AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY ON THE PHENOMENA OF BLENDED LEARNING TEACHERS

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This study determined the teacher-perceived experiences within the blended learning environment to fill a void in previous data. The three research questions defined blended learning, explained strengths and challenges, and provided feedback on teaching programs. This qualitative case study used an ethnographic framework through interviews, check-in meetings, observations, and data collection from four participants. A grounded theory method created themes and codes from the participant’s responses. The participants and previous research defined blended learning as face-to-face and online interactions with students that required readiness from all stakeholders. The participants believed their job would be easier with less additional duties and more time with students. The participants would like teachers to have more experiences, observations, and understanding of blended learning.

Keywords: Blended Teacher, Blended Learning, Blended Definition, Strengths and Challenges of Blended, Blended Teaching Programs
Dedicated to

“Gma” Connie Pierce

The head of our crazy and dysfunctional family that showed me how fun life could be. You instilled a desire to constantly be better and taught me what it meant to be a life-long learner.

Until we meet again, I know you are watching over all of us.

Mommy Dearest

It was always her dream to create a better life for her children and I wouldn’t be where I am today without her personal sacrifices to make this happen. You listened to me no matter what you were doing, when I called, or how hysterical I was. This doctorate was completed for you.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of chapter one is to define and explain the teaching method of blended learning. This chapter provided information on blended learning to understand the background of this research study.

Blended Learning in the United States

The rise in online learning has been substantial over the past ten years. With over 500,000 students in the United States taking at least one of their courses online it created a need to look more in-depth at what was going on within these new learning environments (Allen & Seaman, 2013). In 2007, Allen, Seaman and Garrett presented survey findings in their report Blending In: The Extent and Promise of Blended Education in the United States. According to this report 55% of institutions were offering a blended course to their students. While 55% of institutions appeared to be relatively high, the average number of all the blended courses was only 5.6% (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007). Allen and Seaman (2013) also wrote an article that tracked and summarized a decade’s worth of information on online learning in the United States. They began the research in 2002 when there were less than half of universities claiming online education was important to their growth. While that might have been the case, in ten years the number had increased about twenty percent (Allen & Seaman, 2013). The study stated that more than six million students were taking a class online and that many universities would be offering more online courses to their students.

Within the United States, many people were trying to determine what was required to create an effective blended learning environment. Plough (2017) focused on four different sections for understanding effective blended learning. The first section focused on the interaction of the learners. He stated that blended learning is effective because it created “a
community of inquiry, encouraging open dialogue… and often giving voice to students who may be reticent to offer their thoughts…” (Plough, 2017, p. 28). Teachers needed to understand how to create environments that promoted student interaction with their lessons. The second header within this article focused on the actual role of the teacher. In the blended environment, teachers needed to not only be present in the classroom but they also needed to have a timely online presence. Specifically, teachers needed to focus on creating course goals that were understandable, make subject matter visible, have student’s link ideas and reflect, and finally take advantage of the social nature of learning (Plough, 2017). Another section focused on using technology as a reflective tool. For example, students can journal, write blogs, and incorporate personal evaluations in the blended environment. Teachers needed to explain the reason why and the importance of reflections in order to make them worthwhile to the students. Finally, Plough focused on the training of the teachers within the blended environment. He specifically states “blended learning isn’t just about finding the right mix of technologies, creating a few online interactions, or attaching a YouTube video” (Plough, 2017, p. 31). Plough continued to state that “online education rapidly exposes poor pedagogy” (Plough, 2017, p. 31). This means teachers have to be trained to incorporate the blended elements successfully.

Another article by Pierce (2017) also focused on creating an effective blended learning environment as well. However, Pierce starts by saying “no two blended learning classrooms will look exactly alike” (p. 18). This is important because Michael Horn of the Christensen Institute was quoted saying “at least three-fourths of United States school districts have implemented some form of blended learning – and he estimated about 10 million students are benefiting” (Pierce, 2017, p. 18). Teachers can implement programs like Khan Academy, they can provide students with choices for their learning, they can create stations, and they can offer students with
online content to create more personalized learning. By incorporating these ideas and taking the best of face-to-face and online instruction, it allowed teachers to “customize the learning experience for each student, while making content more accessible” (Pierce, 2017, p. 18).

Even though there isn’t one specific way to create a successful blended environment there are still certain characteristics that can be seen. Pierce (2017) also stated how important the teacher is in engaging the students and getting to know them. Teachers need to create a strong culture within their classroom and they have to have a clear purpose for every single learning experience. There needs to be a very specific intention for each activity that is completed. He focused on how blended learning redefined the teacher’s role, pulling specific information from Lawrence Public Schools.

Lawrence Public Schools superintendent stated that they have blended learning classrooms throughout their entire school and that teachers applied to become blended learning teachers within the program. When they started incorporating blended learning classrooms in 2013 they only had eight classrooms. Now they have over 200 blended classrooms within their district. This school district also created a team of teachers that create educational resources for other teachers since blended learning takes more time to plan. Another teacher from Sonoma County stated “You’re designing these multiple learning experiences for kids… can be daunting for teachers” (Pierce, 2017, p. 19). This same teacher stated that blended classrooms need “a healthy variety of online and offline activities is crucial to keeping them engaged” (Pierce, 2017, p. 19).

**Blended Learning in Ohio**

In 2013, 24 of the 50 states had blended schools such as: Louisiana, Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, California, Utah and many more.
Within these 24 states there were 75 blended schools all together open for student enrollment. In the state of Ohio, there were over 25 schools operating strictly online in which they were teaching 38,519 students (Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2013).

The Blended Learning Network currently has sixty members from Ohio (Ohio Blended Learning Network, 2015). Within these 60 member schools there are over 275,000 students. The schools are located all throughout Ohio in places like Columbus, Cincinnati, Lancaster, Perrysburg, Olentangy and Mentor (Ohio Blended Learning Network, 2015). As of the 2013-14 school year there are 27 e-schools available in Ohio with over 39,000 students (Murin, Gemin, Watson, Pape, & Vashaw, 2013).

The Blended Learning Network recently released a report that focused on blended learning in Ohio. According to their research, 211 schools in Ohio responded to a survey and 122 of them stated that they were implementing some sort of blended learning (Arnett et al., 2015). Based on this survey, 58% of the 211 schools are implementing blended learning with the majority of it occurring in high schools and 10% in the lower levels (Arnett et al., 2015). They also reported that 30% of the schools that were not currently blended were planning to implement blended learning.

In addition to the previous research, Schaffhauser (2015) looked at a survey that was distributed to 994 schools and got responses from 211 of them (p.1) as well. Of the 58% that were participating in blended learning, almost two-thirds of the schools participating were high schools and 42 percent were charter schools. On top of explaining who was incorporating blended learning the survey results also explained what type of blended learning they were participating in. While Ohio already has more than half of their schools participating in some form of blended learning be it an “a la carte (52 percent) or rotation models (50 percent)- or
both... (35 percent) reported the use of the flex model... (26 percent) said they used ‘enriched virtual’ blending...” almost 30 percent of the schools stated that they plan on implementing some sort of blended learning in the future (Schaffhauser, 2015, p.1).

Blended learning is being used within Ohio schools like the Dublin City Schools. DeNisco (2013) wrote an article on how they were using the blended environment in order to teach Chinese classes. The district chose to use the blended model because of smaller budget and the desire to keep Chinese as a possible foreign language option. Dun Zhang taught Chinese for three different high school buildings at the same time. She video conferences three different classrooms while another teacher facilitates the students within that face-to-face room. Even though she is not within the same classroom, she is still able to listen to students, students are able to listen to her and they are able to participate in general through this video conference. The article states that while the students “have adapted to the blended model, they do say they want more time with their teacher face to face” (DeNisco, 2013, p. 56). She continued to say that students have to be more disciplined and responsible to be successful in this environment. However, when she did get to see them face to face she found them to be more productive since they value that additional time with her. This specific example of blended learning within a district in Ohio showed how a school was using the learning environment to further students’ education. While the budget was shrinking the district was able to still teach this curriculum due to this environment.

**Background of the Problem**

Within the blended learning context described in the previous section, much of the research on blended learning focused on the different types of blended learning models (Ferriman, 2013) and how the students responded in the blended environment. Despite that,
Ferriman’s (2013) study sought to focus on the teachers working in blended learning environments. Researchers have spent the majority of their time looking at the students in blended learning and stating that “Evaluation of the effectiveness of distance learning should focus mainly on students’ academic performance and their feedback on their learning experiences” (Thapliyal, 2014, p. 60). The research continued to focus on the students’ academic performance and their opinions on their learning experience. Having said that, what about the teachers that are creating these learning experiences? What about the teachers that are supporting the students in their academic performance? The research focused on the students and did not answer the previous questions in relation to the teachers that were working in these environments. Due to these unanswered questions, this study will attempt to move the focus from students to the teachers within the blended environment. By completing this study it will allow administration, teachers, and other stakeholders to see what is and is not working for current blended education teachers.

The background of this research will define blended learning and how teachers describe their jobs, it will look at strengths and weaknesses that the teachers perceive from working in the blended environment and it will try to determine how education programs should better prepare teachers for jobs in a blended school.

**Definition of Blended Learning**

The National Education Association, NEA, defines blended learning as face-to-face instruction that is combined with technology (“Blended Learning”, 2015, n.p.). The Ohio Council for Community Schools referenced Senate Bill 316 in their 2011-2012 annual report to the Ohio Department of Education. According to Senate Bill 316, blended learning is “the delivery of instruction in a combination of time in a supervised physical location away from
home and online delivery whereby the student has some element of control over time, place, path or pace of learning” (“2011-2012 Annual Report”, 2012, p. 27). Blended learning combines face-to-face and non-face-to-face settings for students. Diaz and Brown (2010) claim that “blended learning provides the flexibility to address a broad range of curricular and institutional needs, opportunities, and goals” (p. 4). Allowing students to take their learning into their own hands they become owners of their education and future. Students typically have “30-79%” of their content delivered to them online (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 7). This content is typically delivered through online lessons and discussions. Students are expected to complete much of their course work on their own through their course management system (CMS) programs (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

When defining blended learning it is also important to understand the different models of blended learning. There are six main models of blended learning. Those six models are known as: face-to-face driver, rotation, flex, online lab, self-blend, and online driver (Ferriman, 2013). The face-to-face driver is most similar to a traditional environment. The teacher still delivers most of the curriculum with the assistance of a computer for supplementing material. Rotation provides students with a schedule that requires them to rotate between their online learning and face-to-face classroom time. The flex model requires the curriculum to be presented to the students through some online platform and then teachers are provided for face-to-face support. An online lab will use the online platform for courses but students are completing them in a traditional environment. Students in an online lab are most likely taking traditional classes still. Self-Blend works to supplement the courses that the traditional high school provides for the students. It allows them to take additional classes online while also taking the required curriculum. Finally, the online driver model provides students with the curriculum online while
the students attend face-to-face meetings (Ferriman, 2013). It is important to understand the different learning models that are being implemented under the term blended learning because each could create different ideas that are populated by the teachers. This study will focus on the rotation model where, based on the course, the students rotate between the online learning and face-to-face learning.

The Ohio Blended Learning Survey delivered in 2015 provided additional information on four identified models (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015). According to this survey blended learning is either done in a rotation, a-la-carte, enriched virtual of flex model. The rotation model focuses on students rotating between online learning and the face-to-face teacher. The rotation model also incorporates teachers that are “Flipping.” The a-la-carte mode focuses on the student’s ability to supplement their courses. Students are able to take additional courses with an online teacher. The enriched virtual model focuses more on independent study. These students complete their courses online and then they meet their teacher at a physical campus. Finally, the flex model allows students to customize their learning by getting support from face-to-face teachers while completing the bulk of their work in a physical building but online (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015).

**Blended Learning Environment**

Blended learning requires students and teachers to interact with technology. Blended learning creates its own environment based on the type of program it chooses to follow such as the a-la carte model or the rotation model described earlier. Students that transition from a traditional setting, where the teacher directs them in their learning, to a blended environment, where students are more self-directed, have to learn how to manage the technology that they are
interacting with in order to be successful. This means that a teacher needs to teach them how to be more self-directed and responsible for their own learning.

There are many differences in the roles of the traditional teacher versus the blended learning teacher. In *Reimagining Teaching in a Blended Classroom* (2014) the traditional teacher is described as having one main role whereas the blended learning teacher is a researcher and developer, an integrator, and a guide. Since blended learning is still new the teacher has to pilot new approaches and material. They have to change curriculum and delivery of that curriculum based on the success and failure of the piloted approaches. As an integrator they have to take what they already know and what already exists and “create best-fit learning pathways” (“Reimagining Teaching in a Blended Classroom”, 2014, p. 2). As a guide blended learning teachers are designing, differentiating, and adapting the curriculum and instruction at the same time as their students are learning. They have to adjust the aforementioned pathway based on the data and the results they are receiving. This means teachers need to be trained to be more independent in their classrooms and decision making, they have to be creative to find new ways to try things and they have to know how to use a computer and manage the different technologies that are available (“Reimagining Teaching in a Blended Classroom”, 2014).

Great educators all share similar competencies. Due to blended learnings ability to create personalized instruction for their students they need to be able to manage all of the competencies with the same level of skill together. Some of these competencies include “planning, classroom management, collection, analysis and effective use of data, collaboration, risk taking and content expertise” (“Reimagining Teaching in a Blended Classroom”, 2014, p. 7).

Planning comes in to play when thinking about long-term goals. Since teachers need to be willing to differentiate the material so seamlessly teachers need to be readily available to
change while still working towards the overall goal for the semester. Classroom management ties in closely with the differentiation skills of blended learning teachers. Since students can be working on different things at the same exact time the teacher needs to know how to manage several learning arrangements like independent, small, and large group settings. Due to the online aspect of blended learning environments and the use of technology there is more data readily available for teachers. They need to learn how to read the data that is provided and then use it in their classrooms. Traditional teachers typically work in their classroom with their students; however, blended teachers are thrust into collaborative roles due to the different roles that they play. This means it is important for them to know when to ask for help, to share their own successes and failures and to constantly be involved in what other teachers and staff members are doing in their buildings. Many people don’t share in their failures but it is important for others to know what is happening and this is one way that risk-taking ties in as a significant skill for blended teachers. Teachers have to try new things and be willing to admit when they are not working so that they can change things. When trying something new there is a risk that it will fail miserably which is why it is important to accept that and make considerate modifications throughout the process. Teachers cannot just give up when it’s not working. The last competency that this research focused on was the expertise required for the content the teachers teach. Teachers need to know their content so they can readily answer questions from students that can be working on different aspects of their given curriculum (“Reimagining Teaching in a Blended Classroom”, 2014).

**Strengths of Blended Learning**

Blended learning has a variety of strengths which is one reason the statistics show an increase in blended environments. In this section the research will focus on three main strengths
of blended learning. The first strength is the benefits of the learning environment compared to traditional and online environments. The second strength is the available curriculum that is offered to students. The final strength of blended learning is the increase in personalized learning.

**Learning Environment Benefits**

A blended learning environment combats the ineptness of the learning environment that is online learning on its own and traditional learning on its own. Traditional learning “is filled into a limited time period” (Kazu & Demirkol, 2014, p. 79). This prevents students from really partaking in an enriched classroom environment. A purely online environment “limits the interaction between the learners,” (p. 79) this prevents students from interacting with peers and teachers (Kazu & Demirkol, 2014). Blended learning environments take the best from both the traditional and online learning models and create an environment that allows both to shine.

A traditional classroom teacher watches students learning directly. The virtual teacher relies directly on what they can see through the technology they are using. A teacher can see what a student types in the chat pods but would be unable to determine if they were working on something else at the same time. In virtual classes, classroom teachers have limited access to students. This might make it more difficult to build relationships with students.

Another worry that online teachers might have is getting their students to attend. In a traditional setting a student would walk into a classroom and participate in the lesson the teacher was presenting to them. On the other hand, if a student is in an online class how do they judge attendance for their students? One technical college helped to define attendance through their “Attendance Policies for Online Students” (2014). They defined it as “active participation in the course as described in the individual course syllabus” (“Attendance Policies for Online
Students”, 2014, p.1). Based on this definition, a student shouldn’t just be turning in assignments they need to be enthusiastically partaking in their classes in order to truly be attending the course. This definition can be transitioned into the blended learning environment in regards to the high school students attending their online classes. Since the students in blended environments are required to attend some sort of face-to-face sessions it helps to verify attendance and participation.

**Online Curriculum Benefits**

A blended learning environment would have the same goals as any other school: to create an environment that supports students’ success and growth. There are certain staples that come with creating that environment. For example, within a school there should be textbooks for students to take knowledge from but in a blended environment they typically use online curricula. Teachers must learn how to interact with the online curricula so they can determine how to use it within the classrooms. This has the potential to create positive growth within the classrooms because you can individualize instruction, engage students through audiovisuals, and provide students with challenging content (Olthouse, 2011).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, an achievement gap “occurs when one group of students outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant” (“NAEP”, 2015, n.p.). Through the use of online curricula blended environments can help bridge that gap. Programs are funded to offer different curriculum to students online in order to help bridge this gap like how the University of California offers Advanced Placement courses to students and the Iowa Online Advanced Placement Academy does the same thing (Olthouse, 2011).
One specific school in Massachusetts called Revere High School won the 2014 High School Gold Award at the National Center for Urban School Transformation (Donohue, 2014). RHS started to implement blended learning and went from a poorly performing school to a outscoring “the state average on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System test… dropout rate[s] fell to 2.1 percent… attendance rate climbed to 95 percent…” (Donohue, 2014, p. 1). Teachers started to incorporate more technology and even used web-based devices like iWalkthrough to observe, share classroom activities, receive feedback, observe other’s classes and find areas for development. Teachers didn’t have to wait to be observed by their superior and instead were able to help each other which creates more knowledge of their personal teaching abilities. Teachers used other online platforms to “endorse the philosophical premise that learning can take place anywhere and at any time” (Donohue, 2014, p. 1). Due to the changes created within the school at RHS the community now sees this school as an equalizer. Redesigning their educational system allowed this school to close the previous achievement gap.

By offering teachers more options with curriculum it also supports them in creating individualized and personalized education for their students. They are able to offer them harder reading levels if the work is too easy or take it down to their level if it is too hard at the current level. U.S. Department of Education data supports the need for additional curriculum availability for courses when they report that “…only 50% of high schools offer calculus, 63% offer physics, and 81% off Algebra II…worse for minority students, as only 74% of high schools… offer Algebra II” (Murin, Gemin, Watson, Pape, & Vashaw, 2012, p. 59). Teachers were able to know where their students were and quickly provide them with the instruction they need. Nonetheless, this meant they needed to be trained properly on how to differentiate and how to determine where students were academically on a personal level.
The other idea that was brought up earlier was the engagement component. Olthouse (2011) described how it was easier to get students engaged in the online curriculum because they were provided with audiovisuals which prompted them to continue moving forward. Students of the twenty-first century have grown up using technology and playing games “Online curricula can offer them educational experiences that they are familiar with and are excited about” (Olthouse, 2011, p. 1).

According to an online survey, online and blended learning is used mostly by students with special circumstances like chronic illnesses, disabilities, and athletes and is also used more in urban districts (Powell et al., 2011). This means this environment is providing them with opportunities that they didn’t have previously. It allows the curriculum to come to them and meets their needs that are currently preventing them from attending a traditional school. The online curricula can be very beneficial as long as the stakeholders are willing to use them.

An additional benefit to the online curricula is how often it can be updated with newer information. An article on the benefits of an online curriculum focused on how educators are spending so much money on making sure that their schools have appropriate access to the Internet. One specific curriculum that was offered was called Fundamental Math and it is accessible wherever someone has access to the Internet. This program supports teachers by tracking their students’ progress and providing a lot of additional support in math. Programs like this can be updated constantly in order to provide new supports for students and teachers (“Benefits of an Online Curriculum, 2001, n.p.)

**Personalized Learning**

As previously discussed, the online curricula creates more opportunities for personalized learning. However, the entire blended learning concept can also support the students’ more
personally. Traditionally students have been promoted based on their birthdays, their attendance in classes and reaching some sort of minimum achievement. According to the Digital Learning Report Card, from 2014, those standards and expectations for promotion may not create the right pace for each individual student. This then means teachers are working with students that are “frustrated, disengaged and unmotivated” (“Digital Learning Report Card 2014, 2014, p. 16). To combat this issue digital learning promotes more personalized learning. Personalized learning allows students the ability to “customize their education using digital content through an approved provider” (“Digital Learning Report Card 2014, 2014, p. 7).

Students are able to move on once they have shown that they understand the material and can show mastery. The accountability within the digital environment is then based off the students learning (“Digital Learning Report Card 2014, n.d., p. 7). Personalized learning requires more attention and digital learning can give teachers the opportunity to provide more instruction and help for students. When students are placed in charge of showing their mastery to move on it allows them to spend as much time as they need on material. Teachers are then able to provide more “…one-on-one instruction and mentoring…” (“National Education Technology Plan”, 2016, p. 14). This additional support helps to create a more customizable education for each of the students.

Digital learning supports personalized learning by removing typical time constraints. Instead of only learning when you are in a school building students are able to access their curriculum at any time (“Digital Learning Report Card 2014”, n.d.). This makes blended learning really student-centered. Teachers still have to set the expectations but the digital aspect allows them to adapt to the student needs creating a very personalized learning environment.

Challenges of Blended Learning
While there is strength in blended learning there are also challenges. Blended learning is a relatively new idea which means there are some problems that still need to be worked out. Determining the best way to utilize the environment with limited time with students face-to-face while also getting them to do their work online, figuring out all of the additional skills needed to succeed in the blended learning environment and working with technology are a few of the challenges in blended learning.

**Learning Environment Challenges**

Students are distracted. Learners have a lot of different demands on them like family, work, and many other social responsibilities (Lotrecchiano, McDonald, Lyons, Long, & Zajiceck-Farber, 2013). In a blended environment students are provided technology and expected to focus solely on their courses. Unfortunately, there are a lot of things out there to distract them.

Students need to be invested in their learning environment. This means a teacher needs to create an environment that allows students to become devoted. They need to create a community of students that want to stay focused and participate in the lessons. In the traditional classroom teachers are able to see everything a student is doing when they are in their classroom. In a blended environment teachers may not see their students every single day but they still need to create an environment that keeps their students motivated and willing to put simple distractions like cell phones down.

There are many authors who have specific views on how to make a student feel invested in a classroom. Bucholz and Sheffler (2009) wrote a study that stated “the type of classroom environment that a teacher creates and encourages can either increase or decrease a student’s ability to learn and feel comfortable as a member of the class” (2009, p. 2). This means it is
important for the teacher to create an environment that gets students to want to attend and be actively engaged. So, it is important for teachers to be trained to create this highly engaged blended environment to be successful.

**Additional Skills Needed**

Students in blended learning models are provided with more opportunities to be flexible. This flexibility allows students to submit assignments outside of the traditional face-to-face class times (Lotrecchiano, McDonald, Lyons, Long, & Zajiceck-Farber, 2013). However, with this flexibility it is important to have students that can regulate and motivate themselves to complete the assignments and lessons. If students come to a blended environment without these skill sets it is important for teachers to figure out ways to teach them those skills.

In blended learning the teachers do not only focus on the content they have to deliver. Instead teachers also need to focus on “learner development and knowledge-building… to meet such demands” (Lotrecchiano, McDonald, Lyons, Long, & Zajiceck-Farber, 2013, p. 1727). One idea to help teachers focus on gaining these outside skills is the Self-Determined Learning Model of Instruction. This “is a model of teaching designed to enable teachers to teach students to become self-regulated problem-solvers, to self-direct instruction toward self-selected goals, and to gain enhanced self-determination” (Agran & Wehmeyer, 2000, p. 353). This means teachers are teaching students to create their own learning goals, determine how they will reach those goals and then keep track of their progress towards reaching those goals. In a blended environment it is very important for students to be able to do all three of these things in order to succeed.

In a blended learning environment face-to-face sessions should coordinate with the online sessions. Rob Kelly (2013) stated that in order to create a successful blended environment the
face-to-face and online sessions “… need to be integrated by taking into account the learning objectives and…deliberately linking what occurs in each…” (p. 1). Students are expected to keep up with the pace so that the face-to-face sessions can reinforce the information that was provided to them in their online sessions. If teachers are not able to link the two modes of blended learning students may not be able to view these as a merged course and instead they might see the course as irrelevant (Kelly, 2013). If teachers do not know how to teach these skills while also teaching the content and students cannot pick them up it can be difficult to keep up with the blended learning environment.

