/> limited in appropriateness to the task <input type="checkbox"/> limited reasoning and textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )  <input type="checkbox"/> <i>inadequately uses appropriate voice and body language (Speaking Only)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> undeveloped claim, topic, or narrative elements <input type="checkbox"/> inappropriate to the task <input type="checkbox"/> no reasoning or textual evidence ( <b>Does Not Apply to Narrative Writing</b> )  <input type="checkbox"/> <i>does not use appropriate voice and body language (Speaking Only)</i>
<b>Writing/<u>Spe</u></b>	Demonstrates <b>purposeful</b> coherence*, clarity, and cohesion, making it <b>easy to follow</b>				

<b><u>aking:</u> Organizatio n</b>	the writer's progression of ideas*; establishes and maintains an <b>effective style*</b> , attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.					
_____ Score	<input type="checkbox"/> purposeful coherence, clarity, <u>and</u> cohesion <input type="checkbox"/> progression of ideas easy to follow <input type="checkbox"/> effective style	<input type="checkbox"/> coherence, clarity, <u>and</u> cohesion <input type="checkbox"/> progression of ideas fairly easy to follow <input type="checkbox"/> mostly effective style	<input type="checkbox"/> some coherence, clarity, <u>and/or</u> cohesion <input type="checkbox"/> progression of ideas discernible but not obvious <input type="checkbox"/> somewhat effective style	<input type="checkbox"/> limited coherence, clarity, <u>and/or</u> cohesion <input type="checkbox"/> progression of ideas somewhat unclear <input type="checkbox"/> style that has limited effectiveness	<input type="checkbox"/> lacks coherence, clarity, <u>and</u> cohesion <input type="checkbox"/> progression of ideas unclear <input type="checkbox"/> inappropriate style	
<b>Language: Knowledge of Conventions</b>	Demonstrates <b>full command of the conventions*</b> of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. <b>Few minor errors</b> in mechanics, grammar, and usage, but meaning is clear.					
_____ Score	<input type="checkbox"/> full command of the conventions <input type="checkbox"/> few minor errors, but meaning is clear	<input type="checkbox"/> some command of the conventions <input type="checkbox"/> errors that occasionally impede understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> limited command of the conventions <input type="checkbox"/> errors that often impede understanding	<input type="checkbox"/> no command of the conventions <input type="checkbox"/> frequent and varied errors impede understanding		

Total Points \_\_\_\_\_ ÷ Number of Rows \_\_\_\_\_ = Raw Score \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Raw Score</b>	4.0	3.5 – 3.9	3.0 – 3.4	2.5 – 2.9	2.0 – 2.4	1.5 – 1.9	1.0 – 1.4	0.5 – 0.9	0.0 – 0.4
<b>Percentage</b>	100%	94%	87%	81%	74%	68%	61%	55%	48%

**Student receives a “0% (no credit)” for the following: no response; response is unintelligible or undecipherable; response is not written in English; or response is too limited to evaluate.**

**Sample Syllabus Grade 10**  
**British and World Literature: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade**  
**Course Description and Requirements**

Mrs. Michelle Alcoser  
 Phone: *redacted*  
 Email: *redacted*

Room: *redacted*  
 Office Hours: M & W 2:20 – 3:00

**Course Description:**

This course will focus on the study of British and world literature from ancient text to modern. Students will be expected to comprehend and analyze a variety of genres (poetry, essays, short fiction, and novels) from a variety of literary critical points of view.

This course is broken into four discreet units and two semester long units:

<i>redacted</i> Thematic Units	Semester Long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Hero’s Journey</li> <li>• Colorful Characters</li> <li>• Identity and Society</li> <li>• Individual Empowerment and Impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research on a country and its culture               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Select a nonfiction text to support research report</li> <li>○ Select a literary text connected to this view for analysis</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

During each unit there will be a variety of graded activities involving reading, writing, speaking, group work, and homework assignments that count for points towards the grade both on and off line.