It is important to understand the expectations of blended learning in order to fully integrate oneself into the environment. Aside from creating an engaging environment and teaching students to be self-regulated and self-motivated everyone that participates in blended learning needs to understand everything that goes in to a blended environment. It should be expected that a new learning model will require extra time and training. Blended learning environments require faculty to not only understand how to work in the face-to-face environment but to also interact with the online aspect. If a teacher has never taught online they may struggle “with the demand for increased time-management” (Lotrecchiano, McDonald, Lyons, Long, & Zajiceck-Farber, 2013, p. 1729).

**Technology**

Every student deserves to have a quality education and “in the 21st century, a high-quality education must include digital learning” (“National Education Technology Plan”, 2016, p. 13). Technology is very important in a blended setting since the majority of the work is completed online. Implementing technology in a classroom requires some form of “high-speed connectivity
and devices that are available to teachers and students when they need them” (“National Education Technology Plan”, 2016, p. 3).

When incorporating the technology it is really important that all involved are trained on how to use it correctly. One of the key challenges for incorporating technology in the classroom is the “lack of adequate, ongoing professional development for teachers who are required to integrated new technologies…” (Nagel, 2013, p. 1). According to Donohue (2014) “Revere High School (RHS) went from a low-performing school… to winning the 2014 High School Gold Award at the National Center for Urban School Transformation” (p. 1). In order to make this transformation the teachers had to learn some new skills and two of these skills were the ability to use an iPad and SMARTBoards. The teachers at RHS were also required to understand the flipped classroom through programs like Schoology and PowerSchool (Donohue, 2014, p. 1). Teachers need to be prepared to use the technology so they can then support the students in using the same tools. If teachers are not properly trained then the technology will not be used the way it should be.

Some people are also resistant to change when it comes to technology. There could be multiple reasons for this. One might be that they don’t understand how to use the technology. This problem would relate back to the professional development being offered. Another reason for this resistance is that some “teachers and school leaders often see technological experimentation as outside the scope of their job descriptions” (Nagel, 2013, p. 1).

Another challenge is the cost of incorporating technology in classes. In 2015, McCandless reported that the higher institutions in the United States would spend 6.6 billion dollars on IT (p. 1). While K-12 is not as high it is close with 4.7 billion dollars in 2015. While
technology has the possibility of lasting for a while there are still charges like upkeep and updates.

**Purpose of Study**

Upasna Thapliyal (2014) stated “students want to be able to supplement, and even replace, conventional learning experiences with distance education experiences” (p. 63). He continues to inform readers that the reason for this is mostly due to “where and when they learn” (Thapliyal, 2014, p. 63). Blended and online learning environments are schools of choice. This means that the students chose to attend that environment probably due, in large, to the ability to pick the ‘where and when.’

This purpose of this study is to learn how teachers in blended learning environments define blended learning and their work in this setting. This research will create a definition of blended learning from the high school teacher’s perspective by determining what they consider their job in this setting. This research will focus on the teacher perceived strengths and weaknesses of teaching in a blended environment. Finally, this research is going to look at how education programs have prepared teachers for a job in a blended environment and what areas need more support. In the end, this research switches the focus from students in blended to the teachers working with those students in an attempt to fill the gap.

**Research Questions**

This research study will focus on answering three main questions. These questions will provide insight on blended learning from the teacher’s perspective. The three research questions are as follows:

1. How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?
2. What are the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in a blended learning environment?

3. How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?

Answering the research questions will help define blended learning for the teacher, it will help institutions to better prepare teachers for blended learning environments and it will focus on the teachers overall opinions and views on blended learning within their specific environment.

Rationale & Significance of the Study

The rationale of this study is to focus on teachers working in blended environments. The researcher hopes to provide more information about the teacher’s perspectives of these newer environments. Blended learning is a new alternative to traditional teaching. However, it is important that the research starts to focus on how teachers in this environment define their job and expectations, what they think the strengths and weaknesses of their job is and how they believe they could have been trained better to work in this environment.

The researcher hopes to make contributions in three main areas. First, the researcher will attempt to determine how teachers in blended learning environments define their work. She will look at what their definition of blended learning based on their specific environment. The researcher will also look at what they are expected to do on a daily basis to be considered a blended education teacher.

Secondly, the researcher is going to determine the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in a blended environment. By discussing the teachers current environment and then asking them about blended learning this study should be able to determine how the environment impacts them.
Third, the researcher is going to look at how teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments. Teacher’s previous educational job experiences and education programs could influence their current job in blended learning. Even so, by looking at their strengths and weaknesses it allowed the researcher to make recommendations for future education programs.

By looking at all three of the aforementioned ideas the researcher hopes to paint a clear picture of blended learning from each of the participants’ classrooms and overall environments. Dewey was quoted stating that “learning emerged from meaningful experiences, where students join together in a social context, such as a classroom, to manipulate materials and ideas” (Comey, 2009, p. 8). Based on this belief, teachers need to create student interaction to support them in their learning. By creating this picture teachers should be able to determine what is working and where things need to be changed to get students more involved.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework utilized in this study is ethnography. Ethnography can be traced back to Herodotus who was known as the father of history. He spent his time documenting the different practices of people during his time. Later, ethnographers focused on providing “accounts of cultural annihilation, slavery, and torture” (Clair, 2003, p. 5). Gerhard Friedrich Muller is considered to be the father of ethnography. He spent ten years collecting data in order to create maps of Siberia. During that time he collected data on their clothing, rituals, and cultures which later became known as ethnographic research (ZAO, 2017). Ethnographic research was the anthropologists attempt to “salvage cultural diversity” when the dominant culture was changing the subordinate culture (Claire, 2003, p. 8).
Ethnography focuses on representing a culture (Parthasarathy, 2008). Edward Tyler defines culture as “the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man…” (Claire, 2003, p. 7). The culture, for this study, is the blended learning environment and specifically the teachers in blended learning. Ethnography looks at the culture and attempts to find themes. These themes could relate to patterns from different people in the culture. It could also focus on relationships.

Ethnographies create an emphasis on research that documents and portrays “the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 505). Hancock and Algozzine (2011) stated an ethnography is successful when it “provides information about and insight into unique cultural settings” (p. 35). Ethnography wants the researchers to make sense of the patterns they find within the wider picture. It is important for ethnographic researchers to “make sense of a place and a case in relation to the entire social setting and all social relationships” (Parthasarathy, 2008, p. 1). They go on to further state that the ethnographic case study is meant to “explore the observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life…” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011, p. 35).

Since ethnography focuses on explaining a culture the data collection typically relates to the people within the culture. It can be taken from “diverse experiences, encounters, relationships, observations, and conversations” (Parthasarathy, 2008, p. 1). In order to obtain this information the researcher typically relies on participant observation (Parthasarathy, 2008). Participant observation occurs when the researcher “becomes a part of the group they are studying in order to collect data and understand a social phenomenon or problem” (Crossman, 2016, p. 1). The participant wants to obtain a thorough understanding of the culture they are researching.
There are advantages and disadvantages for using an ethnographic research study. Some of the advantages that promoted the use of this particular data collection method focus on the direct contact with the participants in the culture. Ethnographic research allows for direct observation instead of relying on other reports (University of Hertfordshire, n.d.). This also promotes the validity of the study since the researcher is involved in all collection and experiences. Another advantage that prompted the use of the ethnography is the different participants involved allows for more than one account for the different understandings of their specific environment (University of Hertfordshire, n.d.).

While these are some of the advantages there were also some disadvantages that arise during ethnographic research studies. One of the biggest concerns for this specific study focused on the time requirement needed to complete an ethnographic study. The collection of data takes a lot of time depending on how in-depth the researcher plans on going. However, an ethnographic study also requires additional time for coding all of the data and determining what that information states. Finally, the participants themselves can create a disadvantage for an ethnographic research study. Participants have to allow you access to them, they have to share private information with you, and they have to be open to what might come out based on this access. The researcher is traditionally invited into this culture but as the observer it doesn’t always create the same environment since there the researcher is an outsider in the environment (University of Hertfordshire, n.d.)

In the end, the researcher believes that an ethnographic data collection will help create a holistic and intrinsic case study that allows us to learn more about this environment. Through the collection of their everyday experiences in their setting this research will attempt to paint a picture of what blended teaching really is and what those teachers work with on a daily basis.
Definition of Terms

Blended Learning. The National Education Association defines blended learning as a combination of face-to-face learning with online technology. NEA specifically stated blended learning is an “integrated instructional approach in which a student learns… at a supervised physical location away from home and through online delivery where the student has control over at least some aspects of the time and place of accessing the curriculum” (“NEA Policy Statement on Digital Learning”, 2013, n.p.). The Christensen Institute breaks the blended learning definition into three parts,

“1. At least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path and/or pace;

2. at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home;

3. and the modalities along each student’s learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience” (Christensen Institute, 2014, p. 1).

Brick and Mortar School: This refers to the actual school building that the students are required to attend. This building must be “‘supervised’ and take place ‘away from home’ (Staker & Horn, 2012, p. 3).

Course Management System (CMS). A system that allows classrooms to implement web facilitated courses, like incorporating web pages for classes, or that supports the online curriculum for the online or blended classrooms (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Online Learning. A learning environment where teachers and students do not meet face-to-face. A “course where most or all of the content is delivered online” (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 7).
School Choice. Offers parents the ability to choose the “best educational environments for their children” (National School of Choice, 2017, p. 1). These can occur within a traditional public or private school, a charter school, magnet school, online, and through homeschooling. Loomis Academy is considered a public charter school.

Traditional Learning. Traditional learning is defined as a class that has no technology incorporated into their teaching (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Limitations

The main limitation for this study is the fact that the bulk of the results will come from personal views. The study will rely on teacher descriptions of what is going on and how they feel about their environment. This will limit how well it can be transferred to other settings because of the participants’ personal views but that doesn’t mean it can’t be transferred. This qualitative study depends on the responses from the participants to be honest and my presence has the possibility of impacting their responses (Anderson, 2010).

Another limitation comes from the students that the teachers have to teach. The study will focus on high school teachers working with students that left their home school district and chose to go to a school of choice. Students may have bounced from school to school and have had problems within other schools as well. They are not happy at their current school because you don’t leave a place that you enjoy. Instead, they are dissatisfied with the traditional education and choose to leave their public school for an alternative education (CCSA, n.d.). They may not ‘fit’ in this learning model. This means that the content could also be affecting their desire to participate in their learning environment. The teachers views may differ based on the students they are working with.
An additional limitation that arose while working on this study surrounded the current management company. The current management company, which will be known as Conrad Education, started Loomis Academy but they are currently in their last year of ownership. After five years, they have decided to remove themselves as the management company are all of the seven schools are working on finding a different management company. At the current time, three of the seven schools have already transitioned to another company. Last year a company, which will be referred to as Pierce Education, came in with the intentions of taking over for Conrad Education. At that time the Loomis Academy schools were transitioning over to Pierce Education and were required to make difficult choices to meet the given budget. One of the decisions was to eliminate some of the staff. This year the Loomis Academy Schools are running with fewer staff members to get the same jobs done. While this made completing the job harder they added insult to injury by backing out of the proposed deal in late 2016. Now the Loomis Academy Schools are scrambling to find new management before the year ends with Conrad Education. This is a limitation due to the amount of additional work and stress that has been added to the participants that were interviewed and observed.

Finally, another limitation focused on the research study conducted. There were four teachers that agreed to participate. All four participated in the check-in meetings and the interviews. They were also given an opportunity to share recorded lessons, lesson plans, schedules and any other documents that supported their teaching within the blended environment. However, due to the school’s calendar, the time constraints for the participants and their personal schedules there was not enough time to conduct observations between all four participants. The observations only occurred between Teacher A and Teacher B. Also, Teacher C was the only participant that provided additional materials, lesson plans.
Reseacher Bias

My research was conducted on teacher’s opinions on the blended learning environment. I was working in the environment that I was writing about which has a possibility to create a rather large bias on my part. Working in the environment was not the only bias I had though. I was also a teacher so it was easy to relate to issues that came up during interviews with other teachers. My research was strictly qualitative and was completed through interviews, observations, and data collection with teachers that were currently working in a blended environment. It would be easy to judge teachers based on their true opinions of the learning environment and argue based on how I would do something in the situation.

In order to combat my biases, I planned on being very open with the chosen teachers I would conduct this study on. The majority of the study was based on teacher opinions and personal feelings and I felt the best way to keep my bias out of it was to listen to what they said and gave very little input on their responses. I had interview questions planned out so I could get the responses from the teachers on all of the different topics. I also listened to the points they brought up and asked them to elaborate on those ideas.

Since I conducted four mini-case studies I looked at each teacher separately. I believed by having a small group of teachers available for interviewing it also allowed me to really remove my bias from the conversation because it was harder to generalize the data and instead focused strictly on them. This allowed me to get the closest to their true feelings. I wanted them to know up front that I wanted their honest opinions and I think being honest with them about my expectations helped to get realistic and unbiased answers.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to recognize the research already done on blended learning from the perspective of the teacher. This chapter will explain the search strategies that provided the following research. Then it will define blended learning and provide evidence on the blended learning environment. The review will focus on what blended learning is from the perspective of the teachers. It will also look at some strengths of blended learning and some weaknesses of blended learning.

Search Strategy

The review of the literature was conducted through the University of Findlay library search engine and Google Scholar. Through the University of Findlay search engine the researcher went through Education Source to find the articles on blended learning. In an attempt to find a wide variety of sources there were many terms searched. To begin with “blended learning” was searched to determine an avenue for further research. From there, the terms become more specific: “attendance in blended learning” and “student perceptions on blended learning” and “teacher perceptions on blended learning.” These four terms pulled up multiple articles that then allowed the research to expand.

The extent of the research helped support the need for this research in general. The majority of the research that was found focused on the students taking the blended course with limited information available on the teachers working in the environment. Most of the research that was found on blended learning came from researchers that focused on college level courses where students were typically making the decision to participate in the blended course, whereas other research looked at classes outside of the United States of America. One issue with the research is that the majority of the research did not focus on an entire school. Instead it focused
on individual courses or content areas. Some of the researchers did a comparison study between face-to-face learning versus blended learning in that specific course. However, the majority of the research focused on student perceptions of the blended environment and not a lot on the teachers’ views. The review of this research provided more information on the students with the understanding that that information would be used by teachers to create their environments.

**Blended Learning Definition**

Researchers defined blended learning as a mix between face-to-face (F2F) and non-face-to-face activities. Most researchers agreed that some of the activities happen simultaneously whereas some happen asynchronously. Many of these activities allowed students to have a flexible learning environment to meet their individual needs and goals while also meeting the institution’s needs. The online aspect allowed students to have some control over when they did the work and even where they did it (Diaz & Brown, 2010; Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2013). Christensen, Horn, and Staker (2013) defined blended learning as an education program that allowed students to learn online but to also spend time in a brick-and-mortar supervised location that provided students with control over “…time, place, path and/or pace…” (p. 9). Jason Kleber (2015) claimed the Clayton Christensen Institute for Disruptive Innovation has the clearest definition:

Blended learning is a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning, with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace; at least in part in a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home; and the modalities along each student’s learning path within a course or subject are connected to provide an integrated learning experience. (p. 20-21).
Schools that can combine the traditional aspects (having a school that students are required to attend on a regular basis, having face-to-face teachers working with students in their classes and an ability for students to get that support from staff in person) and the online aspects (students ability to decide when they work on certain projects and where they work on them, giving them a choice in their educational needs, are what truly make up a blended environment) is the main difference between the traditional and the blended environment. A school cannot just simply add a computer to a class and assume that makes it blended instead that would be a web facilitated classroom. The online aspect had to be accessible and worthwhile for the students. Students typically have “30-79%” of their content delivered to them online in the blended environment (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 7). This also meant that at least 20% of their schooling was done with a teacher. The teacher needed to know how to use the different curriculum, how to engage with the online aspect, and to use the strengths of blended learning to get through the challenges they face.

Meanwhile, while trying to define blended learning it is sometimes helpful to know what blended learning is not, in order to help eliminate misconceptions. Kleber (2015) provided six different areas for what blended learning was not. The first, focused on not just including technology. Blended learning did not include technology integration at the minimum level as a type of substitute to previous learning. Secondly, it wasn’t a “‘flipped’-only classroom where the students primarily access new information online at home and work live at school” (Kleber, 2015, p. 21). A blended learning environment doesn’t separate the teacher and the student throughout their learning process. It does not ignore the personal learning needs of the students. Students don’t have to have internet access outside of the school building to participate in blended learning. Finally, while blended learning is still considered a new learning environment
The influx of participation in online avenues allows everyone to learn new things whenever they want by clicking on the Internet, for example “YouTube, social media, forums, Web pages and apps” (Kleber, 2015, p. 21).

In conclusion, by combining all of the things blended learning is and blended learning is not allowed Kleber to come up with a simple definition: “blended learning is a student-driven, teacher-supported integration of technology, curriculum and differentiation for individual learning needs” (Kleber, 2015, p. 21). So, blended learning focuses on allowing students to really create their environment based on their individual education needs while the teacher provides them with additional support.

In summary, many researchers provided similar definitions for blended learning. In the end, most researchers agreed that blended learning takes the best of both the traditional and the online environments and combines them into one setting. Blended learning allowed students to have more control over their education by choosing when they do the work and where they do the work. In spite of that, they are not left on their own because they are required to come into a physical building where they get support from teachers that seamlessly integrate technology into their curriculum and the lessons that they teach. The first research question focused on defining blended learning from those that were working in that environment. As a researcher, seeing how others define blended learning prior to conducting the research provided a starting definition to work with.

**Blended Learning Environment**

There are many different strategies to provide an effective learning environment. Zaka (2013) completed her case study in an attempt to describe the use of the blended learning environment. The main question the study looked to answer was how blended teaching and
learning were implemented. However, while trying to answer that question Zaka also looked at the implications of implementation for the teachers, school leaders, students, and other educational stakeholders (Zaka, 2013).

Zaka’s case study looked at a school with an enrollment of about 750 students and 60 teachers. Through interviews conducted with the e-principal, school principal, six different teachers, groups of students and also observations of the blended class and a review of documents she found different advantages and challenges of the blended environment. Zaka primarily used a grounded theory for the data analysis. A primary analysis used codes and themes and continuous interrogation was applied and then Zaka used an ecological framework of change for a secondary analysis (Zaka, 2013).

Zaka’s case study focused on a small environment which limited the ability to generalize the data but she gave some very specific recommendations for the blended learning environment which was supported by the interviewee’s comments. She pushed for “effective partnerships among teachers, students, and parents” (Zaka, 2013, p. 12). By working together blended learning environments can create some specific strategies that will create a positive learning environment. One of the strategies presented was to gradually transition students from a traditional learning environment to a more independent environment. Teachers need to provide very specific explanations of learning goals so that they have clear expectations of their learning. In order to foster the aforementioned partnership, it is important to have communication between the parent and the teacher (Zaka, 2013). This means that teachers need to know how to promote that communication and to maintain it within this environment.

While communication between the parent and teacher is important, it is also important to keep all lines of communication open in order to determine what is and is not working. Wong,
Tatnall and Burgess (2014) completed a case study to determine the effectiveness of the blended learning classroom. When this paper was published it only focused on a portion of a research project that was ongoing. Even so, this framework focused on undergraduate students attending Victoria University over the course of two years. The primary data collected was through the use of surveys and interviews with students in an introductory accounting class. In order to increase student participation student surveys were limited to three pages. The survey focused on three different areas that allowed researchers to gain information on the students’ background, study preferences, and students’ learning experiences (Wong, Tatnall, & Brugess, 2014).

Throughout the two years that this case study was completed, various learning approaches were used to deliver the course content. One area of focus was on the intensity of the adoption of the blended learning options. Researchers referenced a continuum, shown below in Figure 1, that looked at the options for blended learning implantation that starts with no information and communications technologies, ICT, use compared to E-intensive where everything is “delivered and moderated online” (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014, p. 234). The continuum allows schools and those involved in blended learning to pick and choose their teaching methods. This gives options of choice because staff and administrators can combine different areas of the continuum.
The researcher wanted to focus on three areas that could affect the classroom. Those three areas were readiness, intensity, and the impact of blended learning (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014). Figure 2, below, is taken from their research to explain how readiness, intensity, and impact create their theoretical framework.
Readiness was defined as the “measure of the degree to which a country, nation or economy may be ready, willing or prepared to obtain benefits which arise from information and communications technologies” (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014, p. 236). This definition points out how important it is to not only be prepared to use the blended environment but for the stakeholders to also want to use the blended environment. These researchers referred to seven specific readiness criteria that a school should have before implementing this environment. They are as follows:

- Content readiness: availability of suitable materials;
- Cultural readiness: readiness to accept eLearning;
- Environmental readiness: readiness of the society and nation to accept eLearning;
- Financial readiness: willingness to spend the required funds;
• Learner readiness: level of time commitment, discipline and interest in eLearning;
• Management readiness: support of the institution for eLearning;
• Personnel readiness: existence of staff to support eLearning technical resources; and

This framework also focused on the intensity of adoption within the blended learning environment. This was difficult due to the lack of complete adoption of any one institution. Instead, the researchers noted that institutions picked and chose different elements in order to create the best environment for their specific stakeholders. This allows them to focus on both the “…human and non-human elements, and offers the notion of heterogeneity…” (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014, p. 238). However, the institution is able to choose how they adopt which provides them with options.

Finally, the researchers focused on the impact, or quality of learning, within the blended environment. They stated that it is the “students’ readiness that influences their intensity of adoption and thus the impact on their learning” (Wong, Tatnall, & Bugess, 2014, p. 238). The amount of time and the attitude while doing it is shown to impact the academic levels of the students. For example, if a student does not want to incorporate the technology aspect in their learning they are more likely to spend less time interacting with it and will perform worse than those that were constantly interacting with it (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014).

This framework was tested based on how a university adopted their blended learning program and could be adopted during multiple stages. Allowing someone to determine where they are most comfortable so that they can then pick a starting point for what is best for the
classroom. For example, if everyone was ready to begin blended learning you wouldn’t need to start at readiness and instead could move on to intensity of adoption (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014). On the other hand, if everyone is not ready to start working in the blended environment it is important to slow down; just because the university adopted the teaching approach didn’t mean that everyone was willing to start using it.

After determining how ready everyone is to create a blended learning environment it is important to determine how the school will implement it as well. Yapici and Akbayin (2012) stated that there is not a formula for establishing a well-blended learning environment that will work for everyone. By keeping this in mind, it helps the readers to understand that there is no specific strategy that will create a strict format for how to have a successful blended environment. Yapici and Akbayin continued to say that it is important to look at what makes the face-to-face environment successful and what makes the online environment successful. Once these strategies have been determined, combining them together will help create the best blended environment for the specific audience. These ideas tie in very closely with this research study because it focuses on four teachers working in similar environments but they all have their own way of defining their work. Each of these teachers will have different ideas for the best way to use their environment to help create an overarching idea of blended learning from the teachers perspective.

Another article *Time Spent, Workload, and Student and Faculty Perceptions in a Blended Learning Environment* (2015) completed a research study that evaluated not only the student perception of the blended environment but also the workload for the faculty involved (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif). This study defined blended learning as an integration of online and face-to-face. The environment “allows faculty members to meet learning objectives through learning
activities in a more flexible and convenient method than traditional teaching” (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif, 2015, p. 1). These researchers focused on the lack of data available on the workload requirements that were expected for the students and the teachers. The study took place between 2013–2014 at a Midwestern private university. This university created a blended environment by combining online lectures and face-to-face activities. The university also paired teachers up with a technology design expert which allowed the teachers to focus on the lessons and curriculum material while the technology expert focused on converting it to the online model.

The results showed that the students spent less time on the online lectures than the time allocated for them with a difference ranging from “12-22 minutes under the allocated time,” for three of the five lectures. (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif, 2015, p. 4). On the other hand, the other two lectures required the students to spend more time but it was not a significant difference. When students reported the time spent on the lectures they all “overestimated the time to completion by an average of 24.8 minutes per hour lecture” (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif, 2015, p. 4). It was found that the students would rather have an online lecture in reference to applying information, learning style, and scheduling. The survey also showed that students enjoyed the blended environment for the following reasons: convenience, interactive nature, self-directed learning, reinforcement of ideas and the feedback obtained (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif, 2015). The students also provided the following suggestions for how to improve the blended environment: difficulty of subject matter, design of the online lecture, quality of the video and sound, amount of time needed to complete and issues with access (Phillips, Schumacher & Arif, 2015).
The teachers “reported spending 15 hours updating the lecture content” (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif, 2015, p. 4). Despite that, the technology design experts “reported spending 68 hours converting the Power Point presentations into online modules” (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif, 2015, p. 4). The results from the majority of the faculty members stated one of the positive aspects of the online lectures was their ability to spend more time on higher learning even if it increased the workload for the teachers. Some of the teachers also commented on how the lectures “might be more convenient and attractive to students, as it allowed them to work at their own pace” (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif, 2015, p. 5). The disadvantages from the teacher perspective focused on time and resources needed, consulting with others, and concern over technology issues (Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif, 2015).

In summary, this section focused on the actual environment that is created for student learning by the teachers and how that happens. The second research question asks about the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in the environment. One of the main concerns that was brought up throughout this section focused on the amount of work that is needed from the teachers involved in the environment. Prior to starting the actual school it is also important that the teachers and other staff members are open about implementing this type of learning and how they will implement it. Teachers also need to work closely with the online curriculum, they need to transition students from the traditional environment to the blended environment, and they need to have constant communication with everyone involved in their school.

**Strengths of Blended Learning**

With an increase in blended learning environments there is also an increase in research conducted in these environments. The following sections will focus on three of the strengths of
blended learning. The first strength will focus on increased achievement and satisfaction with the blended environment. Then the researcher will focus on how technology is being used as a learning tool. Finally, this will focus on the 21st century skills that are gained from blended environments.

**Increased Achievement and Satisfaction**

Umit Yapici and Hasan Akbayin (2012) focused on a 9th grade biology class that used the blended learning environment. They wanted to see if the blended learning could affect the achievement in that class. They looked at an experimental and a control group’s biology exams to determine if there was a difference between the traditional and blended environments in relation to the final test scores. The researcher’s expectations revolved around the ideas that their achievement levels and the students’ attitudes should develop when using the blended learning model. The researchers looked at 107 students that were attending Nevzat Ayaz Anatolian High School. The 107 students were not in the same classroom during the 2009-2010 school year. Students placed in the different groups were determined on a random basis so as not to sway the data. Some students did not participate leaving the researchers with 47 participants in the experimental group, blended environment, and 60 participants in the control group (Yapici & Akbayin, 2012).

The students completed a pre-test before they started working in their specific learning environments. The students in the experiment group were also trained on what blended learning was and what they were expected to do over the course of the eleven week class. They were also shown how to use the website and practiced working through it. Students were then given their specific expectations placed on them for participating in this blended experimental group. In the
control group the lessons were taught through face-to-face learning alone (Yapici & Akbayin, 2012).

The researchers then compared the pre-test to the students’ individual exam grade. The pre-test results showed that there was no significant difference between their achievement scores. After comparing the posttest scores for the two groups, there was a significant difference between the experimental and control group. The experimental group earned 25.11 compared to the control group's 19.08, meaning the activities completed within the blended environment were more effective than in the traditional classroom (Yapici & Akbayin, 2012).

Zaka explained how students are an obvious stakeholder in their education and they can promote change through many issues like their readiness to learn and their parent’s involvement (Zaka, 2013). However, it was important to keep in mind that the teacher, community, principals, and political organizations were all stakeholders in blended learning.

While focusing on the stakeholders it is important to understand more about the students that are enrolled in the blended learning environment. Wu, Tennyson and Hsia (2009) did exactly that when they had students complete a satisfaction survey on their environment. These researchers compiled a questionnaire from multiple sources in order to create a well-developed assessment for the students to take while also interviewing participants. While compiling the questionnaire and conducting the interviews the researchers focused on the social cognitive theory. The social cognitive theory was used to explore what determines student learning satisfaction (Wu, Tennyson, &Hsia, 2009). The social cognitive theory allowed researchers the ability to examine performance expectations and self-efficacy since both are cognitive factors that would determine student satisfaction. The researchers sent out 518 surveys, both paper and online copies, but only used 212 of the surveys due to the number returned and filled out to
When Wu, Tennyson, and Hsia (2009) looked at the results they created a research model that focused on how to reach learning satisfaction. This model shows how the different features of blended learning can be used to reach learning satisfaction for the students. They determined that student satisfaction was affected by “the interaction among cognitive, technological environment, and social environment factors” (Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2009, p. 162). They also noted that students’ performance expectations provided the most contribution for learning satisfaction. The data showed that the students need to have high expectations for the blended environment to have higher satisfaction so teachers and staff should help foster their belief in this program (Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2009). A conclusion “that technology alone does not cause learning to occur…human behavior as a reciprocal interplay” supports the need for maintained teacher-student relationships from the researchers (Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2009, p. 162).

Research done comparing the different courses offered have shown that the blended course work was more beneficial for students. More and more students are taking classes online. The National Education Association reported that half of the classes high school students take will be delivered online as soon as 2019 (“Blended Learning”, 2011, p. 1). This type of education is on the rise so it is imperative that more research is done to support the teachers in delivering the curriculum.

Wong, Tatnall and Burgess (2014) completed their case study to determine the effectiveness of the blended learning classroom. This research focused on an undergraduate class at Victoria University located in Australia. This research was performed because many students that were enrolling and participating in online education options still wanted the face-to-face option to be available to them. While looking at these areas they looked at a few research
questions. One research question focused on the intensity of blended learning, while the second focused on the students’ perceptions of the impact of the blended learning options. They found that thanks to the continuum of blended learning there were so many different ranges of teaching methods and this “suggested a positive change in student grades…” (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014, p. 234). While looking at the survey results the students completed over four semesters it is important to note that while the face-to-face options, lectures and tutorials, were both in the high 90% the live online tutorials was only in the low 40%. However, it is interesting to know that students thought recorded lectures were effective with 72% of the students adopting them (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014, p. 244). The authors question “can the reasons for lack of adoption of the online options be traced back to certain aspects of student readiness?” (Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess, 2014 p. 247). This leads the researcher back to the continuum that focuses on making sure the environment is ready before pushing the intensity and impact through the course.

Tseng and Walsh (2016) wrote Blended Versus Traditional Course Delivery Comparing Students’ Motivation, Learning Outcomes, and Preferences. This study focused on the students’ experiences and their perceptions while working in a traditional classroom and in a blended classroom. In order to determine the students’ motivation within the two environments the researchers used the ARCS model of motivation. ARCS stands for attention, relevance, confidence and satisfaction (Tseng & Walsh, 2016). The researchers then asked four research questions. Research question one asked if there was a significant difference between the two courses on students’ level of learning motivation. Research question number two asked if there was a significant differences between the two courses on students’ learning outcomes. Research question three asked if there was a significant difference between the two courses on the
students’ learning achievement. Research question number four asked about the student’s perceptions for the blended course (Tseng & Walsh, 2016).

Two teachers were selected based on their teaching schedule; each taught the same course but one was face-to-face and the other was a blended course. There were 26 students that completed the survey from both the blended and from the traditional course. The results showed that students in the blended course had a “significantly higher overall learning motivation than students in the traditional course” (Tseng & Walsh, 2016, p. 47). The blended course had an M of 3.81 while the traditional course only had an M of 3.51. The standard deviation for the blended course was a .61 and a .43 for the traditional course. The results also showed that the blended course scored higher on their finals with a mean score of 84.49 versus 82.13 but there was no significant difference. Research question four looked at the perceptions of the blended students and the results showed a high satisfaction rate. More specifically “they found blended classes to be more convenient because they do not have to meet in class as often” (Tseng & Walsh, 2016, p. 48). Even with less time in the classroom student’s still reported having enough time and contact with their teacher. After collecting and analyzing all of the data the findings showed “significant differences on the Confidence and Satisfaction categories and overall learning motivation between the blended and traditional courses, with blended learners reporting higher levels of learning motivation” (Tseng & Walsh, 2016, p. 48).

The research in this section provided insight on the increased achievement and satisfaction that student’s felt while working in the blended environment. Research question two for this study focused on the teacher-perceived strengths of blended learning and increased achievement and satisfaction for their students is a strength for good teachers. This section provided data on how blended groups were outscoring traditional environments on final
assessments. It also explained how imperative it is for student’s to have high expectations within this environment and that teachers need to be able to foster those high standards to promote that high level of satisfaction. This section is also important in reference to the third research question on how teacher education programs can better prepare teachers to work in the blended environment due to the increase in students moving towards the blended environment. With the expected growth of half of high school students taking some form of an online class, teachers need to know how to work in this environment and to be successful doing it. Teachers need to know how to continue to promote student confidence and satisfaction in these environments.

**Technology as a Learning Tool**

In a blended environment all participants are interacting with technology. This creates an increase in the use of technology as a learning tool to enhance the learning experience. Pinelopi Zaka (2013) wrote a case study on New Zealand secondary schools. Over 250 schools in New Zealand enrolled in different online classes through their Virtual Learning Network. Zaka stated that due to the government’s use of the Ultra-Fast Broadband in Schools initiative more schools are working with the blended approach to teaching. “…teachers implement online content to enhance their face-to-face classes, enabling students to experience blended web-enhanced learning” (Zaka, 2013, p. 1). The key word in the previous quote is enhanced. The blended environment is not meant to teach students on their own but instead find ways to make their learning better and more complete. The results from this case study on New Zealand schools advocates how blended learning does have a very direct effect on the learning experience of its students.

*Assessing the Acceptance of a Blended Learning University Course* focuses on the shift from traditional learning environments with the integration of Information and Communication
Technologies. The researchers stated that students’ personal beliefs and attitudes can and will affect their appropriate participation in the e-learning environments, which helps support the idea of creating high performance expectations from Wu et. al. (2009). The researchers used the TAM, technology acceptance model, and the TRA, theory of reasoned action to determine the users’ acceptance of the technology. TAM states that “the acceptance of an e-learning system could be assessed by examining the perceived usefulness and ease of use” (Tselios, Daskalakis, & Papdopoulou, 2011, p. 224). The goals of this study were to (a) investigate if the students’ perceptions of courses being offered in a blended environment were comparable to those being done in a strictly e-learning environment and (b) to look into the differences between said perceptions before and after participating in the blended environment ” (Tselios, Daskalakis, & Papdopoulou, 2011, p. 226).

The researchers looked at participants taking a course focused on ICT use at the University of Patras in Greece. The students had access to Moodle resources throughout the course. After compiling the data it was found that “perceived ease of use affects positively the attitude towards use with a significant relationship” (Tselios, Daskalakis, & Papdopoulou, 2011, p. 228). The data value was higher than a 0.5 which creates acceptable results. In the pre- and post- survey students stated that the ease of use and the usefulness of the Moodle were the main factors that pushed them to use it (Tselios, Daskalakis, & Papdopoulou, 2011).

Combining ICT, Information and Communication Technology and ESP, English for Specific Purposes, allowed researchers Chirimbu and Tafazoli (2014) to look at how they bridge a motivational gap at the University of Applied Science and Technology and the Islamic Azad University. They focused on “109 ESP students majoring in Hotel Management and Tourism” (Chirimbu & Tafazoli, 2014, p. 69). The results showed that the students felt that the tools
offered to them due to technology were a “highly effective medium for learning English language” (Chirimbu & Tafazoli, 2014, p. 70). In spite of that, 20% of the students stated they preferred the traditional tools. The researchers determined that in this setting the “results suggested that including technology-based tools into language classrooms is beneficial for language teaching” (Chirimbu & Tafazoli, 2014, p. 70).

Quyami et al. (2004) conducted a study that compared the traditional textbook method of teaching to the computer-assisted instruction. They looked at the performance of medical students pre-clinical for four different groups with one group being the controlled group. The researchers stated that “it is generally assumed that high quality, multimedia-based, computer-assisted training programmes will provide a more stimulating and realistic training environment…” (Quyami et al., 2004, p. 1081). Based on this assumption they created a hypothesis that the students that used the computer program would do better than those that did not use the program.

Quyarmi et al. (2004) recruited volunteers from two Japanese medical schools and accepted 99 participants. The participants were placed in four different groups; one provided only the text book, another group only had the computer program, a third group had both the text and the online program, finally the control group did not get any of the materials to use during the intervention. All participants were given a pretest, an intervention, and then a post-test.

One area of exploration for this study focused on students from different levels of achievement. The researchers wanted to know if they benefitted from the different methods so they conducted a 1-way ANOVA. They found that the lowest achievement level students were less successful with just the text method and the other two groups were not discernable (Quyarmi et al., 2004). The medium achievement group benefited significantly more with the computer
method. The high achieving group did not benefit more from any specific method. In the end the researchers stated that the computer assisted program “significantly \((P < 0.01)\) improved the theoretical knowledge of students….had a positive effect on the performance of students… had the most significant \((P< 0.01)\) impact on students with lower overall achievement, and… had the least impact on high achievers” (Quyarmi et al., 2004, p. 1086). Through this study the researchers were able to show that inclusion of the computer assisted curriculum resulted in increased knowledge gains compared to the traditional text-based methods (Quyarmi et al., 2004).

In the end, the different research presented a clear focus on how correctly implemented technology can support the learning levels of students within the blended environment. The technology used by the teachers should focus on enhancing the lessons they are teaching instead of replacing the time with them. The blended setting does not replace the teacher but instead combines with the teacher to create the highly effective learning environment. The teacher needs to know how to successfully implement technology, make it readily accessible to students, and convince students just how useful that medium is in making them successful in their learning. These ideals specifically relate to the second question, possible teacher-perceived strengths and weaknesses, and the third research question, how to better train teachers, since the teacher needs to know how to do these things within their classrooms to promote the most learning.

### 21st Century Skills

The Common Core State Standards Initiative states that schools should be preparing their students for college and career options (Common Core, 2017). In order to fulfill this expectation it is necessary to understand what colleges expect from their 21st century students. The research on the college level shows how colleges are using blended and online options. Preparing
students to incorporate these 21st century skills is important in a high school setting if they are going to be better prepared for college. These studies promote the use of blended environments in high schools and make it necessary for teachers to teach their students the correct way of interacting with their online curriculum and to find ways to blend successfully.

A study conducted by Yapici and Akybayin (2012) focused on high school students views on blended learning. This study allowed the readers to see what students thought about learning in a blended environment through the completion of a 50 question survey. The survey had 35 questions that focused on how the blended environment was implemented and 15 questions that focused on their overall views of blended learning. The survey was completed by 47 high school students during their second year of high school. After reviewing the survey answers the researchers determined that the mean score regarding student views on the application of the blended learning model were high, 7.91. They also determined that their overall views of the blended learning model were high, 8.17 (Yapici & Akybayin, 2012).

The researchers provided specific quotes from students discussing advantages and disadvantages for the blended environment. Many of the disadvantages resulted in having adequate Internet and computer capabilities. Whereas the advantages were far-spread, ranging from the ability to find other sources, learning at a faster pace, and the ability to take more control in their learning (Yapici & Akybayin, 2012). Focusing on the specific comments left by the students, stakeholders in blended learning can work to solve the student-perceived disadvantages they encountered. Despite that, in order to truly implement change research needs to focus on how the teachers can turn those student-perceived disadvantages into advantages.

Current state standards and expectations for schools in the 21st century require high school teachers to know how to prepare students for life outside of their classroom. The
previous research on 21st century skills shows how important it is for teachers to be trained in working in this environment. These studies showed how highly students viewed the overall blended learning model. Students enjoyed the ability to learn at a faster pace and to take control of their learning. Be that as it may, teachers had to be able to give up some of that control in the classroom in order for students to take advantage of this option. Giving up control is difficult for some people so this could be a teacher-perceived strength or weakness depending on the participant.

**Challenges of Blended Learning**

Challenges of blended learning make it difficult to create a successful learning environment. Nevertheless, they are to be expected with a change in learning environment. Environments should be problem-free to support students but there are almost always problems that arise in any situation. Three challenges that this research focuses on is the training needed for teachers to work in a blended environment, the availability of blended learning environments, and the technology and Internet issues.

**Teacher Training**

Powell et al. (2011) wrote a report that combined information obtained from researchers in sixty countries that completed a survey that focused on online and blended learning (Powell et al., 2011). This report was created to update the 2006 international survey due to a blended and online learnings average increase of “30% each year for the past 10 years across the United States…” (Powell et al., 2011, p. 4).

One of the trends noted in the survey focused on specialized teacher training. The researchers noted that specialized teacher training was not required to work in an online or blended environment. Despite that, they found that schools offered and promoted additional
teacher training. Based on the countries that participated only 11% of them stated that their teachers needed a license specific for this environment and 25% of them stated that the teachers had to undergo additional required training (Powell et al., 2011).

There are many different things that teachers may be required to do to work in these environments. For example, teachers in Singapore have to take courses on aiding online sessions. British Columbia, Canada, will only allow you to run a distributed learning school if the teachers have been trained or have participated in distributed learning methods and they must provide additional and ongoing training. Teachers in Slovenia have to attend additional conferences and can get training from ICT members hired at the school. In Spain, teachers are given free online training through a special website for support (Powell et al., 2011).

While some of the schools require the specific trainings mentioned in the previous paragraph the researchers found that the majority of countries stated that “…general teacher training and licensure were sufficient to teach in a blended or online classroom...” (Powell et al., 2011, p. 12). However, 72% of the countries that participated in the survey stated that teachers were participating in additional professional development to support them in the technical skills needed for working in an online or blended environment.

It was reported that the United Kingdom explained the reason for inadequate teacher training is based on lack of time and budget cuts (Powell et al., 2011). Forty-one percent of the countries that responded to the online survey conducted by Powell et al. (2011) stated that there was no government-funded programs available in their country.

If there was an appropriate budget and time availability for teachers working in this environment it is imperative that the research can determine what competencies teachers need to be successful. Powell, Rabbitt, and Kennedy (2014) wrote the iNACOL Blended Learning
Teacher Competency Framework to explain some of the competencies they found teachers needed to have. This framework determined that teachers needed to have twelve specific competencies that matched up to four main domains: mindsets, qualities, adaptive skills, and technical skills. The mindset domain focused on a teacher’s ability to understand and adopt behaviors and actions that will support them in the blended learning shift. The qualities focused on things like flexibility and transparency that are needed to support the transition from traditional to blended. Adaptive skills were described as skills that allow blended educators to develop solutions that will arise in the environment. Finally, the technical skills focus on understanding how to incorporate the tools that are being used within their jobs (Powell, Rabbitt, & Kennedy, 2014).

In the teacher competency framework it was recognized that not all students learn at the same pace which means that not all students will be at the same place in their learning. Teachers not only need to know how to work with students at different places in the curriculum but they need to know how to meet them where they are at (Powell, Rabbitt, & Kennedy, 2014). The training needs to transition away from “…one-size-fits-all schedules or sequences of instructional events” (Powell, Rabbitt, & Kennedy, 2014, p. 9).

One qualitative study conducted by Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013) focused on teachers that were teaching blended classes in higher education nursing courses. Through group interviews the researchers determined how the teachers felt teaching in these environments. One main issue that came up focused on the teaching and learning methods. They stated that “it is not appropriate to use the same methods as in face-to-face teaching when using a blended learning approach” (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013, p. 527). They found that not only did teachers need to implement new teaching styles but they needed to deal with motivating students that
were reluctant to sway from the traditional learning styles. The teachers expressed that, in the beginning, they “did not understand how much it is possible to learn outside the classroom, and consequently, the teachers were not able to facilitate that learning” (Jokinen & Mikkonen, 2013, p. 527). Planning and designing a course using blended learning was difficult for these teachers because they didn’t completely understand the blended aspects of the course.

J. Fisher and J. White (2017) from the Clayton Christensen Institute wrote a response to the 2016 Blended and Personalized Learning Conference. In this response one of the main takeaways focused on the unknown. They specifically called this theme “Embrace not knowing” because “one tension in managing change across a classroom… is making the unknown an opportunity rather than a threat” (Fisher & White, 2017, p. 43). It is important to push teachers to move out of their comfort zone to try new things. While blended learning becomes more prevalent more conferences and training will come about to support teachers but teachers need to be willing to try and fail and then share their findings. Another theme focused on promoting an open door policy. By welcoming guests into their classroom when they tried something new it allowed others to learn from them. It also supported further conversations about what the strengths and weaknesses were supporting reflection on how to constantly improve. Sharing their failures and their successes it will support other teachers that are not adequately trained for teaching in a blended environment.

In order to provide the best teachers for this new setting, teachers should have some sort of training on blended learning and what it required them to do. According to the Ohio Blended Learning Survey for 2015 “42% did not provide professional development on blended learning to their instructors” (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015, p. 6). On the other hand, the schools that did provide teacher training focused on the “online course delivery
system (69%), instruction in blended-learning definitions and models (68%), tailoring instruction to each student (63%), data use (56%), and routines and culture (50%)” (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015, p. 6). The majority of the professional development cited in this study did not focus on the curriculum of the blended course or the instructional aspects of it; instead the professional development provided focused on the technical aspects of the environment. Of the respondents half of them stated that they provided “12 or fewer hours of training to their blended instructors,” (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015, p. 6).

If the teachers are not being trained adequately on how to use the tools provided in a blended environment it results in a lack of understanding by the teachers to teach in that environment. If the teachers do not know how to teach for their environment it can reduce the growth for the students in the environment (Powell et al., 2011). One study explained this idea the best when they stated “the learning curve is steep and time scarce” (Fisher & White, 2017, p. 48). Anyone working in a school knows that finding time to learn something new during the school year can be hard but anyone working in a blended environment needs to make time to learn on their own, work with others and attend conferences and trainings.

This data directly relates to the second and third research question for this study. First, the additional training needed to really thrive in this environment is sometimes difficult to obtain and can be very costly making it hard to achieve it. This could create a possible weakness for teachers in this environment. Furthermore, the additional training references the third research question that asks how teacher education programs can better develop and support teachers working in the blended environment. The aforementioned data focused on the different things the teachers should know and understand prior to working in this type of environment such as,
aiding online sessions and technical skills. Nevertheless, teachers in this environment should also be flexible with students especially in reference to their pacing, they need to be transparent, supportive, problem-solvers that can easily incorporate the technology involved in their job. This data supports the fact that teachers cannot use the same exact methods that are taught for future face-to-face teachers in a blended environment; supporting the need for additional training in preparation for work in the blended environment.

**Availability of Blended Environments**

As of the 2011 report on online and blended learning conducted by Powell et al, it was stated that “few countries have widespread opportunity for the general student population interested in online learning” (Powell et al., 2011, p. 14). As stated previously, online learning was used more frequently for students with situations preventing them from participating in the traditional classroom. For example, students that are constantly sick or hospitalized are unable to come in to a classroom but are more able to work on a computer.

However, some countries reported that this environment was not being promoted because of the lack of interest in the environment. Researchers stated that there was very little knowledge being provided about blended environments which resulted in few people wanting to create a blended environment. There is a lack of policy and funding being provided which also stunted the growth of blended environments. In reference to state support, schools stated that without the governments funding it is very difficult to afford the blended learning school (Powell et al., 2011).

While lack of interest may be one reason for limited availability in these environments another issue is policies that are created to prohibit them. Brazil, Poland, Russia and Romania are a few countries that prohibit online learning in their public schools. Brazil stated that “…this
type of system is bound to dehumanize the process of learning and is likely to create antisocial, over-individualistic students who are lacking the social skills required to live harmoniously in society” (Powell et al., 2011, p. 21). Keeping Pace with K-12 Digital Learning stated in the United States “twenty states prohibit open enrollment in online schools, and the large majority of states do not allow course choice” (Murin, Gemin, Watson, Pape, & Vashaw, 2012, p. 8).

The availability of blended environments offered to students and teachers is a challenge for blended learning. Data shows that students have more access to digital learning because it is an aggressively growing field. Even though more students have this available to them there are still gaps in digital learning. Schools are not on the same playing field in reference to the digital technologies that are being offered. Schools are also stopped based on policies placed on blended learning (Murin, Gemin, Watson, Pape, & Vashaw, 2012).

The Ohio Blended Learning Network, The Learning Accelerator, the Clayton Christensen Institute, and ELearning consultant Brian Bridges conducted the Ohio Blended Learning Survey in early 2015. The survey was sent to 994 schools in Ohio; districts and charter schools. Out of the 994 schools 211 of them responded. From the 211 responses 122 of them stated they were currently blended. The results were written in the report by Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty and Mohammed (2015). Of the 211 respondents from across the state they represented 64 different counties and the schools stretched from 21 students to over 50,000 enrolled (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015).

The survey focused strictly on blended learning in Ohio and one of the four questions it asked focused on who exactly was implementing blended learning in the state. As of 2015 “58% of respondents are using some form of blended learning,” (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015, p. 16). The research presented showed that only 10% of the 58%
came from strictly elementary or middle schools while the other 48% came from high schools or schools that housed K-12 classes. On top of having 58% of the schools already implementing some sort of blended learning another 30% plan on implementing blended learning into their schools.

The survey results also showed that the respondents that are or plan on using blended learning are “concentrated in and round large cities such as Cincinnati and Columbus” (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015, p. 5). The survey results also provided separate information on the type of institution that provides blended learning: district schools and charter schools. There were 137 district schools that provided responses with 66% of them stating they were using blended learning and 42% of the 74 charter schools responded in the affirmative. Overall this data “estimated that over 40,000 students are participating in blended learning in Ohio” (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015, p. 25).