Extended compositions and projects will analyze, persuade, and inform the reader or audience. Grammar and language usage will be studied in connection to writing assignments and explicitly. The course will additionally include vocabulary study and SAT preparation.

**You will:**

- Explore authors and periods in World Literature
- Write to persuade
- Write to inform
- Write to analyze, synthesize, and theorize
- Identify and respond to counterclaims
- Research topics related to Literature
- Speak about topics related to Literature
- Enhance vocabulary skills through reading and writing

- Improve grammar/usage skills through writing
- **Proposed Extended Literature:**

<i>Earthsea</i>	<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	<i>Animal Farm</i>
<i>The Canterbury Tales</i>	<i>Beowulf</i>	<i>The Cellist of Sarajevo</i>

Additional titles may be selected based on availability of the text.

**Grades:**

Grades are based on the following percentages:

Summative	70%	(final drafts, projects, presentations, multiple choice tests, and essay tests)
Formative	25%	(quizzes, daily and unit assignments, class participation both on and off line, and group work)
Homework	5%	(Homework will be graded on accuracy and/or completion.)

The course grade is determined by the following:

Term 1 of English	40%
Term 2 of English	40%
District Assessments*	20%

\*The District Assessment has been revised to conform to the new Common Core and AICCS assessment system. Please be on the lookout for new information regarding the District Assessment this term.

**Online Grading**

Grades can be accessed through the grading program through the Internet. The online grade center will have a calendar that displays assignments by their due dates. When you click on the assignments you should be able to read the narrative about the assignment and download copies of assignments. The link for this site is: *redacted*

**Late Work and Absences:**

1. Homework will not be accepted late. A single exception to this policy may be granted at teacher discretion.
2. Summative grades will receive a 10% penalty per calendar day late once the final deadline passes.
3. Students absent from school are expected to monitor the course site and make contact with the instructor to maintain pace with the course. It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements with the instructor to obtain/turn in assignments.
4. All work that is missed due to a student's excused absence must be made up within 48 hours of the student's return. For extended time due to an extended

absence, student's must make arrangements with the instructor within 48 hours of the student's return to have additional time granted.

5. Students will not be allowed to make up work missed as the result of an unexcused absence.

### **Revision and Retake Policy**

Retakes are not allowed on district assessments, quizzes, or multiple choice assessments.

### **Retake/Rewrite Policy for Essay Tests, Projects, and Papers:**

Because this course is structured toward mastery of content, I have adapted my due date policy to reflect this priority.

- Most papers have an initial due date and a 10 day revision window. Students should submit their assignments by the initial deadline and make revisions on Coursesites during this window.
- I will begin reviewing the assignments, making comments and recommendations for students through Coursesites on the initial due date. Students will then have the opportunity to revise and resubmit the assignment until the final deadline. The initial due date and final deadline are included in the assignment narrative for all papers.
- I will provide feedback to students in the order that their paper was received. Students should typically receive feedback within 3 business days.
- I will record a 0 in THE GRADEBOOK for a paper if no draft has been submitted by the initial deadline. Once a draft has been evaluated, the score in will be entered in THE GRADEBOOK . The score will be updated for revised drafts up until the last revision made by the final deadline (considered the final draft).
- **Papers due within the last 10 days of each term will not have a period for revision. Students are encouraged to solicit feedback in advance of the due date.** Students may schedule a time to review these papers with Mrs. Alcoser for revision suggestions.

### **Essay Tests:**

Once the test has been graded and entered into the gradebook, students will have 5 business days to meet with the teacher to discuss the responses made on the test. Students will have an opportunity to schedule the retake. Students will receive the average of the essay test scores as the final score on the test.