The data provided in this section specifically relates to all three research questions. Some of the previous research focused on the fact that there wasn’t enough information provided about blended learning and those environments. This prevented the creation of blended schools since people didn’t know enough about them, or anything, to start them. On top of that, there are some places that refuse to allow these types of learning environments for different reasons which prevents them from happening. If people truly understood what blended learning was there is a possibility that more of these schools would be accessible. This idea also relates to better teacher training for these environments. In Ohio, 122 schools are participating in blended learning, this means teachers need to know how to work with these environments. Finally, this data provides insights on possible teacher-perceived weaknesses in reference to how stakeholders view
blended learning. Views and opinions of teachers can be swayed depending on their understanding of this environment.

**Technology and Internet Challenges**

One challenge with blended environments is the “…lack of equitable access to Internet tools or resources…” (Powell et al., 2011, p. 14). In order to have a blended environment schools and students need to have access to the Internet and tools like computers or tablets to interact with the online aspect of the environment. However, availability can’t just occur within the schools because a blended environment requires time to be spent outside of the face-to-face environment as well. In the survey conducted by Powell et al. (2011) it was reported that many children did not have Internet access outside of the classroom and that children living in high poverty didn’t have Internet access at all.

Internet access is a challenge because many people are not able to get it. In Mozambique it was reported that “…only 1% of the population has access to the Internet…” (Powell et al., 2011, p. 19). Sometimes, Internet access is based on the setting like how rural Guatemala has minimum Internet services. A recent study “The State of Opportunity: The Status and Direction of Blended Learning in Ohio” (2015) found 31 respondents that had multiple problems with blended learning (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015). Some of the written in comments focused on technology issues with both the accessibility to the Internet and the amount of bandwidth available. This problem is not only prominent in the school itself but can also be a problem at the home of the individual students (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015).

One reason for the technology and Internet challenges in the blended environment is based off of monetary issues. It was reported that budgets were not providing enough money to
provide open access to schools (Powell et al., 2011). In *The Influence of the Use of Technology on Student Outcomes in a Blended Learning Context* (2013) Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, Rodriguez-Ariza and Argente-Linares also bring up the concern about the funding for technology. Specifically they comment on the financial investment that is required to promote ICT. While they believe that the financial investment is “justified by the fact that ICT favors and affords more efficient and effective learning outcomes… this idea remains to be tested…” (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, Rodriguez-Ariza, & Argente-Linares, 2013, p. 627).

From the report “The State of Opportunity: The Status and Direction of Blended Learning in Ohio” (2015) also stated that 32% of the 211 respondents had funding problems (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015). In reference to this need for an increased budget “17% said that support was needed for infrastructure improvements- mostly in terms of additional devices” (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015, p. 6). Lack of funding can prevent them from using technology in a proficient enough manner to support teachers and students in a blended environment.

Another concern with the Internet access is the student’s use of the Internet. Specifically, the student’s academic honesty, or dishonesty, can become a disadvantage for student’s that are completing work in an online setting. Sileo and Sileo (2008) state that a major challenge of living in a rural community is the access to secondary and post-secondary education but the increase in online learning has helped bridge that gap. While their article described the rural educations need for distance education options, it also addressed the academic dishonesty problem within the online courses. Their article suggests that “the additional time and energy to complete assignments, loneliness, and lack of personal contact with professors and peers may encourage cheating” (Sileo & Sileo, 2008, p. 57). As of 2001 there was “an estimated 225 active
Internet term paper websites,” that allowed students to submit someone else’s work as their own (Sileo & Sileo, 2008, p. 57). In a study conducted in 2006 the researcher found that “cheating in online courses surpasses that of traditional face-to-face courses” (Sileo & Sileo, 2008, p. 58). In order to prevent academic dishonesty, it is suggested that teachers and students work together to define what it means to be dishonest; since teachers personal definitions tend to be more stringent than the student’s. It is also suggested that the faculty members do not rely on one specific assessment method and that there is an increase in conversations between members of the class.

The previously mentioned technology and internet challenges relate to the second and third research question for this study. First, teachers need to know how to handle possible Internet problems. This information specifically focused on limited Internet availability, the cost for schools to provide the technology and even students that don’t have Internet access at home. Teachers also need to know how to handle the student’s use of the Internet. They need to be trained to easily determine academic dishonesty, they need to know how to handle these problems when they arise, and how to prevent them from happening again. These are some of the technology and Internet challenges that should be planned for when working in the blended environment.

Summary

This literature review provided a current definition of blended learning as a learning program where students learn partly online as well as at a physical location. Students are able to have more control over certain aspects of their learning like when they complete the work, where they complete the work, and how much they complete at one time. This environment promotes open communication between the teachers, students, and parents that are involved due to the
transition from traditional and online environments to that of the blended environment. Teachers need to be prepared to support their students in this transition. Providing this definition based on the research creates a starting point for the first research question which focused on defining the blended environment based on the participants involved.

Furthermore, this literature review focused on the strengths and challenges of blended learning. In reference to the strengths it is important to know that students showed an increase in achievement and satisfaction within the blended environment. The incorporation of technology as a learning tool supported this additional achievement and satisfaction by providing constantly updating curriculum. The blended environment also focused on the 21st century skills that students need to be successful in their chosen college or career like the overall ability to take more control and responsibility of their learning outcomes. On the other hand, there were also some challenges within the blended learning environment. One main concern for the teachers is how much additional training is required to be a successful blended teacher. Some research stated that the additional trainings were costly and they didn’t always focus on the specific things those teachers needed. Additionally, the overall availability of blended environments is a challenge. Some places wouldn’t even allow this type of environment and this creates a limited access to this type of learning. Then, there is technology and Internet challenges that are costly, which means the blended environment needs to find additional funds to support and maintain these environments. This strengths and challenges really support the last two research questions. It specifically stated some of the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the environment which was question two. One of the challenges the research presented also focused on the training issues surrounding teachers within the environment so this specifically relates to research question three.
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to determine how teachers in blended learning environments define their work, the strengths and challenges that come with this environment, and how they were trained to be a blended learning environment teacher. As a new educational system it is imperative that educators learn as much as possible about the nuances of this learning environment. The teacher is at the forefront of learning and should be able to paint a realistic picture based on what is happening in their specific learning environment. In order to understand their experiences and views on this topic the researcher will conduct a phenomenological study. Blended learning is a new phenomenon, or an innovative idea, in education. A phenomenological study will allow the researcher to investigate the current condition through the participants lived experiences in that environment. The more stakeholders learn about the current blended learning system the better prepared they can be to improve this new system to create the best learning environment for students.

The study of the blended phenomena was done through ethnographic case studies. The researcher wanted to determine how teachers working in the blended environment actually defined their work within the blended environment, determine what the strengths and weaknesses were from their perspective, and to determine what areas they wished they had more training in to be successful. The researcher chose an ethnographic research study because of how involved she become in the setting and with the participants. This ethnographic research study was conducted on teachers that worked in blended learning environments so that the researcher could get the best picture possible of what blended teaching was through that additional involvement.
The ethnographic study allowed the researcher to place the emphasis on research that documents and portrays “the everyday experiences of individuals by observing and interviewing them” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 505). Hancock and Algozzine (2011) stated that an ethnography is successful when it “provides information about and insight into unique cultural settings” (p. 35). The blended environment is the unique cultural setting. However, since the majority of the research focuses on creating the environment and looking at the student perceptions of the environment, focusing on the teacher provides more uniqueness to this study.

Hancock and Algozzine (2011) further stated that the ethnographic case study is meant to “explore the observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life…” (p. 35). An ethnography allowed the researcher to observe the participants through different observations. It allowed the researcher to really learn about how each participant handled their unique situation by conducting an initial interview as well as check-in meetings that asked what was going on in their environment and even more importantly how they felt about those things. This helped create a holistic and intrinsic case study that allowed the researcher to learn more about this environment. Through the collection of their everyday experiences in their setting this research attempts to paint a picture of what blended teaching really was and what those teachers worked with on a daily basis.

This chapter focuses on the structure of the study. It explains the research design, the participants involved in the study, and how the information was obtained from them. This section also discusses how the data was analyzed. The chapter ends with the assumptions made throughout the task of collecting information.

**Research Design**
The goal of this study was to determine what teachers’ perspectives and views are on blended learning and this goal will be completed by answering the following research questions:

1. How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?

2. What are the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in a blended learning environment?

3. How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?

This qualitative design focused on data collected through interviews and observations conducted with teachers working in different blended schools. A qualitative design was chosen so that the researcher could focus on what the participants were saying, to describe how they felt in their specific situations, and to share their stories and experiences. A qualitative design supports the use of ethnography by creating a vivid picture of the teacher’s daily life within the context of blended learning.

While conducting this qualitative study the researcher transcribed her information into narrative responses. Torill Moen (2006) described narrative research as “the study of how human beings experience the world” (p. 56). In this study the world focused strictly on their teaching environment and the impact it makes on their lives.

The focus was on creating what Hunter McEwan (1997) described as an emancipatory narrative (p. 85). The purpose of the research was to create an expressive opportunity for the participants to describe the phenomenon of working in the diverse blended environments. By using a narrative approach the researcher was able to enlighten people on this environment and provide real insight on it.
McEwan (1997) stated “Narratives express our thoughts, feelings, and actions in ways that cannot be articulated in non-narrative ways…” (p. 89). By focusing on taking the stories that are told through interviews, check-in meetings, and throughout the observations, the researcher was able to really provide a complete story of teaching in a blended environment. Through narrative research the researcher encouraged the dialogue through our interviews and then she critically reflected on the information they provided. Through the telling of these narratives the researcher will be able to create meaning.

The participants were asked to answer fourteen open-ended questions (Appendix A). The initial interview occurred online through Lync which all Loomis Academy staff members had access to. The participants met with the researcher online and then they were recorded answering each of the fourteen questions about their experiences as a teacher in general, specifically in blended learning, and the areas that need to be improved within the teacher preparation world.

Participants were also asked to partake in a check-in meeting (Appendix B). The check-in meetings also happened through Lync. The check-in meetings allowed the researcher to follow up with them after the initial interview. It allowed the researcher to learn what was happening and changing within their environment. Questions during the check-in meetings focused on finding out what had happened within their school since the last check-in. This provided the participants with an opportunity to talk about any challenges they were having and to also discuss the areas that they felt were supporting them in their setting. It also provided them with an opportunity to share additional information that they felt was important which could help define blended and find new areas that the teachers feel they needed more support.
Participants answered each of the questions on the check-in form during the check-in meetings to support the three research questions.

Participants were also asked to be observed to obtain more in-depth information on their interactions with students. During the observations, the researcher took notes on how the observations related to the research questions (Appendix C). Out of the four participants, two were able to be observed due to time constraints and schedule issues amongst the other two participants. As the observer it was crucial that the researcher focused on how the teachers were handling each situation, why they were doing it, and what the outcome was. It was important for the researcher to think about her own ideals on the topic and then “deliberately put aside these ideas” (Nieswiadomy, 2002, p. 172). In phenomenological studies this is called bracketing (Nieswiadomy, 2002, p. 172). In order to prevent personal bias throughout the observations, the researcher stuck to the facts. Observations were done as specifically as possible without her own opinions on what was happening. During the observations the researcher completed an observation form (Appendix C). The observation form focused on what the teacher expected to accomplish and how they used the blended aspects to accomplish this goal. The researcher then asked them to reflect on their lesson, what areas they felt went well, and what went poorly. This allowed the research to be focused for each of the observations. The researcher also removed any of her own ideas from one observation to the next. Each participant was kept separate through the research process so that one wasn’t compared to another during their time.

Throughout the data collection process it is important to also understand why narrative writing and the use of a qualitative study can lead to some possible problems. This data collection focuses on personal human experiences. These experiences can be different depending on the current situations of every individual. Two people can experience the same
event and categorize it differently. Moen (2006) focuses on Vygotsky’s developmental ideas in reference to a narrative research process. People should not be thought of as only that isolated individual but instead should focus on the environment and situations that are creating those experiences as well (Moen, 2006, p. 58). The researcher questioned the participants on their current working environment and previous working environments to create an overall picture of their blended classroom. Their individual case study allowed the research to include the environment, the situations, and the experiences to create the best narrative.

According to Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) another issue revolving around the use of narrative research is how political it is (p. 75). Narrative writing requires the participants to think about their experiences and provide dialogue on them. This means they are at the front of that dialogue. The participants are providing the researcher with private and personal stories. These stories are very subjective. It is the researcher’s job to “redraw the distinction between public and private” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997, p. 76). It is her job to retell these private stories in a public way that will create an impact on teaching.

Understanding the implications that revolved around narrative writing, the researcher recognized the importance of creating a reflective piece. Narrative research is very personal to the participants and as such it becomes very personal to the researcher. Through narrative writing this research conducted a study that expressed a reflective and personal conversation on blended learning.

**Research Questions**

1. How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?
2. What are the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in a blended learning environment?
3. How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?

Participants

This study provided insight on blended learning from four teachers working in different blended environments. Prior to beginning the research, the researcher obtained letters of cooperation from the principals of seven different Loomis Academies. In order to keep the identities of the participants hidden the schools were numbered one through seven, for example Loomis Academy 1. This research focused on four teachers from the previously mentioned seven schools. The four teachers came from three of the Loomis Academy Schools: Loomis Academy 1, Loomis Academy 4, and Loomis Academy 6.

Each school was in a different location with their own students. While these schools were founded on the same principles, each of the schools were run to best suit their students. The researcher was not looking for an answer on the right way to do blended education. Instead, the researcher wanted to know what it was like to teach in a blended environment and how the teachers felt working in them and then further studies can later be conducted to determine what the right way is.

The participants worked at Loomis Academy but may be from any of the seven Loomis Academies open between Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. The researcher selected four participants from the schools dependent on which teachers agreed to participate. Loomis Academy employs face-to-face math and English teachers in grades nine through twelve. Through interviews, observations, artifact collection, and constant conversations the researcher acquired information about teachers and students in a blended high school environment.
Loomis Academy was a public charter school and that had been open for less than five years, ranging from four-five years depending on the school, so the teachers were relatively new to blended learning. Loomis Academy 3 and 4 opened in 2013, so they were in their fourth year. On the other hand, Loomis Academy 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7 had been running for five years since opening in 2012. Some teachers had been with Loomis Academy since they opened and were able to provide more insight on changes made over the years in the blended environment. Whereas, some teachers were brand new and were able to provide more information on the struggle or ease with transitioning from traditional environments to blended.

Loomis Academy was designed to only accept 300 students with almost all of them well below that number. The 300 students were split into two different shifts so that each shift had a maximum enrollment number of 150. The shifts were either in the morning, from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM, Tuesday through Friday or they were in the afternoon, from 12:30 PM to 4:30 PM, Mondays through Thursdays. While in the building, the students attended their math and English courses face-to-face, worked in their team rooms with their success coach, and attended their online classes with their virtual teachers.

Each teacher had a different experience based on the growth they saw and were striving for. Some of the Loomis schools had over 150 students so they had more than one subject teacher. For example, Loomis Academy 5 had two English teachers and two math teachers based on the number of students enrolled. This created a different environment than Loomis Academy 7, for example, that only had one English teacher and one math teacher.

This research study focused on four teachers from the Loomis Academy Schools. One of the research questions focused on how each teacher can have different perspectives on the strengths and challenges of blended learning even when their school is using the same
curriculum and materials as the other Loomis schools. Originally, the researcher was going to focus on five different teachers. However, only four teachers responded to the email invitation to participate so all four were accepted into the study based on their willingness to participate. This helped eliminate any bias towards teachers or subjects because the teachers decided if they wanted to participate and the researcher didn’t have any say in who responded.

The first participant will be referred to as Teacher A. Teacher A is the only male teacher that agreed to participate in this study. He was currently working as the English teacher at Loomis Academy 1. The year prior to this study he had an additional English teacher working with him but due to transitioning in management he is, once again, the only English teacher for the building. This year Teacher A is teaching a skills session twice a week, he has a class of honors students throughout the different grade levels combined, he has also placed all of his foundations level students in one class and then he teaches English 9, 10, 11 and 12. Teacher A is also second-in-command within the building so he is in charge if the principal is unable to make it to work for whatever reason. Teacher A is completing his fifth year at Loomis Academy 1. Prior to working at Loomis Academy 1, Teacher A worked at two state municipal school districts that will be referred to as Thrasher School and Kinder High School. Both of these schools were a traditional brick-and-mortar environment where Teacher A only taught English. Teacher A spent fifteen years working between the two municipal schools putting him at twenty years’ experience teaching all together.

The second participant will be referred to as Teacher B. Teacher B was a female math teacher at Loomis Academy 1. Teacher B also went down to one math teacher in the building again during this study. She had nine different preps and 180 students that she was teaching. She taught Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, she taught A and B semester classes depending on
what students needed, she taught a parts class where they broke the traditional semester class up into a full year, and she also taught a skills session for math. This was Teacher B’s third year working at Loomis Academy 1. While working at Loomis Academy 1 she spent a year and a half as the Special Education teacher as well but is back to teaching math again. Before joining Loomis Academy 1, Teacher B started out teaching math in a traditional brick-and-mortar public school. While remaining at the same public school, she also taught in a resource room. She spent four years working at that school before she moved to a self-contained resource room for an in-school suspension program where she stayed for a year. Then she spent two years working with high school students that were emotionally disturbed and in a self-contained classroom. While there she was also the curriculum coordinator. Teacher B stated that this was her tenth year teaching all together.

Teacher C was a female math teacher from Loomis Academy 4. As the math teacher, she was in charge of teaching Algebra 1 and 2, Geometry, and she was also in charge of teaching a State testing class that was just implemented that year. She was the only math teacher at Loomis Academy 4 and during this year she was dealing with the fact that the school was closing at the end of the semester. While this wasn’t a part of her job she had a lot of students talking to her about their futures so she felt like she was a part-time counselor. Before she started working at Loomis Academy 4 she worked as a long-term substitute in a seventh grade math class. What that position was over she spent time teaching eighth grade math during summer school. She also worked at an alternative school where she taught not only math but everything from science to life skills, stating that she felt like she taught everything at that school. She spent the majority of her career at a traditional high school teaching Algebra 1 and one hour of Geometry. This year was her thirteenth year teaching.
Finally, the last participant, Teacher D, was an English teacher at Loomis Academy 3. Teacher D had been working at Loomis Academy 3 for three years. Loomis Academy 3 still had two English teachers within their building so she taught English 11 and English 12. Teacher D is the only participant that spent time in the brick and mortar school and the virtual school. She spent ten years working in a traditional brick and mortar school teaching English and social studies. While at the brick and mortar schools she only taught one prep but she spent her lunch monitoring students, worked before and after school as a tutor, and worked with different committees. From there, she spent five years teaching at Conrad Education as a virtual English teacher. While at Conrad Education she spent her time teaching Live Lessons, grading and making phone calls. Teacher D has spent eighteen years teaching.

Throughout this process the researcher kept in mind the ethical considerations for each of the four participants discussed above. Each participant was given the opportunity to participate or not. They then were able to make a choice on how much they shared in the interviews and check-in meetings. They were also asked if they felt comfortable being observed and we then set up times for those that could fit it in to their schedules. The researcher also gave each participant an anonymous name, Teacher A-D, to provide them with more privacy throughout the process. Throughout this entire process, the most important traits to strive for, from an ethical standpoint, was being up front and honest with each participant, the removal of personal biases, and maintained respect for the work that was conducted and each of the participants. These ideals are important in qualitative research because if the participant doesn’t feel like you are being ethical and open then it will be very difficult for them to share their stories.

**Instrumentation and Data Sources**
The first data instrument was the fourteen initial interview questions. The fourteen questions were created to provide the best answer for the three research questions. Research question one asked “How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?” Figure 3, below, shows the specific interview questions in reference to the first research question. This research started to answer this question with the three initial interview questions. The first was “How would you define blended learning to someone?” This question was included because it helped create the participants own personal definition of blended learning. The second question focused on their personal feelings working in the blended environment. This question was chosen because it assisted in creating a baseline for how the teacher felt about blended learning and their job. The final question looked at previous educational experiences and their influence on the participants views on the blended setting. This allowed the participants to provide information on their previous experiences to help create the bigger picture of each of the participant’s background that impacted their definition.

![Research Question 1: How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?](image)

Figure 3. Research question 1 in relation to the initial interview questions.
Research question two “What are the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in a blended learning environment,” was initially answered with seven interview questions. These questions focused on the participant’s current job and their daily routine so that there was an understanding about what each participant was expected to do based on their individual school. The interview questions asked them how the blended environment impacted their ability to complete their specific tasks and/or how it prevented them from completing their job. The questions allowed the study to focus on each individual teacher’s ideas about the strengths and weaknesses. The final questions focused on the things they would like to stay the same and what things they would like to change. By asking them what they want changed and what they wanted to stay the same it provided insight on how they believed blended learning could improve. Figure 4, below, shows the connection between the second research question and the different interview questions that were used to answer it.
Figure 4. Research question 2 in relation to the initial interview questions.
The third research question focused on how each participant was prepared to work in a blended learning environment. Specifically, the question asked “How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?” The first two questions focused on previous educational job experiences and what was expected from them in those jobs. This helped determine if their previous job prepared them for blended learning in any way. The last two questions focused on how their teacher program prepared them and what they thought should be included to better prepare them. These teachers were on the front lines for what they had to endure while working in a blended learning environment. They were able to provide insider information on how to best prepare for success in this setting. Figure 5, shows how the third research question was answered by the interview questions.
Research Question 3: How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?

11. Describe your previous education related job experiences.

12. What did your daily routine look like at your previous job(s)?

13. What teacher program, if any, did you attend that supported your work in blended learning? Explain how it supported you.

14. What teacher program, if any, do you believe would have better supported you to work in a blended learning environment? Explain how it would support you.

Figure 5. Research question 3 in relation to the initial interview questions.

The check-in meetings were not as cut and dry as the interview questions in relation to the research questions. Depending on the answers that are provided by the participants could sway which of the three research questions they answered. The first question that addressed the first research question, during the check-in meetings, focused on how they’ve used previous skills and materials within their classrooms. This question allowed the researcher to determine the definition of blended learning due to its ability to combine the previous experiences from other environments. Participants were also asked how their environment has made it difficult and/or easier to complete their daily tasks within their current blended environment. Understanding the daily tasks of each teacher helps to define what their job involves. Finally, they were asked if there was any additional information that they’d like to share. Since this
question wasn’t overly specific the information they brought up could have related to the first research question. Figure 6 shows the relation between the check-in meeting questions and the first research question.

![Research Question 1: How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?](image)

- Since we last talked, have you used any of the skills/materials from previous jobs within your lessons and activities?
- Since we last talked, has your environment made it difficult to complete your daily tasks? Like working with students, grading, and teaching?
- Since we last talked, has your environment made it easier to complete your daily tasks? Like working with students, grading and teaching?
- Any additional information you’d like to share?

Figure 6. Research question 1 in relation to the check-in meeting questions.

Research question 2 was answered through six different questions asked during the check-in meetings. The first question asked was an initial greeting and discussion on how they were doing in their current environment. Depending on their answer, this provided some insight on the strengths and challenges they were dealing with. To be more specific, the check-in meetings then asked two additional questions that focused on the good things and the problems
happening within their environment. The check-in meetings also asked how their environment has impacted their ability to complete their daily tasks both negatively and positively. Finally, participants were asked if there was anything else they would like to share about their environment which could have an impact on their perceived strengths and challenges. Figure 7 explains the connection between the check-in meetings and research question 2.

**Figure 7.** Research question 2 in relation to the check-in meeting questions.

The third research question asked “How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?” The check-in meetings asked two questions that could have answered this research question. The first
question that referred to the third research question asked if they were using any of the skills or materials that they have used in previous jobs within their lessons. This allowed the researcher to determine how information can be transferred to the blended environment from other jobs. The second one, inquired if they had any additional information they would like to share about the environment. Figure 8 shows the connection between research question 3 and the check-in meetings.

Figure 8. Research question 3 in relation to the check-in meeting questions.

Two of the participants were also observed. There were four different sections that were filled out during the observations. All four sections related to all three research questions. The teacher’s goal related to research question 1 due to its ability to explain how teachers define their lesson goals based on the fact that this is a blended environment. This same section related to the second research question since it has the possibility to shine light on the strengths and challenges within the environment. Finally, the teacher’s goal helped show how teachers have been trained to create goals for their environment. The second section asks “How is the lesson
‘blended’” and again related to all three research questions. The way that teachers blend their lessons explains how they define blended learning. The strengths and challenges are shown through how they used their environment to complete the lessons. The way they used their given environment also provides additional information on how they were prepared. The third section focused on the reflections of the completed lessons. A teacher’s ability to reflect on the lesson provided an opportunity for them to explain how this environment impacted their daily lives. Finally, the teacher’s expectations for the lesson showed what they expected to happen throughout their lesson to compare it to what actually happened within the environment. The following figure, figure 9, shows the relationship between the four sections of the observations and the research questions.

Figure 9. All research questions in relation to the observation form.

All of the data collection questions were reviewed by University of Findlay faculty to determine the applicability to the research questions. Most of the data for this study came from the answers from the interview questions. The study did not use any other surveys, but
additional questions came up based on where each interviewee took the question. Further questions arose during their observations and the answers they provided through the conversations had about their day.

**Data Collection Procedures**

As soon as the study was approved by the University of Findlay review board, see (Appendix D) initial contact emails were sent out to all of the possible teachers working in the different environments described in the participants section. The email explained the study and asked if they were willing to be interviewed and observed on their participation in blended learning. The responses were sent back were collected. Then the researcher used those names to create the stratified random sampling of the different schools. While there were seven possible schools, the research was only conducted on five teachers. The researcher randomly selected teachers until there were five from different schools.

The researcher conducted individual interviews with each of the participants. The initial interviews were conducted over the phone and the internet with the understanding that the conversations were recorded. Conducting the interviews this way allowed the researcher to have the same starting point for each of the teachers and then added additional information through the rest of the semester. Most of the information was described through the participant’s eyes and their personal views on their environment. However, once the initial interviews were completed the researcher set up a schedule for the rest of the semester in order to meet with them, conduct face-to-face observations or taped observations, and to have check-in meetings with them. The researcher also collected artifacts that teachers used throughout the semester like lessons plans, resources and classroom materials. This data collection occurred during the first semester of the school year, between August 2016 and January 2017.
Once the researcher compiled the list of random teachers, an email was sent to the staff that wasn’t picked thanking them for the agreeing to participate but letting them know that they were not selected. Then an email was sent to the chosen participants that let them know they had been randomly selected to participate and provided them with the written consent.

Then an interview time was set up with them. The researcher worked around their free-time so that the interviews were not rushed. The interviews were meant to be conducted in one session and all participants were able set aside enough time to do that.

**Data Analysis**

This qualitative study focused on each of the teacher’s experiences in blended learning. The researcher wrote a case study exploring their teaching styles, methods, expectations and ideals on blended learning. The researcher described each of the four teachers own environments and views on blended learning.

The researcher used the interviews and conversations to synthesize some of the information. The interviews were recorded so that they could be transcribed. After all of the interviews were transcribed she read through them completely before starting the coding process. After reading through them, the researcher did it again to make her own comments on the sides. Once the comments were made the researcher read through them to see what main ideas stood out to determine the different codes that were already arising.

When my original comments were organized the researcher read through them again to see how the different information tied together to create the codes. The researcher continued to repeat this process until she was able to find the different themes all four teachers were bringing up to really get their views on the different aspects of their blended learning environment.
In order to maintain an organized code list the researcher kept all of the codes in one area so that she could maintain a structured environment. The researcher did the coding by herself with multi-colored highlighters, multi-colored post-its and multiple copies of the same interview transcription.

Once the researcher narrowed down the similar ideas she finally started to combine the information. By combining the background information on the schools and teachers, the research conducted on blended learning and the participants interview answers the researcher was able to triangulate the data to create an overall picture of their personal views on blended learning environments.

Assumptions

Since this study focused on personal views on an environment one of the biggest assumptions is that they were going to feel comfortable enough to be completely honest in the interviews. If someone did not feel like they are able to be honest it would impact the answers that they were providing. The assumption that they would not get in trouble for being honest is also one that could affect their answers.

Another assumption was that the research questions would be completely answered based on the interview questions that have been created for them. The questions being asked during the interview were meant to be open-ended to allow them to reflect on their past experiences that led them to their current situation. Using open-ended questions allowed the interviewed participants to answer based on their own interpretation of the questions.

A third assumption was that teachers tend to worry about observations and think more about what they are doing since someone was watching them. It may not provide a realistic picture of what they do on a daily basis if they were trying to be perfect during the observations.
Through multiple interactions with the teacher the researcher was able to create a picture with depth and breadth.

These assumptions had the possibility of affecting the researchers study due to the ability to get honest answers. Still, by explaining the study up front to each participant and the goal of the study the researcher believed they understood the importance of providing truthful responses so that the study could be accurate.
CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Chapter four focused on presenting the results that arose from the analyzed data. The three research questions were as follows:

1. How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?
2. What are the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in a blended learning environment?
3. How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?

The research questions focused on how teacher’s in blended environments defined their jobs, how their environments supported and hindered their ability to teach, and what was needed to better prepare teachers for working in this environment.

Characteristics of the Sample

The participants for this study worked at one of the seven Loomis Academy schools, within Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, for a minimum of one year. Loomis Academy is a public charter school. While there wasn’t an application or lottery-style enrollment process at the Loomis Academy schools, they did limit enrollment to 300 students, with 150 students accepted into each session, AM and PM. A recruitment email was sent out (Appendix G) and four teachers responded stating they would participate in the study. There was one teacher from Indiana, one from Michigan, and two from Ohio.

To maintain confidentiality, the participants were referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, and Teacher D. The schools were also labeled Loomis Academy 1 through Loomis Academy 7. Teacher A and B worked at Loomis Academy 1, Teacher C worked at Loomis Academy 4, and Teacher D worked at Loomis Academy 6.
Teacher A was a male English teacher. He stated he had twenty years of previous teaching experience working in brick and mortar municipal schools, or a traditional public school setting, and had worked for five years at Loomis Academy 1. Teacher A stated he was not trained in blended learning and did not know what it was prior to beginning at Loomis Academy 1.

Teacher B was a female math teacher. She stated that this was her tenth year working in schools with multiple different brick and mortar environments prior to working at Loomis Academy 1 for three years. Loomis Academy 1 was her only involvement with a blended environment. While working at Loomis Academy 1, she had changed positions multiple times, moving from math to special education and then back to math.

Teacher C was a female math teacher. She stated that she had thirteen years teaching experience working in different brick and mortar environments, specifically stating that she worked as a substitute, in a summer school, an alternative school, and at a traditional high school. Teacher C had worked at Loomis Academy 4 for four years. She stated that prior to Loomis Academy 4 she had no experiential knowledge about the blended environment.

Teacher D was a female English teacher. Prior to joining Loomis Academy 3, she spent a decade in a brick and mortar school teaching both English and social studies. Then she spent five years working for a virtual school. She was the only participant with experience in both a virtual and a brick and mortar environment prior to coming to a blended environment. Nevertheless, she did not have previous experience in a blended environment. Teacher D had worked at Loomis Academy 3 for three years.

Instrument Validity and Reliability
Prior to collecting data, the initial interview questions (Appendix A) were created with the support of the chair, and primary investigator for this research project, to verify they would provide the best information in reference to the research questions. The fourteen questions created for the interview sessions were the same for all four participants. The check-in meetings (Appendix B) occurred at the end of the first semester of their school year and required the participants to answer the same questions about the current state of their environment. For the two participants that were observed, an observation form (Appendix D) was created so the same information was looked at and then collected even in the different environments. All participants were asked during their original interview to send any additional support material that they used for teaching so one participant shared some lessons plans.

**Research Question 1**

Research question number one was: How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work? This research question was answered primarily through the first three interview questions. The first interview question asked the participants how they would define blended learning to someone else, the second question focused on how they felt working in the blended environment, and how their previous educational experiences influenced their current view on the blended setting. Teacher C also provided information on defining her work through the lesson plans she turned in.

The following themes were discovered through the analysis of the data:

- Combination of staff
- Online platform
- Students
- Rapport
• Control
• Curriculum

Teacher A.

Interview. The first interview question asked the participant “How would you define blended learning to someone?” Teacher A talked about “…teacher’s onsite along with success coaches onsite combined with an online platform where student can do their work and get together with virtual teachers that teach various subjects.”

When defining blended learning, Teacher A primarily focused on the combination of staff required for a blended learning environment. Teacher A commented on the onsite English and math teachers that worked face-to-face with students. Teacher A also noted the success coaches that spent additional time working with the students and the virtual teachers that allowed students to take additional extracurricular and core classes. The other key component according to Teacher A was the online platform that allowed students the chance to complete their coursework. All four components were needed to define blended learning according to the initial question.

The next question focused on the teachers’ emotions and feelings while working in the blended environment. Teacher A was asked “How do you feel working in the blended learning environment? Explain.” Teacher A started talking about how fortunate he was to be working in this environment. He said blended learning is the “cutting edge of where I feel like education could potentially be going.” He focused on how often college classes required their students to work online and virtually and provided students with an opportunity to work with others from many different areas.
While Teacher A believed that blended learning was the cutting edge for education he also pointed out the difficulty that students have trying to learn in this new system. He claimed there was a learning curve that students had to go through when they transitioned from a traditional brick and mortar or purely virtual school to the blended school. The learning curve was different for each student “some are mature enough to jump in and that learning curve ends after the semester. I feel like others can potentially waste a year or a year and a half trying to figure it out and that’s with people assisting them all the time.” While teacher A said he was “fortunate to work with good people that have assisted me on the way,” he also realized the potential problem with understanding exactly what blended learning is and how to be successful for himself and the students.

Finally, in reference to how Teacher A defined blended learning he was asked “How do your previous educational experiences influence your current view on your blended setting?” Teacher A had one main focus in response to this question: rapport. Teacher A felt that his previous educational experiences working in a traditional environment “…really taught me how to build rapport and relationships with students.” As an onsite teacher, he created these relationships a lot differently than the virtual teachers involved in the blended environment.

**Teacher A research question 1 summary.** While defining blended learning from his job as an English teacher in a high school blended environment, Teacher A focused a lot on the specific things that went in to creating a blended environment. For instance, he focused on the different staff and people that were needed within his environment: the students, the success coaches, the virtual teachers, and the onsite math and English teachers. His response also explained how all of the previously mentioned stakeholders needed to work seamlessly with the learning platform in order to be successful. That success would then carry over into further
educational aspects since many colleges expected their students to know how to participate in college classes and even teachers were expected to use technology to create more 21st century learning opportunities. Finally, he felt that a blended environment allowed a teacher to create a strong rapport with the students and staff that he worked with on a daily basis.

**Teacher B.**

*Interview.* When asked to define blended learning, Teacher B defined “blended learning as a virtual curriculum that is available to students 24/7 with face-to-face academic support from area teachers.” She stated there is some “independent online learning” going on with the students however, they were also provided with support from the “face-to-face contact.”

To further understand how the participant came up with this definition she was asked to describe her feelings working in the blended environment. Teacher B started answering by stating that she found it to be pretty challenging due to the lack of control she had in the blended environment. The Headley Learning Platform provided the online curriculum and also allocated the amount of time that should be spent on each lesson within the lesson and in the planner. This made it very difficult to “mold that to my students needs while still doing what Headley Learning Platform expects us to do at the pace they expect us to do it at.”

While answering interview question two, she started to answer question three which focused on how her previous educational experience influenced her current view on her blended setting. She commented on how she wasn’t used to “someone else setting a pace for me and setting a curriculum for me.” While she understood that the grade level curriculum was always set and established by the state, she meant “in terms of the assessments being set up for me already.” Teacher B brought up the lack of control again since she was “used to having that autonomy in my classroom and more control over deciding how to approach topics.” In her
previous educational experiences, she was able to decide where to place the emphasis for the different skills and the amount of time spent on it to meet her students.

Another problem she found in this environment compared to previous environments was the live gradebook. The Headley Learning Platform provided multiple choice assessments at the end of some of the lessons. The multiple choice questions were automatically graded through the learning platform. Teacher B said she had “a lot less understanding of exactly where my student’s grades are at any given time compared to when I graded it all by myself.” Since the computer program was doing the majority of the grading, students’ grades “may be jumping all over the placed based on assessments that I don’t even see.” This provided an opportunity for their grades to change dramatically. The online curriculum allowed students to complete the work at any time and she found that students would be in a “different spot in the curriculum then the last time I had something to grade for them.”

Teacher B also brought up how the ‘work at your own pace concept’ was really challenging. In one classroom she could have students that were behind by entire units and were “disengaged in class because they are not there yet or completely lost.” In that same classroom she could have students that worked ahead and were focused on getting material for the next unit so they could keep moving forward. Overall, Teacher B focused on the challenges associated with her current blended setting.

*Teacher B research question 1 summary.* In order to define blended learning, Teacher B focused on many different ideas. To begin with, she provided her own definition that focused on the curriculum provided to the students, the face-to-face support, and the independent online learning. She focused on how that online curriculum that was already provided created a lot of control issues because the Headley Learning Platform created a time frame for when lessons
should be completed, they created all aspects of the lesson, they graded the majority of the assessments, and students were able to complete them at their own pace; these concepts of this blended environment made it difficult for her to really control how she taught the course.

**Teacher C.**

*Interview.* Teacher C stated that when she defined blended learning to other people she had to combat the preconceived notions that blended learning meant alternative. After explaining that blended learning did not mean alternative she focused on the fact that it was “half online and half in the classroom.” Teacher C also stated “students learn all of their lessons online and then they come to me for remediation.”

In response to how the participant felt working in the blended environment, she had a lot to say. To begin with Teacher C focused on starting at Loomis Academy 4. She said “I obviously had no idea what I was doing.” She continued to say there was no real training. Headley Learning Platform provided her with a learning series but it focused on the online aspect and everything else was more of a “learn as you go” endeavor.

Another focus area for Teacher C had been the type of students she had seen since she started. Originally, she remembered thinking “these students are sort of teaching themselves,” and she still felt like some of them did. Over the past couple of years she noticed a change in the clientele and now Loomis Academy 4 was “getting more of that alternative student,” that is not doing “very well teaching themselves.” Based on Teacher C’s grasp on what was expected of her and the change in the type of students they were attracting she had to “find a balance of teaching them everything,” just so they can complete their assessments.

Teacher C continued to focus on the type of students that were attending Loomis Academy 4. She started by adamantly stating “This is not for every student.” She stated to
succeed in this environment students needed to be strong readers. Unfortunately, her school had been enrolling “kids that are at an elementary reading level,” which made the curriculum next to impossible to get through. On the other hand, when they got the right type of student she felt they could really excel. While students were able to work at their own pace, Teacher C said there was a certain timeline that needed to be followed. Nevertheless, students could decide to “work on Saturday night at midnight if they wanted to.” This provided students with an opportunity to get ahead in their work which allowed them to “finish classes early… start more classes… graduate early.” Teacher C really felt like having the right type of student for the setting impacted the learning environment.

In order to further answer research question one, Teacher C was asked to explain how her previous educational experiences influenced her current view on the blended setting? Teacher C said everyone at Loomis Academy 4 spent a lot of time comparing their previous schools to their current environment. She said each staff member worked to “incorporate some of the stuff we’ve learned along the way to this school but not everything fits.”

Compared to her previous job, Teacher C felt like the blended environment was really missing the social environment that was expected from school. When students arrived at Loomis Academy 4 they were expected to “sit for four hours a day,” and were unable to really talk to each other or socialize the way they would at a traditional school. The staff members focused on “missing that sense of community and trying to bring that together.” In an attempt to create that sense of community, Loomis Academy 4 created similar situations that were found at their previous jobs like after school events.

While discussing her previous educational experiences impact on her current setting, Teacher C stated “I can’t even imagine coming in as a first year teacher trying to figure out how
to do this.” She said that as a first year teacher, this would be “next to impossible.” When asked to elaborate on these opinions Teacher C responded that after teaching for a long time she had “learned what works with kids and what doesn’t.” As a first year teacher, Teacher C believed that your views on teaching may be a bit naïve because teaching didn’t always work out the way you wanted or expected it to. She said “All kids learn differently so having that past experience and being able to incorporate it here is very helpful.” For her, she couldn’t imagine working in this environment without “some of the tricks of the trade.”

**Lesson Plans.** Teacher C was the only participant to provide the researcher with lesson plans. She provided seven different lesson plans as additional documentation. In the lesson plans Teacher C did not mention technology at any point and instead, focused on the curriculum. Teacher C spent time in the lesson plans explaining how she planned on teaching the content to the students. According to the lesson plans, Teacher C was first and foremost a teacher that taught math to high school students.

These were made by Teacher C for the lessons she planned on teaching each week. The lesson plans were set up to explain all three high school math courses: Algebra, Geometry and Algebra 2. The lesson plans were set up to have an objective, summary, rationale, pass rate data and a reflection. In the objective of the lesson plans the teacher spent time explaining what the student would be able to do. For example, in lesson plan number one, the objective for Algebra stated “The students will be able to use order of operations properly.” The summary of the lesson condensed what would happen during the lesson. In lesson plan number seven, the summary for Algebra 2 stated “Students will be guided through guided notes, practice problems and then work independently.” The rationale of Teacher C’s lesson plans focused more on where students were in the course like how lesson plan number five, which happened the week
of October 17th, 2016, stated that most students were finishing up unit five in all three of the math courses. Teacher C also provided pass rate data for each of the classes. For instance, lesson plan number four stated “14/20, 70%” of her Algebra students were passing at the end of September. Finally, Teacher C provided a reflection from the previous week within her lesson plans. She looked back on what students accomplished and created a reflection on how they did and felt at the end of the week. All seven lesson plans focused on the same items and the teacher focused on describing the content that she was teaching for each of the math courses.

**Teacher C research question 1 summary.** Teacher C provided information on the definition of blended learning through her initial interview and her lesson plans. She explained the different schedule used within the blended environment for teachers and students: stating students spent half of their time working online within the learning platform and with the virtual teachers and the other half with the face-to-face teacher. The students and the teachers were required to learn how to make this environment work for them since it was so different compared to a traditional school. Teacher C also focused on the social aspects that were missing from the blended environment that you would find in a traditional school. Finally, Teacher C explained that her job as a blended education employee was to be a math teacher.

**Teacher D.**

**Interview.** Teacher D was asked to define blended learning and stated that when she told other people what she did for a living she tried to break it down very simply because “You know, many people that I come across can’t wrap their head around what blended learning really is.” Based on this fact, she stated that blended learning was just the “simple combination of that onsite teaching experience and the virtual learning.” Teacher D repeated the word ‘combination’
multiple times in her definition to stress the point that blended learning needed the virtual aspect and the onsite teaching approach.

In Teacher D’s explanation she also expressed the reason for having the onsite teacher and physical building. She stated by coming into the building the students were able to benefit through their individualized learning style. The face-to-face teacher provided students with interventions and an opportunity for “continued challenges and pushing them to be a little bit...uh...I guess out of their comfort zone…”

Interview question two asked how she felt working in the blended setting and Teacher D described it as “a double edged sword.” To begin with, she described the negative aspects of blended learning which focused primarily on the different variables that are out of her control. The onsite class periods “are short and fewer,” than the brick and mortar environment. Teacher D said this really became a problem in reference to attendance problems within the environment. When students were chronic absentees she said that “sometimes it feels like I’m chasing my tail.”

The positive aspects of blended learning, or the other side of the sword, were also present. She said since curriculum was already provided to the students and the teachers she was able to spend more time on the things that were normally discarded due to time in a traditional school. Teacher D said the given curriculum provided the students with the bulk of the curriculum virtually which allowed her to “hone in on specifics within that curriculum rather it is reading comprehension, grammar pieces, or take what has already been given to me and create a project based learning tract for them.” Teacher D also brought up rapport as a positive aspect of blended learning. She said “I am able to get a better relationship started, a deeper relationship with all my students because of the fact that everything is smaller.” In the end, she said the
positive traits of working in the blended environment outweighed the negative traits because “there are so many students that need us for so many reasons.”

Teacher D was the only teacher that worked in both the brick and mortar environment and the completely online environment prior to working in the blended environment. So, when answering question three “How do your previous educational experiences influence your current view on your blended setting?” she provided a different view.

Blended learning provided her with the autonomy that she had due to the given curriculum. The virtual side of blended learning allowed students to get the majority of their information so “the kids don’t rely on me for every last piece of information they are getting.” That allowed her to “take what they are getting and tweak it a little bit and work with it based on what would be more meaningful for them.”

In the brick and mortar environment she spent more time creating the lessons and the curriculum because it wasn’t provided. While she saw the kids every single day, she felt like she was caught “between a rock and a hard place when it came to time.” Specifically stating she tended to push fun activities to the side due to time constraints. So, even though she doesn’t always see the students in class every day she had more autonomy to focus on the aspects of each lesson that she wanted to, since she knew they would get the other information when they completed their online lesson.

**Teacher D research question 1 summary.** Teacher D defined blended learning as a combination of face-to-face teachers and virtual learning; it needed both of these to be considered blended. Teacher D also focused on her lack of control due to the curriculum provided, the limited onsite classes, and attendance problems with the students. However, she also focused on how that provided curriculum can be a huge benefit when used correctly because
students get additional information and should be better prepared for the teacher’s lessons, teachers have a guideline, and teachers are able to pick and choose the things within the lesson to really focus on during the class since the students still get the rest of the information. Teacher D also focused on how this environment allowed her to create a stronger relationship with her students.

**Research Question 1 Summary.**

In the end, the four participants involved in this study provided a simple definition that became more in-depth with additional responses. All participants defined blended learning as a mix between online and traditional learning environments. Be that as it may, it was also important to include the special aspects of their environment. They also defined blended learning as a combination between the virtual teachers, onsite teachers, success coaches, online learning platform, and their students.

While all of these aspects came into play within their definition of blended learning, the participants also focused on the issue of control. Some focused on having more control and autonomy within their classrooms, with the students and their pace and with the online curriculum. This additional control over the format of their teaching and learning allowed the teachers to focus on creating a strong rapport with their students. However, some of those same things created a feeling of no control since they weren’t able to control the curriculum that was already created, they couldn’t make a student work at a specific pace, and they couldn’t always do exactly what they wanted within the classroom.

**Research Question 2**

Research question two asked what the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges are when working in a blended learning environment. This question was answered throughout
different data collections. The interviews, observations, check-in meetings and lessons plans provided information on this question.

In reference to research question two the interview questions asked the teachers to describe their current job and their daily routine. The participants were also asked to explain the impact their blended environment had on their daily tasks. Finally, they were asked to explain how their learning environment hindered or facilitated their ability to teach.

The check-in meetings were short sessions with each participant to see how they were doing and what was happening within their environment. The check-in meetings all happened during the transition period from first to second semester. One participant was completing exams for semester one while the other three participants were preparing for second semester to start. The check-in meetings focused on the positive and negative things happening within their environment, and it also provided additional information on the environments impact on their daily tasks.

Two participants were able to complete the observations. The observation forms (Appendix D) focused on how the teachers implemented their lessons within the blended setting. This provided more detailed information on their daily routine. It also provided insight on how the environment was hindering and/or facilitating their ability to teach.

The following themes were discovered through the analysis of the data:

- Additional jobs
- Schedule
- Students
- Pace
- Personalized learning
Teacher A.

Interview. During Teacher A’s interview he answered seven questions in relation to research question two. The responses for the seven questions allowed the participant to showcase the strengths and challenges of working in the blended environment. Teacher A was the English teacher for Loomis Academy 1, however, he completed his interview during an atypical day because due to absent staff members he was the acting principal. Due to the small staff provided at the Loomis Academy schools, there were no assistant principals. This meant one of the other staff members would be considered the principal’s ‘number two’ and they were in charge when the principal had to be out of the building. Originally, the plan was to observe him as an English teacher, but he had to cancel classes and multi-task as a principal in charge and as the English teacher working with students in the team rooms.

When asked to describe his current job he said “My job consists of being in charge of 180 students…probably 190 students taking English. At the moment it is pretty overwhelming. I feel like every day I’m just barely keeping up.” Teacher A continued by discussing the additional jobs he had to complete in the building stating “in the situation I am in there are a lot of hats and mandates that are placed on me.” He focused on the problem surrounding the fact that he had to cancel classes because someone was ill. He was very adamant that the student should come first but that was not always the case in his environment. Teacher A brought up possible reasons for this, speculating that it could be due to the setup of the building or the small staff that they had.
The next interview question asked Teacher A to describe his daily routine. However, this seemed to be very difficult because the daily routine and schedule changed every day for him. Teacher A said that these changes created positive and negative aspects to his environment. One personal reason for liking the different daily schedule focused on always having something new to do each day. He stated “it is very difficult to keep that structure with the students.” On Monday’s Teacher A focused on skills so he could be working on writing skills like persuasion or alternate endings or he could be helping students on their specific portfolios for the course. On Tuesday’s Loomis Academy 1 had their virtual lessons for their students. Since they tried to keep the schedule open for students to meet with their virtual teachers, the face-to-face teachers worked with different groups of students. Having said that, each individual student might have been working on something completely different due to the students pace. While one student could be “working on a shorter story… a quick check… an essay they didn’t complete on their test…” Teacher A still considered this a positive because it allowed for flexibility in what he was teaching and doing. On the other hand, his last comments on his daily routine focused on having “peace of mind,” by having a daily routine.