### **Classroom Expectations in person and online:**

Be on time

Be prepared by completing reading and writing assignments and bringing materials

Be respectful

Use appropriate language

Typical Consequences:

2 warnings > Parent Contact > Detention > Administrative Referral

### **Coursesites:**

Coursesites is an online collaborative learning space (hosted by Blackboard which is utilized by many institutions in higher education). Students will complete and manage much of their coursework utilizing this site. I will post digital copies of presentations, handouts, and assignments on our class coursesite. It is a private education site with restricted access. All of the high school and district conduct policies are applicable to digital learning spaces.

The enrollment passcode: *redacted*

Good to know:

- Students do not have to register using their email, official name or birthday, but they do need to provide me with the alias if they choose to use one.
- **I can reset student's passwords and provide them with their username if needed**
- Students will submit some classwork and most homework assignments through Coursesites but THE GRADEBOOK grades are the official gradebook resource for the course. The students will have additional assignments recorded in THE GRADEBOOK and it is considered to be the comprehensive student grade.

### **Community Public Library**

*redacted*

#### **Hours:**

9:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. Monday - Thursday

9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Friday - Saturday

1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Sunday

### **BYOD POLICY**

Students will be allowed to use smartphones and other devices in this course for instructional purposes at times designated by the instructor. Similar to other items brought to school, *redacted* High School is not responsible for lost, damaged, or stolen devices.

### **Expectations**

1. The device will be charged/recharged at home unless given permission by the teacher.
2. Students will only access Internet resources for which they have been given permission.
3. Devices may not be used for non-educational purposes.
4. The student is fully responsible for their device at all times and their behavior associated with the use of their device.
5. School rules apply in virtual spaces



6. The student must complete and submit the official digital device permission form.

### **Literature Selections**

Throughout the semester students are assigned a variety of literature to read. The novels, plays, essays, and poetry which students read at home or in class reflect a range of views from established authors in order to engage students and make them think. Teachers have taught these texts in the *redacted* Public School system for years (all have been approved by the *redacted* Board of Education), and the works are proven winners with students. I choose each selection for the class based upon its merits and curricular fit. However, at times literature can use frank language or put forth views unacceptable to some parents or students. *If you as a parent or guardian ever object to a selection assigned to your child, please feel free to contact me at redacted High School so we can discuss the matter and look into acquiring an alternate text to fulfill curricular requirements.*

### **Parent Permissions and Acknowledgement of Receipt of the Syllabus**

Parent(s) and Guardians,

By signing below you agree to the following:

- You are giving your child permission to read the texts listed, unless otherwise noted below.
- You acknowledge receipt of the classroom rules and expectations
- You have read the syllabus

## Term Guide Sample English 10

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1/26 Teacher Work Day	1/27 Intro to course and BB	1/28 Diagnostic Writing	1/29 Epic elements Begin <i>Beowulf</i>	1/30 Continue <i>Beowulf</i> Syllabus signature due
2/2 <i>Beowulf</i> - Unferth's Challenge  Writing focus- Organization	2/3 Battle with Grendel  Writing focus- Thesis and support	2/4 Battle with G's Mom  Writing focus- Prewriting	2/5 Global Scholar Lab A136	2/6 Vocab Quiz 1 Battle with the Dragon <b>Paper 1- Informative Beowulf Essay Due</b>
2/9 Read Gilgamesh	2/10 2 hour late Registration video Vocabulary review	2/11 Finish Gilgamesh	2/12 Vocab Quiz 2 Discuss <i>Earthsea</i> Paper 2- Argumentative assigned	2/13 <b>Teacher Curriculum Day No School</b>
2/16 <b>President's Day No School</b>	2/17 In-Class Essay Compare and Contrast the epics	2/18 In-Class Essay Continued	2/19 View: <i>Merlin</i>	2/20 2-hour delay Vocab Quiz 3
2/23 2 hour delay <b>Paper 2 Due</b> View: <i>Merlin</i>	2/24 Finish <i>Merlin</i>	2/25 <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i>	2/26 Write a story that incorporates the hero's journey. <b>Narrative Paper 3</b>	2/27 2 Hour Early Release Mid-Term Vocab test 1-3
3/2 <b>SNOW DAY</b>	3/3 <b>DISTRICT ASSESSMENT</b> Formative Research Simulation	3/4 <i>Arabian Nights</i>	3/5 Faculty Meeting No After School tutoring today	<b>3/6 Paper 3- Narrative Due</b> Vocab Quiz 4
3/9 <b>DISTRICT ASSESSMENT</b> <i>EBSR Formative Lab A231</i>	3/10 <i>The Canterbury Tales Prologue</i>	3/11 <i>The Pardoner's Tale</i>	3/12 Finish PT and begin WBT	3/13 Finish <i>Wife of Bath's Tale</i> Vocab Quiz 5
3/16 Introduce: Shakespeare And tragic hero <i>King Lear</i> Act 1	3/17 <i>King Lear</i> Act 2	3/18 <i>King Lear</i> Act 3	3/19 <i>King Lear</i> Act 4- 5	3/20 2 Hour Early Release Vocab Quiz 6 Final Paper 2 <b>MUST BE IN</b>