The sixth question asked “What impact does the blended environment have on the tasks you have to complete on a daily basis?” Teacher A focused a lot on the data that the blended environment provided him. While students worked to complete the lessons, the students and teachers were provided with automatic feedback from the online platform. The live grade book allowed him to see how the students were doing on a particular objective. This “gives me an idea of where I wanna go and what objectives I need to hit upon and what I can do to make the lessons a little more exciting I guess.” So, when he was planning his lessons in advance he could
see what objectives the students were performing well on and the ones they needed more help with and that allowed him to create more specific lessons for his students.

Questions seven and eight focused on the learning environment’s ability to hinder and facilitate his teaching. Teacher A stated that Loomis Academy I had an open environment, which meant the team rooms were open to one another with only a small path of lockers separating them. Teacher A said “a lot of students find it easy to get off task and that can be simple distractions because they are teenagers and they wanna talk to each other, they want to socialize.” This made it very difficult for them to create a “study hall environment” that is supposed to be created in the team rooms. With students only being in the building for four hours he found that they only did a couple of lessons or rushed through the correct number of expected lessons so that they could spend the rest of the time doing whatever they wanted to do.

The amount of time spent in the building was another concern for Teacher A. With the limited face-to-face time he felt it “takes away the teachable moments that I would have in a different environment,” because he was spending that time making sure they understood the portfolio or preparing for their next test. Having a “curriculum that is set in stone,” made it difficult for him to make adjustments and modifications but it also meant there was less opportunities for Teacher A to bring in things that he was interested in.

Teacher A was also asked how the learning environment facilitated his ability to teach. Teacher A focused on two specific things: communication and rapport. While he discussed the negative aspects of the set-up of the building in reference to student’s completing their lessons successfully he still thought this environment really supported communication because it allowed him to step outside of his room and talk to the students in their team rooms. Due to the additional amount of communication, this helped build rapport and engage with his students. He
felt this was really important since he was sometimes placed in different positions apart from English teacher. This meant when he asked students to do something, no matter his position, students would usually do it because of the rapport he had been able to build with them individually.

**Observation.** Teacher A was observed as a teacher in December, 2016. This observation happened in Teacher A’s English classroom but he taught a skills session in math. During the observation, the researcher looked at how the lesson was blended, what the teacher’s goal was for the lesson, what the teacher expected to accomplish and the overall reflections on the lesson.

In reference to the weaknesses working in a blended learning environment, there were a few areas of focus for Teacher A. He showcased some of the problems with the students in his environment. When students showed up for the skills session, it was expected they had certain materials like writing utensils however, students had come in asking for materials that the teacher didn’t have. Another problem was the number of times Teacher A had to give directions to his students, within four minutes, he had repeated the directions four times. Originally, Teacher A explained the instructions when the students arrived on time but was required to explain them again while students walked in late. When asked why students were late he stated they didn’t know where they were supposed to be for the last period of the day.

During the math skills session, Teacher A showed some of the positive aspects of working in the blended environment. Teacher A mentioned this environment allowed him to build a rapport with his students which had been very evident during this observation. Some students walked in a couple of minutes before the session started and they were laughing even when talking about a subject they were uncomfortable doing. Teacher A continued to keep a
humorous conversation throughout the rest of the period while he motivated them to keep plotting their math points.

Another positive aspect was shown in the explanation of how the lesson was blended and the teacher’s reflection. The teacher reflected on how surprised he had been by how many students were not able to do this math problem, he stated “we were working with a lower level math group but the assignment, even though it was extra credit, was below their age group.” While these students had problems completing the assignment, the staff still utilized the blended aspect by incorporating different student groups based on their individual need.

**Check-in Meeting.** Teacher A completed his check-in meeting in January, 2017, and had been preparing for the second semester stating that he was “hanging in there by a thread.” Teacher A stated he wasn’t prepared for the second semester “I don’t have any plans for the second semester,” because he was still trying to complete the first semester grading.

Teacher A discussed some of the semester changes they were making to the schedule. Loomis Academy 1 decided to change the schedule to allow the face-to-face teachers to “meet with kids two times a week instead of once a week.” On the other hand, a problem focused on the fact that there was only one staff member making changes to the schedule which was very difficult to complete alone.

Another positive focused around the staff; onsite and virtual staff. Teacher A stated “the staff is coming together a little bit more,” due to being pushed together during exam week. Exam week required staff to rely on each other. Teacher A also focused on how the virtual teachers would be paired with an onsite staff member to help students complete their portfolios. Teacher A stated “we schedule them and then if students have problems they can come to me, so I can help when the virtual teachers aren’t available.” While this is an additional duty for the
face-to-face teachers, Teacher A said “I think this will ultimately produce more success on the portfolio side.”

Teacher A also focused on how the live grade book could really help him complete his daily tasks. The Headley Learning Platform automatically graded the multiple choice portions of all assessments which made it easy to see how students were doing. It also allowed Teacher A to focus on the writing abilities of his students.

Teacher A still had concerns with the environment. The first concern focused on the low staff and the stress of the job being placed on them. He said “I don’t want to see them crack. They can’t pull away for a moment.” This made it difficult to push forward but he believed the principal was finding reasons to push them together. Another concern with the small staff focused on unplanned situations like a student misbehaving, a parent walking in, or someone else that needed the principal meant they lost her. If someone was missing then someone else has to be pulled to complete their job, for instance, they had to pull the fitness instructor to answer the phones. When the onsite staff was required to complete other jobs it meant they were unable to complete their own jobs “there is no time for making calls…the amount of work that is being asked doesn’t fit in a normal business day and that doesn’t include grading and things we as normal teachers are expected to handle.”

Another problem, one that had already been touched on, was the scheduling problems within the school. On top of adding an additional class time for each student the staff had to deal with conflicts in the schedule. For example “students between different classes, like a senior that needs to take an English 10 class but also an Algebra 2 and it is crossing with each other.” Figuring out how to find time for 180 or more students to go to class two times a week for
English and math was hard enough, but when students were double dipping because they were off track it made it very difficult to get them in their classes.

Another concern for Teacher A focused on what was happening within the team rooms. Teacher A stated that technology was becoming a problem; specifically the student’s obsession with their cell phones. The bigger concern was that there was no “real follow through on consequences.” There was no real discipline in the school. “We can’t do detentions and we don’t have time between morning and afternoon.” Teacher A stated that if a student “lashes out our only choice is to send them home.” Within the team rooms, the students were spending a lot of time off task “even with a good success coach they are having difficulties keeping them going.” Loomis Academy 1 provided their students with a pacing guide which assigned a specific number of lessons to complete each day. Now students have started to “complete some quick assessments and then they use it to do other things even when redirected- goes along with no follow up consequences.”

Continuing his focus on the problems with the environment, Teacher A was asked to explain how the environment made it difficult to complete his daily tasks. He responded that the open environment set up made it a challenge to complete his expected tasks because “there is no filter.” Teacher A stated that students were always coming into the classroom even when he was teaching “someone is knocking on the door or coming in and that can derail me and frustrate me.”

Finally, when asked to share any additional information, Teacher A focused on what he felt was the biggest problem with blended learning: Internet access. Teacher A stated “the biggest problem in blended learning is that because students work on a computer, because they have access to the Internet it becomes very easy to find answers and lose their education.”
Students had to have integrity when completing their course work and instead he found them focused on finding the easy answer instead of reading the material themselves.

**Teacher A research question 2 summary.** Teacher A provided a lot of information on the strengths and weaknesses of blended learning throughout the initial interview, observation, and check-in meeting. One of the main areas of focus was on the additional jobs he was required to do in this setting. At times, he had to work with students on their virtual classes, he taught different skills, and had a lot of work to do within the online learning platform. While the schedule allowed the staff an opportunity to change things easily to provide a better environment, it also limited the amount of time teachers were able to work with students face-to-face. The online learning platform and the open environment created some additional control issues for Teacher A: he wasn’t able to control the individual pace for his students, he had a lot of data to comb through that could change every hour, the students found it easier to get off task with the open environment which created additional discipline issues and they had no way to handle them except to send them home. On the other hand, the major discipline issues were less than he previously experienced and he felt that was due to the strong rapport he had with his students.

**Teacher B.**

**Interview.** Teacher B was asked to answer six interview questions that focused on determining what she felt were the strengths and challenges of working in the blended environment. The first question asked her to describe her current job and Teacher B focused on how big her job was at Loomis Academy 1. First, she stated that she was the whole math department, she had nine preps to prepare for and classes to meet with, she also had to provide Response to Intervention, RtI, support to the students, she was the mentor to the special
education department, and she was the School Support Team, SST, lead which meant she was “responsible for monitoring… and providing support to all of the staff for coming up with intervention plans for our students.”

When asked to describe her daily routine it was difficult for her since she didn’t know her schedule off the top of her head since it changed every day. When asked to pick one of the days and describe it she explained her schedule for Tuesday stating that it “is nicer than any other day in the week.” On Tuesdays they had virtual lessons so the students were spending the majority of the day working within those classes which promoted the face-to-face teachers to create a support day. The class periods were all 37 minutes long and she spent the first two periods working with upperclassmen, then she taught an Algebra 2B parts class followed by an Algebra 2A session, and finally she had a free period that she used to plan for the skills session which was the last period of the day. On Tuesday, the skills session was a math focus so she planned it for all of the teachers and students. After the morning session was completed, she helped with dismissal, took her lunch break before the afternoon session started, and then repeated the morning shift for the afternoon.

When asked if the current learning environment hindered Teacher B’s ability to teach she had two main concerns. The first concern focused on the face-to-face schedule. Teacher B discussed the expectations for students, stating they are “only here four hours a day and four days a week and supposedly completing fourteen hours on their own.” The first problem was that students were not completing the hours on their own which meant it was very difficult to make up the extra time. This was even more difficult when Teacher B only saw her students once a week, for a limited time, which meant she typically only saw a student three times before they were supposed to start a new unit.
The second concern still focused on the limited time with students but also the types of students they were getting. She stated “the type of students we are attracting are not the type of students that are capable of learning math on their own.” In general, she believed most people don’t learn math on their own but need someone to explain it to them. The students they were attracting needed someone to teach them math face-to-face, every single day. However, that was not happening with the blended schedule which made it hard to promote successful math habits.

After explaining how her learning environment hindered her ability to teach, Teacher B was asked to explain how the learning environment facilitated her teaching. Teacher B felt like having “access to the curriculum 24/7,” was beneficial for students. Students were able to flip through their text books and view embedded videos to support them whenever they logged on. If students were using the resources that were provided to them, Teacher B thought it could help her teaching because they would have the background information prior to class.

Teacher B also focused on the provided curriculum for the teachers as a positive. Since someone else had created all the assessments and portfolios, it created a backward design course and “when you have the end goal in mind and you’ve already decided from the beginning this is the learner outcome I want… you are better able to design your teaching around helping students master the key concepts.” Teacher B realized that having the assessments already created when she started planning lessons for the unit helped prevent her from “making it up at the end.” This stopped her from just hoping they focused on the right key concepts and instead allowed her to present the concepts from the very beginning.

The next couple of questions focused on what changes she would have liked to see within her environment and what things she would want to remain unchanged. To start with, Teacher B would like to see more face-to-face staff. Due to the management transition, Loomis Academy
went from two face-to-face teachers per subject to one a piece and she said “we need it, our student’s need it, nine preps is too much for anybody and 180 students is too many for anyone to handle.” On the other hand, Teacher B did not just want to see an additional math and English teacher again instead, she wanted to see all of the core teachers in the building. Teacher B felt strongly that the students at Loomis Academy 1 “need a face-to-face teacher in science and social studies.” Teacher B understood why the Loomis Academy model chose to offer electives purely virtual in response to “managing your budget with teacher salaries.” She found the students were relatively successful with the elective courses that were offered. Still, she wanted to see “some face-to-face instruction for all of those core academics.”

Another change for Teacher B was the face-to-face schedule because she felt the students should still have attended school for the full thirty hour schedule. Teacher B wanted to see the students “five days a week with your typical school day,” instead of trying to split students up into two different sessions. To be successful, she would like to see her students at least every other day if not the five days a week. Teacher B stated that the “classes that have been most successful historically are those that we’ve been able to schedule face-to-face instruction three or four times a week.”

Teacher B then discussed how she would like to keep the small class sizes. For her, she automatically split a “class when you hit 20… the largest class I have is nineteen and the smallest class I have is four,” and normally the classes run about twelve students a piece. When the school was fully staffed, Teacher B enjoyed the use of the success coach as the “go-to person for the students and helps them monitor their pacing and their progress and just supporting them socially and emotionally.” Due to the fact that they didn’t have a full staff she noticed the impact they had on the environment and realized the students were missing the “more
personalized attention.” She also noted that without the full success coach staff they saw a big impact on “student’s performance and behavior and satisfaction.”

**Observation.** During Teacher B’s observations there were obvious teacher-perceived strengths and weaknesses within the blended environment. One of the first focuses, student pace, proved to be a strength and challenge. During observation number one the teacher’s expected plan had been to “work closely with a small group of students that are behind or failing so that they can bring their grades up and complete missing work.” Since the program stated that students could work at their own pace it was sometimes difficult to determine which students were behind but they were still pulled in when they were further behind than expected. Observation one showed a student working on sample work they had been working on the previous week. Since this student had still been trying to complete this one assignment more work was piling up as overdue assignments for him to complete. This student was working at his own pace but kept falling behind which meant Teacher B had to keep finding new ways to get him, and others, through the material.

On the other hand, the second observation showed how working at their own pace could be a benefit when Teacher B had a discussion with students about when they wanted to take their final exam. Teacher B felt these students were on pace and was comfortable if they took the exam early. By taking the exam early she stated that they would know if they passed prior to exam week which also allowed the teacher to focus on students that were further behind and needed more help.

Another challenge with the blended environment, which was shown through both of Teacher B’s observations, was the attendance rate for the two courses. During the first observation, only one student was present for class, when asked where the rest of the class was,
she explained that one of the students just “chose to skip class and the other students were absent.” During the second observation, Teacher B went into the team rooms in search for students that were missing from class but had been unsuccessful because they were all absent.

*Check-in Meeting.* Teacher B completed her check-in meeting mid-January of 2017. During that time she was frustrated trying to complete the schedule for the upcoming semester. Teacher B stated she spent a lot of time working on a schedule only to find additional problems trying to schedule “all of our students around two teachers for math and English.”

When asked if there were any good things happening within Loomis Academy 1, Teacher B focused on one of the additional job duties. She stated that they had decided to reintroduce the mentor program with their students. The mentor program would occur one period a week, specifically sixth period on Tuesdays. Mentor groups allowed the students to become closer with one adult in the building and to have an advocate. Teacher B claimed the “kids are pseudo excited” about the mentor groups coming back because they “commented a lot that they missed the mentoring and more socialization time with their peers.” Loomis Academy 1 hoped that bringing back the mentor groups would help students get back that socialization while still working closely with an adult.

Teacher B was asked if there was anything happening within her environment that had helped her complete her daily tasks since our last conversation and she brought up the concept of a “hired grader.” Due to the number of students and the nine different classes Teacher B prepped for, she kept falling behind she specifically stated “I could never get my grade book under 150-200 ungraded assessments.” She said “I was buried and so he graded everything for me.” While she appreciated the fact that he was grading everything she noticed she didn’t know where the students were as easily since she was not in the grade book.
During the check-in meeting the participant was also asked about the problems within their environment. Originally, Teacher B stated that “nothing has changed,” but then focused again on the second semester schedule. She said “trying to schedule everyone around one teacher is a huge issue,” and teachers would have “no support periods in the schedule.” As of second semester, the math and English teachers would be able to conduct class and that would be it because they did not have any “free periods at all to prep, to plan anything.” Based on first semester, those changes needed to be made and would allow students to be seen two times a week compared to once. This was a problem for Loomis Academy 1 because “if a kid was absent you didn’t get to see them,” then you couldn’t teach them and ensure their success.

During the check-in meeting Teacher B was asked if there was any additional information she would like to share about the blended environment. Teacher B focused on her views to make the Loomis Academy school model better, stating that the “concept is a good one… making the reality work is the challenge.” She stated students enrolled because they were excited about having their curriculum online and only going to the physical school half the time. She stated students didn’t realize what they are giving up when they signed up for this model. Students had problems working with only two face-to-face teachers because they were used to the teachers coming to them which wasn’t always the case with the virtual teachers. Teacher B stated that if she was going to make changes she wanted her students to realize what they were getting themselves into and create some sort of “flexible schedule scale.” She believed students should decide which face-to-face teacher they needed to spend more time with and would benefit from having all core teachers available. For example, a student might state “in math I’m really weak, I need them all the time but maybe science I am good and only need to see them once a
week.” She stated that she was not sure how that would work and she understood that it would be very difficult but students needed more access to their teachers.

**Teacher B research question 2 summary.** Teacher B also provided information on the strengths and weaknesses of blended learning through an initial interview, a check-in meeting, and two observations. She focused on six different themes throughout all three collection methods. The first theme, additional jobs, explained how much more work she had to do as a blended teacher: grading without controlling when students turned things in, documenting everything she did with her students, the additional duties she had like mentoring, interventions, and support sessions. Teacher B also focused on how the two onsite core teachers were limited on the time spent with students and the complications created when she tried to provide them with additional class sessions. The online curriculum provided students with a lot of the information they needed to understand the material but she found that the students were not using the curriculum the way they should and they were not working at an appropriate pace to complete their course work and be successful. Finally, the small staff allowed them to work closely together and have a strong grasp on the big pictures but it also required each staff member to do more to make sure the school ran smoothly.

**Teacher C.**

**Interview.** Teacher C was also asked to describe her current job to determine the strengths and challenges of working in the blended environment. She stated “I don’t think anyone would understand what it was,” in reference to what she had to do as a blended teacher. Teacher C showed up to work by 7:45AM and “it is non-stop go until 4:45PM every day.” Even saying that some days she barely got a lunch break and there was no down time throughout the
day. For her “it’s like you’re working nine hours a day, every single day, with kids asking you a million questions.”

Despite that, it was not just teaching that took up her day because she also had additional duties. For instance, she had to monitor the parking lot in the morning and afternoon to make sure students were behaving. Since her state required a math test to graduate, she was now teaching another class to help prepare students on top of her previously required courses and she felt like “you just get spinning around because you go from teaching Algebra 1, to Geometry, to Algebra 2 and then teaching the State 4 class.” Teacher C commented on how the traditional setting required you to teach one class multiple times throughout the day and you focused on tweaking it in order to make it the best possible lesson for the students, however, here that was not the case.

When asked more specifically to describe her daily routine she said that she started the day by dropping off her stuff in her room, monitoring the parking lot, and then she taught all of the previously mentioned courses. Loomis Academy 4 had the same schedule every day and each course was forty minutes in length. Unfortunately, due to a missing staff member all others have been taking turns “during my planning…playing secretary or administrative assistant.” If they were lucky they got a thirty minute lunch break “but a lot of girls here don’t even get a break.” Then everything repeats itself again for the afternoon session.

Teacher C described the impact the blended environment had on her ability to complete her daily tasks by focusing on everything that she was expected to complete during the day. Stating that “my tasks are just crazy because we are with kids all day long.” All interactions with students were expected to be logged into their system to create a document that informed everyone about what was going on with each student. Teacher C stated that obviously, as
teachers, there was grading, creating lesson plans, and responding to Emails. Since students weren’t passing the state tests, Loomis Academy 4 moved more towards printing off assessments to complete and taking pop quizzes to support understanding of the content.

When asked if her learning environment hindered her ability to teach, Teacher C originally said no. However, later she stated that what does make it hard was that “kids are all over the place and then kids start late. So, I have kids that are in unit five, kids in unit seven, kids are all over the place.” The online curriculum should have made it easier to teach because students were completing a lot of the background information prior to coming into the classroom which meant “I should be here just for remediation.” Unfortunately, the current students were not doing the lessons correctly or at the right pace which caused a difference between where students were expected to be and where they actually were.

Teacher C also focused on the given curriculum as a hindrance for her ability to teach because she had compiled a lot of really great lessons throughout her teaching experience and was unable to incorporate them since the curriculum was already provided. She felt like “it kind of limits you if you are going to follow the curriculum.” Even so, as it was her third year, she felt like she could make judgement calls in reference to what she was going to teach and if she was going to change the lessons. In the end she felt like she just “can’t really teach whatever we want to teach.”

On the other hand, Teacher C felt like the given curriculum could be a facilitator for teaching in this environment because the lessons were already provided and the assessments were already prepared. When she first started, she was told to have the students focus on completing projects but over the past few years she noticed that students didn’t understand the
concepts so she had to focus more on the math and the lessons so having a curriculum already created made it easier to teach the concepts.

Teacher C was asked to discuss the changes that she would have liked to see and she only had one area of change: the long days. Specifically, Teacher C said “These are just too long of days to be teaching.” Since the days were so long, she felt like other things were getting ignored and pushed to the side. For instance “at a traditional school you might teach five classes and then you’re done at 2:30 and then you have time to reflect… get ready for the next day… time to really organize.” Unfortunately, when school was not over until 4:45 you don’t get that time because “by the time you get home… we’re all exhausted and we gotta get up and do it all again.” Since the afternoon shift was so small, she wanted the shifts to combine to create one standard shift.

To determine the strengths of the learning environment, Teacher C was asked to explain what things she would like to remain the same within her environment. Teacher C stated “I think blended learning is the way of the future.” Because of that, she thought the “whole curriculum and learning online needs to stay.” The problem was this was not for all students “not all students can do this and figure it out and basically teach yourself.” She realized how successful the right type of students could be stating some were “finishing classes early and moving on to their next classes and getting to graduate early.” Blended learning was great when the students were doing what was expected.

**Lesson Plans.** In the seven lesson plans provided by Teacher C, data and student pace was a common theme within the rationale section. For example, in lesson plan one most students were in unit two and in lesson plan six most students were in unit six. Students were told they could work at their own pace even though there were still expectations and guidelines for where
they should be; this was in order to keep them on-track to pass. For Teacher C, the pace of the students was important enough for her to figure it out each week so she stated “most students are…” in reference to where they were in the course. There wasn’t a single lesson plan that stated every student was in the same unit. For the students that were not part of the “most” Teacher C had to find a way to motivate them and keep them engaged with the material even if they were not there.

Another strength was provided in an additional column on the lesson plans labeled “All math classes.” Within this section Teacher C stated that “all students had an opportunity for one on one instruction.” Teacher C was able to find time within the schedule to work individually with each of her math students. This provided the students with an option to have more individualized learning and provided her with the ability to know exactly how students were doing within each lesson. Teacher C was able to determine which students understood the concepts within the lessons and which ones did not very quickly, this allowed her to provide specific instruction to each of the students.

The final strength and challenge shown through the lesson plans focused on the classes she taught. Teacher C provided lesson plans on three different courses since she was the only face-to-face math teacher within Loomis Academy 4. This was a challenge for Teacher C because she did not have another math teacher for support and she was required to know the content for all levels of math well enough to teach them every day. She had to plan and grade for all three courses which created a lot of additional work.

However, this was also described as a strength of blended learning because her students always knew what she expected from them year-to-year. This created a looping environment which placed the students with the same teacher every single year. While they got new students
quite often, Teacher C had already built rapport with the returning students and it continued to grow throughout the years. This made it easier for Teacher C to focus on teaching the students the material since she had already built that relationship with them.

**Check-in Meeting.** Teacher C completed her check-in meeting January, 2017. When asked how she was doing Teacher C stated that she was doing “good.” She said they started the second semester and were really off to a good start. When asked to reflect on last semester and what she had accomplished, in reference to positive things happening within the school environment, Teacher C focused on the pace of the students. Loomis Academy 4 started second semester January 3rd, 2017. This meant students had “through Christmas break to work on classes,” for first semester. In reference to the pace of the students, Teacher C focused on how traditionally they tried to “get kids to end by December 16th” even though they had the entire break to complete their courses and bring their grades up. Habitually “kids in the past would say they were going to do work and never did,” which was why they promoted completing everything before they left. This year the “majority of the kids had their work done before going on break.” So, by following and keeping up with the pacing the students didn’t have to rush through their work during the break because it was already done.

Sticking with the positive aspects of the environment, she was asked how the environment made it easier to complete her daily tasks. Unfortunately, Loomis Academy 4 made the decision to close at the end of the school year. Based on this decision, many students had already left to attend a different school which meant their numbers were really low. Teacher C felt like the low student enrollment allowed her to really help the students that are still there. While the small number of students made it easier for Teacher C to focus on her students, it also lowered her excitement level which made it difficult to complete her tasks. She “used to teach to
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a roomful of kids,” but now she only worked with “a few kids at a time.” As of January, they were down to seventy-two students with the AM and PM sessions combined.

When asked about the problems happening within her school, Teacher C focused on two different issues. The first focused on the virtual teachers. During exam week, the students took their final exams proctored which required a virtual teacher to open the test while the onsite staff monitored to promote accurate test scores. During that week they had a lot of problems with the virtual teachers “not opening exams when we were ready to proctor.” She also focused on how they were not available for them during the week. This promoted a high need for problem solving while the onsite staff tried to create a solution that allowed the students to take the exams without the virtual teacher’s assistance. In the end, they ended up “printing off a lot of exams and then scanning them in to the virtual teacher,” which created a lot of additional work for the onsite staff.

Teacher C’s other problem focused on the way the online math curriculum was set up. The math course required students to complete sample work assignments which typically entailed the students to “open the text book and do like twenty problems similar to the traditional environment.” Students had the option to “mark as offline” if they wrote out the problems and then turned them directly into the teacher. The problem was when the students “never do them,” and their grade plummeted. Based on this problem, they were trying to find ways to get students to do them and bring their grades up.

Finally, Teacher C was asked if there was anything she would like to share about the blended learning environment. She stated that she wanted the “world to know that this kind of school needs to exits.” The students were really sad when they found out that their school was closing because they finally found a school that worked for them and were now forced to “go
back to a traditional school or purely virtual.” Teacher C stated that kids were excelling, graduating and doing great things within this environment. It was sad to see it go “because of funding or because you’re numbers aren’t where they need to be.” She hoped that someone would choose to invest in it because of how successful the students could be and hoped that they would continue looking into this type of school.

**Teacher C research question 2 summary.** Throughout Teacher C’s data collection she created a few different themes in concern to the weaknesses and strengths of blended learning. One of the main themes was the additional work she was required to do on top of her teaching duties: she monitored the parking lot, she taught an additional state required math class, and she filled in for missing staff members just to name a few. She also had a lot of additional teaching duties within the blended environment compared to her previous work experience. Within Loomis Academy 4 she was required to teach all of the face-to-face math classes, she logged and documented all forms of interaction with the students, used printed assessments to verify student learning, responded to a constant influx of Emails, and graded constantly. Other weaknesses focused on: the student’s ability to work at their own pace, the way the students were completing their online lessons, the ability to bring in additional support materials when the lessons were already prepared, the long days that were required due to the two different shifts, and sometimes the limited access to the virtual teachers. On the other hand, Teacher C focused on how the curriculum also provided her with a guideline to teach and if the students used it correctly they were able to do extraordinary things as a strength for blended learning. She also believed that this environment provided her with an ability to promote individualized and differentiated instruction, the looping concept supported this theme as well.

**Teacher D.**
Interview. In an attempt to answer research question two, Teacher D was asked seven questions during her interview. The first question focused on describing her current job. Teacher D stated “I flat out tell people that I am a high school English teacher.” From there, she stated that the conversation normally evolved and focused on how the attendance was different from a traditional school; explaining how “I have two groups of kids both the morning kids and the afternoon kids.” In spite of that, she was adamant that her current job was that of a high school English teacher.

On the other hand, when asked to be more specific in reference to her daily routine she provided more details on the job and stated that her schedule was different depending on the day. In the PM group, the students had direct instruction Mondays through Wednesdays and then had an intervention day on Thursday. In the AM group, the students had direct instruction Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays with their intervention day on Friday.

Teacher D’s interview was conducted on a Thursday, so she described her Thursday and Friday schedule, stating that it was an “intervention day.” On Thursdays she typically came in and started by monitoring the floor and working with students in their team rooms during her prep hours. Then she continued working with students during their specific class period. During advisory time she did something different depending on the day, stating that on that specific day she “sat in on a guest speaker for a college with the juniors and the seniors.” Then she had to continue monitoring the floor during the transition time between the morning and afternoon shifts. Since the PM shift’s last day was Thursday, her schedule changed from the morning session. As previously stated, Thursday and Friday were considered intervention days so they “pull in all of our students that are failing our class and or behind.” When they were in their
classrooms they specifically worked on bringing their grades up, completing lessons that were overdue or retaking tests.

After discussing the different schedule Teacher D had to work around, she was asked if the blended environment had an impact on the tasks she had to complete on a daily basis. Teacher D stated that “the blended environment in and of itself doesn’t create a lot of problems for my ability to do what I need to do on a given day.” The problem within her specific school was how student attendance “would be a stumbling block or hurdle for me in getting done what I need to do.” Due to the small school, she was not sure if the student’s attendance impacted her more or less than if it had been a larger school.

Teacher D stated they had chronic absentees and “in a brick and mortar they would be gone but here they linger.” When asked to explain why she felt the students lingered at the blended environment instead of the brick and mortar school she stated that after “ten unexcused absences,” a student could be withdrawn unless there were extenuating circumstances like a special education designation. In the brick and mortar school, after ten days the student would be considered truant and the truancy officer and court system would take over. In the blended environment she found herself more “in charge of keeping track,” of student absences. In a traditional school there were a lot of students whereas a charter school is traditionally smaller and she found they didn’t like to withdraw students because of the already small population.

When asked if there was anything in the blended environment that made it difficult to complete her job Teacher D stated “if anything I think it makes it better.” So, we moved on to the next question which focused on how the environment facilitated her ability to teach. Teacher D’s concentrated on the small class size. Loomis Academy 3 had two face-to-face teachers for their core subjects so Teacher D only taught juniors and seniors. Teacher D stated that she had
between sixteen to eighteen students per class. With the smaller class sizes, Teacher D believed it allowed her to “sit with the kids and actually have a literature discussion instead of me constantly talk at them all the time.”

An additional positive aspect focused on the student’s learning depth. Since the students were in such smaller class sizes it allowed them to have more in-depth conversations. For example, Teacher D stated that while her seniors worked on Milton’s *Paradise Lost* they had a deeper conversation about “Heaven and Hell, Jesus and Satan… it was getting to the mindset of what Milton had on writing it.”

Teacher D also touched on the curriculum that was created for the students and teachers. In a brick and mortar building “there are so many things you have to get through in a time period,” but in the blended environment the students already had the curriculum; they were already given their courses and assessments online. This meant “we can just focus on areas of need and areas of enhancement.” With the combination of small class sizes and provided curriculum this promoted the mastery learning that was expected for all students at the Loomis Academy schools.

During her interview Teacher D was asked “What changes, if any, would you like to see in your current situation?” Teacher D wanted to change the amount of time she had with her students. Specifically, she wanted to “have more time for onsite classes versus the virtuals, just because thirty-seven minutes for class periods goes by so dog gone fast.” The limited time “is short changing the kids,” when they wanted to work together and ask questions. Based on the type of students Loomis Academy 3 was attracting, she was concerned about how they needed more time to process the information and she knew having additional time for the onsite classes would provide that.
When asked what she would have kept the same Teacher D focused on the curriculum. For her, as a teacher, it was really nice to have the given curriculum. Since the students got there “curriculum as a whole virtually,” it allowed her to make changes and push project based learning for the portfolios. Teacher D also stated “I am differentiating not only by skill level but also by learning modality,” since the students were already getting the bulk of the information before coming to class. This curriculum allowed her to continue to give students projects that they were excelling at and she profited the environment for allowing that to happen.

*Check-in Meeting.* Teacher D completed her check-in meeting late January 2017 which had been exam week for Loomis Academy 6. When asked how Teacher D was doing she stated that she had spent all weekend grading the “sixty things that they submitted last minute.” Due to the fact that students turned things in last minute the quality of work had been very low but students were turning in work so she had “a number of kids off the failing list.”

In reference to the blended environment Teacher D stated one of the good things focused on the small staff since they “can more easily reevaluate at the end of the semester.” She stated that the small staff allowed them to “turn things around more quickly, to experiment, and do different things.” Teacher D said the small staff provided them with “more of a chance to talk to each other and reflect.”

The change in management had Teacher D excited. She said they were already preparing students for the next school year by changing the schedule so they were able to see the students more often. She also talked about the opportunity to get additional core teachers and a new curriculum carrier. Teacher D said the new management company was “local so they can pop in a lot more often,” to offer support. She was also excited that the company was allowing them to
continue using the blended environment stating that she just wanted to get in there and make changes now but knew “it is just a waiting game.”

During the check-in meeting Teacher D was also asked to talk about how the environment made it easier to complete her daily tasks. Since Loomis Academy 3 provided a flexible schedule it made it easier for her to work with students that needed additional support. If a student owed her an assignment she “can sit them down in the classroom and make them complete it.” She further stated “we’ve had kids in this English classroom all day every day for a couple of weeks,” just to get them to complete their work.

When asked if there were any problems within the school’s environment Teacher D focused on one main problem: attendance. Attendance was an even bigger problem when students didn’t have the necessary tools at home. The biggest tool needed was Internet access and a lot of the students that were absent were also the students that didn’t have it. Teacher D said students were also able to stay late or come early but they were “not taking it on themselves to stay late or come early.” Other things like “mid-year graduates, rushing to turn in assignments” were things that Teacher D felt were annoying but could still be overcome. In order to help the students succeed they had to show up first.

When asked if there was anything within the environment that made it difficult to complete her daily tasks she brought up two additional points. First, she focused on how grading would always be there but since students could work at their own pace “it comes down like an avalanche because everyone is freaking out about getting this done,” at the end of the semester. She also commented on the number of ESL, English as a Second Language, students they had gotten. “The needs that they have are much greater than I thought so that makes some things a little more difficult.” In addition to the extra support the ESL students needed, Teacher D found
that true intervention time compared to course support time was a lot more intensive and required more planning and time on her part to really create useful interventions.

When asked if there was any additional information Teacher D would like to share in reference to the blended learning environment she focused on doing a better job with the public relations aspect since “blended learning is the way to go.” Nevertheless, they currently had a stigma as an alternative education or credit recovery school and that was not the case. Be that as it may, due to that stigma, they were getting students that wanted and expected that type of school and were not prepared for the level of work that was required for this environment. Teacher D wanted the blended schools to “cater more towards those kids that want to go to college early, that are traveling athletes…” This environment needed to be thought of as “an advanced placement school, not a last ditch effort to get kids off their ding list for graduation.”

**Teacher D research question 2 summary.** When asked about the strengths and challenges within the blended environment, Teacher D started by explaining how the schedule constantly changed creating opportunities for additional support. She also stated the small class sizes promoted a strong learning environment, students were able to delve deeper into their curriculum, the curriculum allowed her to pick and choose what she would focus on during the face-to-face time without fear of them missing out on the material. While the class sizes promoted student learning she also felt that the small staff size promoted school growth since they reflected and talked more often. Teacher D focused on one specific challenge with teaching in the blended environment, the attendance problems. She noticed since she only saw them four hours a day for four days it was difficult to promote success when they were also absent. While she considered this a challenge, she also stated that due to the small school size the absences were noticed more easily. However, she wanted to see them more often through less absences
and more time in school. During her check-in meeting Teacher D also showed how students rushed at the end of the semester to turn things in and complete lessons which added more work for her in reference to grading and having them fix their quality of work.

**Research Question 2 Summary.**

In reference to the challenges within the blended learning environment, the four participants agreed on a few key themes. One main theme was on the additional jobs that were expected for them to complete between the online and face-to-face settings. They were also concerned by the types of students they were getting and how much additional time these students should be in school. Unfortunately, the schedule didn’t allow this to happen and created additional problems due to the limited face-to-face time. Finally, another concern focused on the things out of their control, like the work-at-your-own pace concept for the students, the small staff, and some learning platform issues.

On the other hand, the participants discussed some of the strengths provided through the blended environment. The participants agreed that the relationships they were able to build with their students was exceptional. The online curriculum was also a positive aspect because it provided a framework for their course, it allowed students to obtain additional support and a more personalized learning environment which promoted mastery learning. Teachers were also excited about the support they got from their coworkers due to the small environment and how willing everyone was to make changes to promote successful students through very personalized learning. Finally, the participants felt the learning platform provided them with a lot of additional support and data to create effective lessons.

**Research Questions 3**
Research question 3 asked: How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments? Teachers were asked four interview questions that focused on how their previous educational jobs helped them in their current blended environment and what teacher programs they had or wish they had to better prepare them for this environment. They were also asked during their check-in meetings to think about what they were using from their previous jobs in their current environment.

The following themes were discovered through the analysis of the data:

- No previous teaching training
- Personal additional training
- Communication
- Differentiation for mastery learning
- Observations
- Communication
- Data
- Teaching skills
- Experiential knowledge

**Teacher A.**

**Interview.** When asked to describe Teacher A’s previous education related job experiences he was able to describe twenty years of teaching experience. Prior to joining Loomis Academy 1, Teacher A worked at two different State Municipal School Districts: Thrasher School and Kinder High School. Teacher A described Thrasher School as having a real community even though it had a “bad rap: this is the bad school with the bad kids and they get out of hand.” While sometimes this did happen they, had a lot of community involvement to
help the students. However, Kinder High School provided a completely different experience. In this school, it was imperative that you got to know the students and their background because of gang affiliation which also required him to be very observant of what was going on outside of the classroom. These schools housed 1,800 to 2,000 students compared to the 250 that Loomis Academy 1 housed.

When asked to more specifically describe his daily routine at his previous schools he brought up the fact that he wore many different hats at Loomis Academy 1 but in the other two environments he was strictly the English teacher. He spent the majority of his time in his classroom which made him feel “really alienated, even from the other English teachers.” During his breaks he would normally find himself taking a breather since he had a “constant flow of students,” coming into his room. Teacher A also focused on the differences in the class sizes on his expectations for the period. At Thrasher School and Kinder High School he would have classes with up to thirty-five students in them, depending on the attendance, so if the first class came in with thirty-five students he would have to work on crowd control. Then the second class could come in and there would be only eighteen so he would be able to just teach the lesson. Those differences greatly impacted his daily routine.

When asked what teacher programs he attended that supported his work in blended learning he pointed out how he was “only introduced to blended learning five years ago.” Based on this fact, the majority of the teacher programs he went through were not focused on blended learning. He attended a University “rated number two in the nation at the time for education and English.” This meant he was taught how to handle a classroom and learned about the “new modes of learning in education,” for the time. But, twenty years ago people had just started talking about email and the Internet “it wasn’t a profound influence in the classroom.” Since
graduating, Teacher A focused on taking courses that were “aligned to technology,” in order to “sharpen and hone my own skills.”

When asked what type of teacher programs he would like to see available to support blended education teachers, Teacher A brought up the “need to be paired with another teacher that is already doing blended learning.” Teacher A stated there were so many different ways to do blended learning: you could follow a specific curriculum, do a flipped classroom model or have students prepare for the lesson in different ways. Since there were so many different things you could do within the blended environment he would like to see a lot more observations to create prepared teachers.

Teacher A would also like to see more focus on technology. The focus needed to be on how to use technology in a way that could benefit students and not just how to type the fastest on the computer. Instead, teacher programs should teach teachers to integrate technology into the classroom. Teachers needed to have appropriate techniques modeled for them so that they could then provide the best practices to their students.

**Observation.** In reference to question three, the observation did not necessarily talk about the teacher education programs the teacher felt needed to be created. Even so, Teacher A’s interactions with his specific environment presented certain skills necessary to have if they were going to work in this environment.

One of the biggest ideas that arose within the observation was the idea of being able to change plans quickly. For example, Teacher A was given a lesson one period prior to the skills session he was expected to teach. He had to depend on the other teacher to provide him with something the students were able to understand and do, and to provide him with enough instructions to explain the assignment to the students.
Another theme focused on the ability to multi-task. Teacher A had to deal with discipline issues that occurred throughout the lesson. For instance, students were late to class, they were not prepared for class, they did not necessarily want to do the math assignment, and they wanted a lot of additional help. At the same time, he had to keep the students on track, he had to work on the math with the students so he had a better idea of what had been expected. He also had to keep them motivated to do the math problems when they wanted to just go home.

Another important aspect of the job focused on the way the staff member had to present himself. During the reflection, Teacher A stated “I am fortunate enough to command enough respect from teachers. I have to change my behavior but they’ll listen to me.” This idea was also prevalent when talking about the students. He had to hold himself to a high enough standard that other people in the building would view him as the person in charge when that was not his job. Teacher A did not traditionally teach math, but he stood in front of the classroom and explained what was expected during the lesson and the students sat down and worked on it.

**Check-in Meeting.** During the check-in meeting, Teacher A was asked if he used any skills or materials from previous jobs within his current environment. The first focus area centered around the additional materials that he used in different settings. Teacher A stated that he brought in “support materials to build skills and reach standards that are only brushed on,” in the Headley Learning Platform. In addition to the support materials, he also liked to bring in more engaging activities that he used in the face-to-face environment to get students “out from the computer.” Teacher A also discussed the “basic communication skills,” that were required for teaching a face-to-face classroom, the ability to build rapport to reduce classroom management problems, and his ability to “handle a large group at a time.”
Teacher A research question 3 summary. Teacher A began describing how teacher education programs could better prepare teaching candidates by focusing on some of the differences between his previous education related experiences and his blended environment. One of the areas he focused on was the difference in size and knowing how to handle 250 students compared to thousands. He also believed that in his previous jobs he was strictly an English teacher but that was not the case within the blended environment. One concern about the ability to prepare teaching candidates for a career in blended learning focused on how new the environment was. He left his undergraduate program feeling very prepared to be a teacher but at that time no one talked about blended education as an option. He didn’t know it existed and believed that would have made a world of difference in preparing him. Since graduating, Teacher A had to focus on supplementing his own knowledge and skills through conferences and professional development and he would like to see those focus more specifically on blended learning. His main focus for the teaching schools was to provide more opportunities for observations and interactions with blended schools prior to graduation. Teacher A also presented specific skills that new teachers should have to work in the blended environment. Those skills were the ability to: change plans instantly, multi-task, presentation of self, and knowing how to find additional support materials.

Teacher B.

Interview. During the interview process, Teacher B described her previous education related job experiences. While she moved around to multiple different settings prior to starting at Loomis Academy 1, they were all within the traditional brick and mortar setting. Originally, Teacher B spent four years working full-time in a public school: two years teaching math and two years teaching special education in a resource room. She also spent another year working in
a resource room within an in-school suspension program for the county and two years working with emotionally disturbed students in a self-contained high school classroom prior to becoming the curriculum coordinator. Even after joining Loomis Academy 3, she moved around within the building. She started as the math teacher, moved to the Special Education spot for a year and a half, and then went back to math.

Teacher B described the expectations for her daily routine within the self-contained classroom and other assignments. In the self-contained classroom, Teacher B was with the students the entire day “from the moment they walked through the door, through lunch, through the end of the day.” In the end, the biggest difference from was the fact that there wasn’t a time where she was alone.

In the other teaching assignments Teacher B stated she normally met with a couple of classes in the morning, had a duty that broke up the morning and afternoon classes, she would be assigned a lunch period and a planning period, and then she would wrap the day up by teaching the rest of her classes. In reference to her schedule, she stated that “in most of my assignments my daily schedule was the same classes meeting each day in the same order.”

Teacher B was then asked “What teacher program, if any, did you attend that supported your work in blended learning? Explain how it supported you.” Teacher B responded “Specifically in blended learning, I can’t think of anything” so the researcher moved on to question fourteen and asked what teacher programs she would like to see. One of the things that Teacher B brought up was the Loomis Academy “first year teachers… 100 course.” This was a course that provided training on how to be successful within their specific environment. However, what would have been most useful would have been scenarios set up outside of the classroom “where you are in the setting.”
Teacher B wanted to see things that taught them how to create lesson plans for a provided curriculum. Teacher B set up her lesson plans by writing unit plans. She would go to the planner provided in the Headley Learning platform to see how much time the course had allocated each lesson. From there, she determined which objectives and lessons she needed to spend more time on in class and which lessons the students were more likely to complete on their own. Teacher B took a “Backwards design course for my master’s program,” but even this course was different because “I was setting up the final assessment too it wasn’t just given to me.” Teacher B believed it was different working with lessons someone else had created.

Teacher B would also like to see more training or classes on how to work with data. For example, there were multiple reports provided by the school to the teachers on the students. Still, knowing how to take all of the reports and “using the data… to pull out which students are lagging behind and figure out a plan…” that will get them caught up was difficult in her limited time. Within this environment there was “a lot of data thrown in our faces without being able to really digest all of it or know what to look at.” If a teacher didn’t know how to look at the data, digest it, and determine how to use it correctly it became very overwhelming. However, if teachers were trained to look at the data and “pull out from there like essential information and then use it in some useful fashion in a timely manner,” she thought it could be beneficial in any situation.

**Observation.** Teacher B’s first observation occurred during a skills session for math which showed how teachers needed to know how to work with different leveled groups. The teacher stated that depending on which students showed up for the session, would depend on what their goal was for the day and what they would do. During this skills session only one of the expected students were present. This meant the teacher worked one-on-one with him to
complete the assignment he had been working on. During the second observation, three students showed up for class and the teacher taught the lesson as a whole group.

Another prevalent idea that was important was the teacher’s ability to multi-task. During the first observation, Teacher B explained how to turn in sample work while her class was coming in. When that student left, she worked one-on-one with the only student present while she also printed documents for the next class. During the second observation, the teacher got students working and then left in search of missing students stating it was faster to just go get them. At 9:44 AM, a student walked in to talk to the teacher which required her to stop teaching just to remind him she couldn’t work with him because she had class. The student continued to talk before he decided to set up a meeting for the following day. At 9:50 another student walked into class asking for a document that he missed. During both of these interruptions, the teacher kept track of where she was within the lesson, monitored the students that were in class and handled the student that was interrupting the class.

Another trait that was apparent was her ability to redirect students and keep them working on their material. During the first observation, Teacher B constantly redirected the student when he wasn’t on the right path; providing him additional instructions and ideas that helped him stay on the right track. About ten minutes into the observation she started asking him “IF” questions; like “if we did this in one step instead of two how would we do that?” These questions got the student through the different steps of the problem. During the second observation, with three students, she worked on redirecting and motivating them. For instance, when students were stumped she gave new ideas and different examples to show how to solve the same problem. Teacher B found new ways to direct the students down the right path in order to help them understand the content.
Teacher B research question 3 summary. Teacher B stated that she had no prior experience with blended learning environments prior to working at Loomis Academy. She identified a few areas that would have supported her and she believed would support future blended teachers: observing and interacting within this environment with an experienced professional, setting up lessons for material that was already created and training on how to use data quickly and correctly. Like Teacher A, Teacher B also presented skills that she needed to be successful within the blended environment. During her observation she specifically showed how you needed to know how to work with different groups, to differentiate lessons based on students understanding, to change plans quickly, to deal with interruptions, to motivate, and to redirect constantly.

Teacher C.

Interview. Teacher C had worked in education for thirteen years. Prior to beginning her job with Loomis Academy 4, she only worked in the traditional brick and mortar environment. She started her career as a long term sub where she taught seventh grade math. From there, she taught summer school for eighth grade math. Then she worked at an alternative school where she was teaching “everything from science to life skills to math.” After working at the alternative school, she spent the majority of her career at a traditional high school teaching Algebra 1 and one hour of Geometry.

In an attempt to determine how these previous jobs helped her to work in the blended environment Teacher C was asked to describe what her daily routine looked like. Teacher C stated that she started her day around seven in the morning and ended by four each day. In those nine hours she described a relatively relaxed schedule. Stating “I usually got there around 7:00-7:15, drank my coffee, I read my emails for a while, got my lessons ready for the day…” From
there she taught for three hours; between classes she stood in the hallway, then she had lunch and planning before she taught for a couple more hours. Then she would stay up to an hour to get ready for the next day and grade any new assignments.

Teacher C was also asked to describe any teacher programs she participated in that supported her work in blended learning. “First, I was going to say nothing. But, I guess, I could say that I took one online class for my master’s degree,” was her response to her training. Teacher C wasn’t able to recall the class she took, just stated that it had to have been some sort of education class. While the class itself didn’t teach her about blended learning, she used it to remember how she felt when she took the class in order to “have some empathy for these kids trying to do it.” She remembered how difficult it was to work on all of the material online; she remembered thinking “where is the teacher?” While this helped her understand what the student’s might go through she stated that she didn’t have any other training. When asked if she had anything outside of her graduate program that supported her work in the classroom, she stated there was nothing else.

To combat the fact that she didn’t have any real training she was asked what teacher program she felt would have better supported her work in the blended environment. The first area that Teacher C focused on was the fact that there needed to be a light shed on blended learning. “They need to make teachers aware that it is out there.” Until teachers were aware it was an option they don’t know they should prepare for a possible career in a blended environment.

Once blended learning was more talked about she wanted to see classes in college that focused on the blended classroom. She commented on the increase in teachers creating a “flipped classroom where they are making their own videos and trying to get this up and running
on their own in a brick and mortar high school.” Based on this fact, she stated she had been to a lot of conferences where they focused on that. However, in order to prepare possible teachers for a future in blended learning she would like to see more classes incorporated in their undergraduate program on “how to make a flipped classroom or incorporating if you are going to be a blended teacher.” In the end, Teacher C felt strongly that there needed to be a class on blended learning added to the curriculum for teachers.