## Syllabus Grade 11

### American Literature: 11<sup>th</sup> Grade

#### Course Description and Requirements

Mrs. Michelle Alcoser

Phone: *redacted*

Email: *redacted*

Room: *redacted*

Office Hours: M & W 2:20 – 3:00

#### **Course Description:**

This course will focus on the study of American Literature from Colonialism to the Modern Era. Students will be expected to comprehend and analyze a variety of genres (poetry, essays, short fiction, and novels) from a variety of literary critical points of view.

This course is broken into four discreet units and two semester long units:

<i>redacted</i> Thematic Units	Semester Long
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Independence and Convictions</li><li>• Reality</li><li>• Loyalty</li><li>• Adversity &amp; Dreams</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• College and Career Research and preparation</li><li>• Analysis, composition, and discussion <u>Atlas Shrugged</u></li></ul>

During each unit there will be a variety of graded activities involving reading, writing, speaking, group work, and homework assignments that count for points towards the grade both on and off line.

Extended compositions and projects will analyze, persuade, and inform the reader or audience. Grammar and language usage will be studied in connection to writing assignments and explicitly. The course will additionally include vocabulary study and SAT preparation.

#### **You will:**

Explore authors and periods in American Literature

Write to persuade

Write to inform

Write to analyze, synthesize, and theorize

Identify and respond to counterclaims

Research topics related to Literature

Speak about topics related to Literature

Enhance vocabulary skills through reading and writing

Improve grammar/usage skills through writing

**Proposed Extended Literature (Listed in the likely order that text will be introduced):**

*Atlas Shrugged\_            The Crucible            The Great Gatsby*  
*Our Town                    All the Kings Men      The Scarlet Letter*

Additional titles may be selected based on availability of the text.

**Grades:**

Grades are based on the following percentages:

Summative	70%	(final drafts, projects, presentations, multiple choice tests, and essay tests)
Formative	25%	(quizzes, daily and unit assignments, class participation both on and off line, and group work)
Homework	5%	(Homework will be graded on accuracy and/or completion.)

The course grade is determined by the following:

Term 1 of English	40%
Term 2 of English	40%
District Assessments*	20%

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Grades can be accessed through the grading program through the Internet. The online grade center will have a calendar that displays assignments by their due dates. When you click on the assignments you should be able to read the narrative about the assignment and download copies of assignments. The link for this site is: *redacted*

**Late Work and Absences:**

6. Homework will not be accepted late. A single exception to this policy may be granted at teacher discretion.
7. Summative grades will receive a 10% penalty per calendar day late once the final deadline passes.
8. Students absent from school are expected to monitor the course site and make contact with the instructor to maintain pace with the course. It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements with the instructor to obtain/turn in assignments.
9. All work that is missed due to a student's excused absence must be made up within 48 hours of the student's return. For extended time due to an extended absence, student's must make arrangements with the instructor within 48 hours of the student's return to have additional time granted.

10. Students will not be allowed to make up work missed as the result of an unexcused absence.

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### **Essay Tests:**

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Coursesites is an online collaborative learning space (hosted by Blackboard which is utilized by many institutions in higher education). Students will complete and manage much of their coursework utilizing this site. I will post digital copies of presentations, handouts, and assignments on our class coursesite. It is a private education site with restricted access. All of the high school and district conduct policies are applicable to digital learning spaces.

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- Students will submit some classwork and most homework assignments through Coursesites but the online gradebook is the official gradebook resource for the course. The students will have additional assignments recorded in the gradebook and it is considered to be the comprehensive student grade.

### **Community Public Library**

*redacted*

#### **Hours:**

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1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Sunday

### **BYOD POLICY**

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### **Expectations**

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11. School rules apply in virtual spaces

12. The student must complete and submit the official digital device permission form.

### **Literature Selections**

Throughout the semester students are assigned a variety of literature to read. The novels, plays, essays, and poetry which students read at home or in class reflect a range of views from established authors in order to engage students and make them think. Teachers have taught these texts in the *redacted* Public School system for years (all have been approved by the *redacted* Board of Education), and the works are proven winners with students. I choose each selection for the class based upon its merits and curricular fit. However, at times literature can use frank language or put forth views unacceptable to some parents or students. *If you as a parent or guardian ever object to a selection assigned to your child, please feel free to contact me at redacted High School so we can discuss the matter and look into acquiring an alternate text to fulfill curricular requirements.*

### **Parent Permissions and Acknowledgement of Receipt of the Syllabus**

Parent(s) and Guardians,

By signing below you agree to the following:

- You are giving your child permission to read the texts listed, unless otherwise noted below.
- You acknowledge receipt of the classroom rules and expectations
- You have read the syllabus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8/25 Syllabus Introduce BB	8/26 Introduce <u>Atlas Shrugged</u> , Commentaries, Lit analysis	8/27 Declaration of Independence	8/28 Vocab unit 1 assigned	8/29
9/1 No School	9/2 Atlas Quiz 11-88	9/3 Atlas discussion	9/4 Vocab quiz 1 Carry On, the rest of the story  Prompt: Write about a descriptive account of an event you have learned from. (N)	9/5 Patrick Henry's Speech to the Virginia Convention  Prompt: Analyze the literary and rhetorical choices of Henry (I)  Post Introduction to BB, respond
9/8 Thomas Paine's <i>The Crisis</i> Prompt: How does the language selected connect the author's purpose? (A)	9/9 Atlas Quiz 88- 154  Groups: discuss responses to Henry and Paine	9/10 Lab 227(1) Lab 228(2) DISTRICT ASSESSMENT Formative Research Simulation (whole block)	9/11 Vocab Quiz 2 Atlas Discussion	9/12 Objectivism Overview My Journal CC1 Due
9/15 Select one of this unit's writings to finalize for Thursday  Benjamin Franklin	9/16 Atlas Quiz 154- 237	9/17 DISTRICT ASSESSMENT EBSR Formative Lab 231	9/18 Final Paper 1 Due  Vocab Quiz 3	9/19 No School
9/22 Olaudah Equiano Analyze the author's tone and the impact on the text. (I)	9/23 Vocab Test 1-3	9/24 Midterm cut off 2 hr early release Atlas Discussion Part 1	9/25 Rosh Hashanah  No School	9/26 Atlas 1 Discussion/Review



9/29 Atlas Part 1 Essay Test	9/30 View Atlas Part 1	10/1 Discuss Tests	10/2 Vocab Quiz 4	10/3 My Journal CC2 Due Introducing The Crucible
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## **Term Guide Sample English 11**

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