Finally, Teacher C wanted to see more observations within the blended environment. Teachers are required to complete some hours where they observed other teachers so they should spend some of that time in “online learning schools.” This would allow them to see how the online environment worked and what was expected from the teachers and the students.

**Lesson Plans.** One idea that Teacher C focused on in her lessons was the ability to use data. Teacher C had an entire section in her lesson plans that stated the pass rate data for each of her classes. Each week Teacher C pulled data to determine where the students were grade-wise. The blended environment provided a lot of additional data to the teacher and they needed to know how to fish through it and find what they could use. In this instance, the teacher focused on how many students were passing her classes.

Another thing that should be focused on was how to work with different groups of students. For example, in lesson plan number three, Teacher C stated that students would be “guided through guided notes,” students would also “practice problems and then work independently.” Teachers needed to know how to work with full groups, small groups and independently. It was also important for teachers to know how to keep students working in the different groups. In a traditional school many teachers worked with about thirty students per class but that wasn’t the case for Teacher C. She showed she only had eighteen Algebra students
all together, she had forty-one Geometry students and thirty-two Algebra 2 students during the week of September 19th, 2016.

Within the reflections on the lessons, Teacher C focused on how the students felt at the end of the lesson. For example, in lesson plan number two Teacher C stated “after 2 days of solving, some students need more practice,” for their Algebra curriculum. She wrote in lesson plan number three that “after two weeks of solving, some students finally understand the process,” for Algebra. In lesson plan number four she wrote “students are doing a great job solving inequalities,” for her Algebra class. She was able to track the students throughout the lessons which allowed her to focus on mastery learning instead of just getting students through the curriculum. Teacher C made notes when students did not understand the material and built in time to have remediation. For example, in lesson plan number two she stated that the Algebra students “had remediation lesson on solving,” which provided them with more support on solving for x. Teachers needed to know how to determine mastery learning within their students and if the students have not mastered the concept they needed to be able to reteach the material.

**Check-in Meeting.** When asked if Teacher C used any skills or materials from previous jobs in her current environment she responded very strongly in the affirmative. Teacher C brought up her previous concerns about first year teachers working in this environment again, specifically stating “I would hate to be a first year teacher coming into this.” Teacher C focused on all that she had learned from other teachers and from different conferences that helped her in this environment. Teacher C said teaching math was not as simple as just teaching the way you learned but that it was so much more intensive. Teacher C believed a new teacher wouldn’t “get the results,” because they needed to know how to teach math prior to adding the additional complexities of blended learning.
Teacher C research question 3 summary. Teacher C explained how her undergraduate teaching program did not prepare her for a job in blended learning. However, she did take one course in her master’s program that was set up similar to the courses within Loomis Academy so she believed that gave her some information on how her students felt completing their work. Teacher C strongly believed that people in general needed to know more about blended learning so that they were aware it was an option, teaching candidates should have more interactions with the blended environment, a course should be required that focused solely on blended learning, teachers needed to know how to use data, and how to differentiate group sizes within classes while also working with random class sizes.

Teacher D.

Interview. Teacher D was asked to describe her previous education related job experiences and she started as an English and social studies teacher in a traditional brick and mortar environment for a decade before moving on to the online environment as an English teacher for five years. Finally, she moved to Loomis Academy where she taught English for the three years. In order to determine how the previous jobs prepared her for working in the blended environment, Teacher D was asked what her daily routine looked like based on those jobs. Teacher D provided information on both of her previous jobs within the brick and mortar environment and the online environment.

First, Teacher D described life in the brick and mortar environment stating it was “much more hectic,” because she only had one prep throughout the entire day. Teacher D also spent lunch “monitoring and tutoring students.” There was always “before school and after school kind of tutorials,” that she needed to be present for. Finally, throughout the year she was required to participate in different committees that were “short term and ad hock.”
After describing the brick and mortar environment Teacher D moved on to the online environment. As an online teacher she worked from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon which created a traditional eight hour day. Instead of coming into a building every day she was required to teach online lessons on specific days. She also spent her day grading assignments students turned in and made phone calls to the families to create connections.

To really answer question three, participants were asked what teacher programs they participated in that supported the work they did in the blended environment. Teacher D stated that this was the hardest question she was required to answer because “as far as blended learning goes I don’t think I have ever attended a conference that gave me information strictly towards blended learning.” Teacher D claimed she went to a lot of different conferences throughout her teaching career for the virtual teacher and for the brick and mortar teacher that she had to make fit for her blended environment. Teacher D continued to say that “certain programs just don’t fly in the blended class as if they were in a brick and mortar or completely virtual.” This was a problem for Teacher D because she had never been to a conference that purely focused on how to teach in the blended environment.

Teacher D focused on conferences in her response to the question so she was asked if she did anything in college through her undergraduate or graduate work that helped her in the blended environment. Even in college there was very minimal work that supported her in the blended environment. Teacher D stated that the closest thing she had to learning about blended was one class she took while earning her Master’s degree. The class itself wasn’t focused on blended learning education but was considered a blended class. Although she stated “it was not a true blended class.” What she meant was that during the eighteen week class, they did three different shifts of five weeks spent at home and then one week on sight. This meant they spent
fifteen weeks working from home and only three weeks on campus. So, for her, she remembered what it was like working in that class and tried to keep that in mind while working with her students now.

Finally, Teacher D was asked what type of teacher program she believed would have helped and supported her work in the blended environment. She talked about the need for more observations especially due to the number of programs “offering online courses or online degrees… there really needs to be more student teaching opportunities or field opportunities where they can come and do observations.” Providing more opportunities for teachers to “get their hands dirty,” really allowed them to know what they were getting into and figure out what it was like. Teacher D stated it would have been beneficial if someone had said “hey come shadow with me for a month, come student teach with me… have an idea what you are getting yourself into.” Having more time shadowing was Teacher D’s biggest area of needed support to be better prepared to work in the blended environment.

While observations and shadowing were important to Teacher D another specific focus that needed to be taught to blended teachers was how to be a “succinct communicator.” In her environment she had limited face-to-face time with the students which made it really important to know exactly what she was going to say. It was important that she could get the necessary information to her students in the best, quickest, and easiest way possible.

Teacher D had a bigger concern about those that were teaching the programs that prepared teachers in the blended environment. Teacher D believed “the people that are in place to teach these things to students have never taught blended learning either.” If they had never taught in blended learning they were missing that experiential knowledge that was needed to really help future teachers that wanted to work in the blended environment.
Check-in Meeting. As discussed within her interview, Teacher D had been teaching for eighteen years with three of those years at Loomis Academy 3. So when asked if she had been using any skills or materials from previous jobs she stated that it was just really hard to answer this question. Teacher D stated that everything blended together because of how long she’d been teaching. However, after some thought, she stated that she was sure that she used the skills she’d learned from the other environments. In reference to the brick and mortar environment Teacher D learned how to manage things within the classroom. On the other side of the spectrum she said “When I plan things out or modify it comes from purely virtual.” In the end, Teacher D stated she was constantly taking things that she’d used or seen and tweaked them to fit her current needs.

Teacher D research question 3 summary. Teacher D explained how she had no prior training in blended learning before she started working at Loomis Academy. While she felt a little more prepared due to her work in an online setting and the traditional setting she had no experience within a purely blended environment. She took one class that was considered blended for her Master’s degree but she didn’t believe it was a truly blended class. In reference to future teachers, she believed they needed to have more observations and interactions within the blended environment, an opportunity to shadow other blended teachers and learn from them to create experiential knowledge. Teacher D also believed that teachers should have excellent communication skills, both verbally and written.

Conclusion.

So, in general, this research question was the easiest to answer for the participants. To start with, all four participants stated they had no previous training prior to their job within the blended environment. They also spent their own additional time going to conferences and taking
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classes they thought would best support them with the 21st century skills they needed within the Loomis Academy schools. While Conrad Education provided support through the Headley Learning Platform, the participants felt it was still heavily weighted on the virtual aspect and not enough on blended.

While they all started at the same starting point, with no experience teaching in a blended school, they were all able to provide specific examples and ideas for teacher education programs to support future educators. One of the first common themes focused on observations. All participants wanted teaching candidates to spend more time in the blended environment. They also wanted colleges to become advocates for blended learning and to support the understanding and development of this learning style and environment. They needed to start by creating awareness; to foster more experiential knowledge for their staff, faculty, and their future students.

Finally, while training the future generation of teachers, they also believed there were some specific skills that needed to be honed in on. One skill the participants agreed needed to be stronger was communication. The schedule created by Loomis Academy did not provide enough time for students to attend class every day or for long periods of time; so it was imperative the teachers knew exactly how to communicate with their students since there was a good chance they wouldn’t see them the following day. Blended teachers also needed to know how to work with data: to run reports, review them, determine what information was the most beneficial, and to create a plan of action based on that data. They need to know how to differentiate their lessons based on the number of students, the learning level of each group, and the skills they needed to master. Finally, blended teachers needed to know how to work with a curriculum that was already laid out for them.
Summary

This research study focused on answering three different research questions on the teacher’s perspective of blended learning. The first research question “How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?” provided a definition from those that worked in the environment. Multiple teachers commented on how difficult it was to define blended learning. However, in an attempt to define it for their specific environments, the four teachers focused on the different components that went into creating a blended environment. The teachers all defined blended learning as a combination between onsite teachers and virtual teachers where students complete their work with an online platform. Only one teacher provided any type of percentage between the face-to-face teachers and the virtual teachers: explaining that they spent half of their time online and half in the physical building. The teachers also brought up Loomis Academy’s use of success coaches to support the student’s success in the school.

Many of the teachers focused on how blended learning was the future of education as long as students and teachers were prepared to use the tools that were provided for them, like the online curriculum, the live gradebook, and the virtual academic support that was provided. The teachers also focused on how the Headley Learning Platform provided all of the curriculum, it allocated the time that should be spent on lessons, and also graded the majority of the assessments the students completed. This platform was available to both teachers and students at all times which provided them with the opportunity to work anywhere with an Internet connection.

In reference to the student aspect of blended learning, the teachers focused on the fact that students had to be strong readers, willing to work at home, and come to the physical school to create a successful blended environment. Blended learning allowed students to use their
individualized learning style to be the owner of their education and learning. The blended environment required students to attend the math and English classes or work on their virtual classes within the team rooms; this meant there was not a lot of socialization that was found within the traditional environment. 

In the end, teachers defined blended learning as a blend of both virtual and face-to-face teaching; an environment that required students to be strongly motivated to learn and complete the online lessons. It was a small environment that allowed teachers to build a strong rapport with each of the students. When all of these ideas were combined Teacher C still focused on the fact that her job was that of a teacher and that the environment just provided additional support to complete that job. 

Research question two asked: “What are the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in a blended learning environment?” An important theme arose during the data collection for this research question. It was imperative to understand that the Loomis Academy schools were all undergoing changes in management. One of the Loomis Academy schools had already switched management companies, another planned on closing at the end of the semester, while the other school was not sure what was going to happen at the end of the year. These changes created some additional challenges within these blended environments. 

Some of the common challenges determined by these four teachers surrounded the additional jobs that they were required to perform. Due to the small staff within all of the schools, the four teachers all focused on how much work was involved within the blended environment. These four teachers were expected to work from 7:45 AM-4:45 PM due to the two different shifts they taught. Three of the teachers were the only face-to-face teacher for that
subject which meant they were also required to teach all of the courses that the Loomis Academy school offered.

Additionally, all four teachers discussed the Loomis Academy “work-at-your-own-pace” concept. Students were typically not on the same exact lesson every day which made it difficult to teach a full group lesson. This was a challenge when students completed a lot of lessons at one time because it was difficult for teachers to keep up with the grading. All four teachers discussed the guidelines for the self-paced model, stating that if the students followed the schedule they would finish on time and if they worked ahead of the schedule they had the option to finish early.

Another key theme focused on the how they all wanted to see a larger staff in the building that included the other core teachers. Three of the schools had to release staff members at the end of the previous year due to the management transition which made the small staff a large topic of concern since they worked with the same amount of students but were doing it with at least three less staff members.

Another theme that arose focused on the time spent with students. All teachers stated that a big challenge within this environment focused on attendance and while none of them stated the blended environment was what created the poor attendance with students it was still one of their biggest concerns. They found attendance a problem since students only attended the physical location for sixteen hours with classes once or twice a week. The teachers would like to see the face-to-face schedule changed to provide more time with the students in the building.

The environment that the Loomis Academy schools provided was very open. All of the teachers stated that this provided them with a better opportunity to get to know their students and create rapport. On the other hand, two of the four teachers specifically commented on the fact
that the students were always there and there was no down-time to complete anything since they were always asking questions; even going as far to interrupt class time to talk to their teacher.

All four teachers also focused on the students within this environment. Loomis Academy stopped accepting students when they reached three hundred. This created a very small environment for students to work in and kept the class sizes small. Students were able to get more personalized attention from the face-to-face teachers and the success coaches while they were in the building. The small numbers also provided them with more opportunities to work one-on-one with their teachers and to get more interventions and support when they needed it. These small class sizes allowed all teachers to focus more on mastery learning compared to pushing students through the course. All teachers believed that students needed to know what they were getting themselves into in reference to the expectations placed on them. Students were more in charge of their learning in this environment and they needed to understand how much work it was, preferably before they started.

Finally, the last theme focused on the curriculum that was provided within the blended environment. All teachers specifically stated that having a curriculum provided for them made it more difficult to incorporate additional material. On the other hand, the provided curriculum was a strength since it created a guideline for the teachers. It allowed the teachers to use backward design to make sure students were successful on the final assessments. If used correctly, the online curriculum also allowed students to be better prepared before walking into the classroom. Students were able to use all of the embedded material so that the class time could be used to delve deeper and to focus on areas of enhancement instead of just teaching the basics.
The last research question asked: “How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?” All four teachers stated that they had no prior training in blended education before becoming a blended education teacher. Since blended learning was so new, all four teachers stated that they didn’t even know about blended learning while completing their undergraduate degrees. Two teachers stated that the only thing they had was their own experience taking a blended class in their graduate courses. The teachers also focused on how the conferences they attended traditionally focused on either the brick-and-mortar environment or the purely virtual environment which meant they had to take what they learned and make it work for their own environment. A big concern for one teacher was the limited experiential knowledge for those in the position to train others in blended learning.

One common theme that the participants focused on was the need to observe other teachers within this environment. Since undergraduate students were required to complete observation hours while working towards their teaching degree they would like to see a course that focused on blended learning and provided them with opportunities to work in that environment. These teachers all concentrated on the variety of environments that could be considered blended and how they should have practice within these environments before graduating. They also discussed the need for teachers to know that these environments existed in the first place.

Another theme really focused on the expectations placed on the teachers within this environment. Teachers needed to be prepared for all of the additional work that occurred within these environments. All teachers mentioned the need to do more than just teach their specific
content. They were more than just teachers and this provided the need for a lot of additional skills that were really developed.

This brought up the next theme, specific skills. For example, the teachers focused on the ability to multi-task. Teachers not only had to monitor the environment that was in front of them but they also had to focus on the online aspect, the team rooms and the technology involved. Since the teachers did not see the students every single day they had to have strong communication skills. Teachers were also required to constantly redirect students and to find ways to maintain their attention when they were easily distracted with the computers.

Finally, the last theme focused on data. All four teachers explained that the blended environment provided them with a massive amount of data which was not always easy to search through it and know what to do with it. Teachers needed to know how to quickly look at any data set and know how to read it and what to do with it. Knowing how to use the data correctly allowed these teachers to focus on mastery learning and how to make sure students really understood the objectives they were taught.
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

The discussion section focuses on the connections made between the four participants’ data, chapter four, and the current research provided in chapter two. The emphasis was on defining a blended teacher’s work, explaining their perceived strengths and challenges for their blended environment, and explaining their recommendations for making teacher education programs better. This section focused individually on all three research questions in order to express those connections.

Research Question 1. One of the first themes that arose from the four participants while answering this research question focused on the difficulty in defining their work. Many teachers stated they were an English or math teacher because it was easier to explain then saying they were a blended education teacher. This was shown in the research since many of the researchers had their own definition for what blended learning really was and how to do it. Pierce (2017), stated “no two blended learning classrooms will look exactly alike” (p. 18). While the classrooms may not be exactly the same it was still important to understand the differences to create the best environment for the increasing number of students that the blended schools educate.

The majority of the research focused on taking traditional classroom components and combining them with the online components to create the blended environment. Christensen, Horn and Staker (2013) defined blended learning as a program that had students learning online but also spending time in a supervised brick-and-mortar location. The National Education Association defined blended learning as the combining of technology and face-to-face instruction (“Blended Learning”, 2015). This was shown between the four participants because
while they found it difficult to easily define their work they focused on the different components that created their specific blended environment. Teacher A focused on combining teacher’s onsite, the online platform and the virtual teachers. Teacher C stated that she told people blended learning meant “half online and half in the classroom.”

The participants also focused more specifically on the course management system that was provided for the teachers and the students, Headley Learning Platform. This system provided teachers with the curriculum that they should teach and provided the students with the lessons they were supposed to complete. One concern was how willing the stakeholders were to use this the way it was meant to be used. Teacher B described this as “challenging because I am not really used to someone else setting a pace for me and setting a curriculum for me.” Stating she was used to coming up with her own lessons and deciding the order of the skills she taught. This showed how it was not just the students that had to learn to manage and thrive within this environment; instead all stakeholders needed to be dedicated to the success of their environments in order to use all of the materials that were provided to support them.

The participants focused a lot on the types of students they were getting within their environment stating students needed to be self-motivated, able to take control of their learning, and responsible. Regrettably, the participants didn’t feel they were always getting those students, which made it difficult to motivate them to use the platform correctly. This related to the theoretical framework described by Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess (2014) that focused on readiness, intensity, and the impact of blended learning. Two of the main components of the readiness stage focused on staff readiness and student readiness. This framework specifically mentioned the students readiness as a commitment to time spent working, how disciplined they needed to be, and their overall interest in this type of learning institute.
While Teacher B focused on how challenging it was to have someone else provide information for her she accepted it. Teacher A focused on the learning curve that was necessary for students to overcome. Stating some students were “mature enough to jump in and that learning curve ends after the semester… others can potentially waste a year or a year and a half trying to figure it out.” The participants stated they understood the difficulty in transitioning from one type of school, traditional or online, to this environment. The students had to be ready and willing to work in the environment or it would negatively impact their learning outcomes.

An unintentional finding focused on the fact that the four participants didn’t typically define their work as blended. Instead, all focused on the simple fact they were a teacher. It didn’t matter what environment they were in because they were there to teach students and help them succeed in their given curriculum and overall lives. The participants focused on what they taught; Teacher D stating “I flat out tell people that I am a high school English teacher.” The participants described how they had to build a rapport with students to motivate them to complete their work; Teacher A explained this environment produced the rapport due to his ability to step out of his room and talk to students more, which created an environment where students worked on assignments for him even if it was not something they wanted to do.

So, in the end, the four teachers created a definition that related to the research. They focused on all of the different aspects like the technology, the types of students they got, and the curriculum. The teachers defined the blended environment as a collection of differences: different courses, different timelines, different schedules, and different expectations. Still, all of those expectations paled in comparison to the fact they still defined their jobs as that of a teacher. The environment might change the way they do some things but they were still the teacher.
Research Question 2. One main theme arose that created an impact on the strengths and challenges of working within the blended environment, the change in management. The same theoretical framework that impacted the blended learning outcomes discussed earlier by Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess (2014) also focused on the readiness of the management company. In this instance, the management company backed out making the aspect of readiness a major challenge for the staff and students present. Teacher C stated during her check-in meeting they had decided to close at the end of the year and students were really sad and scrambling to figure out what to do. One theme from the participants focused how they were lost because they weren’t sure what would happen with their jobs and students. However, while the change in management was already a concern for those working at the Loomis Academy schools it also impacted some of the additional challenges that arose.

One of the additional teacher-perceived challenges focused on the limited staff members within their building. Teacher A and Teacher B had both lost staff members at the beginning of the school year, specifically due to the management company requiring it. While the schools ran on less staff they still had the same amount of work to complete, which meant staff members were taking on even more additional jobs. The additional work was introduced in the research when one article said teachers in the blended environment don’t have just one role that they completed, but instead they had to be a researcher, they needed to be an integrator and they needed to be a guide (“Reimagining Teaching in a Blended Classroom”, 2014).

Previous researchers stated the blended teacher needed to learn how to correctly interact with the online curriculum. Phillips, Schumacher, & Arif (2015) explained that the amount of time spent in creating appropriate online content for students within this environment was more than they originally thought. Specifically stating even with a technology assistant they were
spending multiple hours transferring face-to-face lectures to the online format. Another article commented on how blended teachers couldn’t just be present in the face-to-face environment but also needed to have a constant online presence (Plough, 2017). The participants exposed the challenges with being available face-to-face and online within their specific content very easily. During Teacher A’s check-in meeting he stated that there was no filter “I can be teaching a lesson and someone is knocking on the door or coming in and that can derail me.” This showed how Teacher A’s students assumed because they needed help with the online curriculum he was able to stop what he was doing to help them right away. This challenge was also shown within Teacher B’s observations when she had been interrupted multiple times during one lesson. The students enjoyed the more personalized learning and their ability to work closely with their teachers. However, this showed how difficult it could be for the teachers within environment when they were unable to separate themselves and focus on one thing at a time.

All of the participants further explained the challenges with having a consistent online presence by referencing the amount of grading they had to complete. Since the students completed their work at their own pace, the teacher’s weren’t able to control when assignments were finished. Teacher D stated she spent the weekend prior to exams grading all of the assignments students were submitting at the last minute. Conrad Education, had to hire a ‘grader’ for Teacher B because she had been unable to keep up with that aspect of the environment, stating “I could never get my grade book under 150-200 ungraded assessments.” The previous research focused on how students were able to work at their own pace which had been great for them but the participants showed how many additional challenges were created for the teachers within that environment. If students were not required to complete an assignment at a specific time, the teacher had more difficulties maintaining an online presence.
While the research focused on how teachers needed to do certain things to create a successful blended environment, like the online presence, the research provided didn’t focus on all of the additional duties these four participants focused on. For example, three of the four participants were the only core teacher for their subject. Teacher A taught English 9, English 10, English 11, English 12, all foundations level courses, and all honors level courses for those grades as well. Teacher A stated he had been in charge of teaching 190 students English within his school. He was also second-in-command, so he had to be the leader on certain days he worked with the virtual teachers to get students to complete their portfolios and assignments, and led multiple different committees within the building. Teacher C also focused on this environments desire to have everything documented, stating they had to “log it in the system that says we met with those kids and what we did and what was said.” This created additional online documentation she wasn’t used to for her previous environments. If a teacher was in charge of completing all of this additional work, they needed to have more time built into the schedule to complete all of them. Despite that, the provided research didn’t focus on the teacher’s daily schedule while the participants focused on the lack of time to complete all of the additional jobs.

An additional teacher-perceived challenge for the four participants focused on the students within their given building. Researchers defined blended learning as a combination between the traditional environment and the online environment that allowed “some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace…” (Christensen Institute, 2014, p. 1). This definition by the Christensen Institute specifically stated students were able to have some control over the pace of their work. This was shown within all of the Loomis Academy participants. They stated the online curriculum allowed students to have the entire semester’s content available to them from day one. This created a few challenges for the four participants.
The first challenge focused on the difficulty in teaching a full group lesson. While the researchers explained how the blended environment provided students with the opportunity to work at their own pace they didn’t discuss the problems this could create for the teachers. Teacher C discussed how frustrating it was when “kids are all over the place.” She had to start teaching based on where students were supposed to be even if they were not there. She tried to motivate students to get where they were supposed to be but stated it was really difficult when the program allowed them to complete the lessons when they wanted, as long as they were done by the last day of the semester. Teacher B also expressed the same concerns saying “oftentimes I have students that are lagging two or three units behind where they are supposed to be.” For her, this created a classroom with students that were “disengaged in class because they are not there yet or completely lost because they are not there yet.” Teacher B also showed the opposite side of the pendulum where students had rushed through the material and didn’t want to wait for the rest of the class. The student’s ability to work at their own pace had been a major challenge for the teachers that were trying to teach them.

In these four specific environments the participants also focused on the amount of time spent with students as a challenge. Students attended school for four hours, four days a week and were expected to do the rest of their work on their own, away from the physical building. However, the participants discussed the limited amount of work the majority of their students completed when out of the building. The participants stated they wanted more time with their students because 35-37 minute classes was not enough time. Some of the researchers focused on the different types of blended learning environments that could be created based on the needs of the different stakeholders. In Ohio, Shaffhauser (2015) stated, within the schools incorporating blended learning, there were some that used an a la carte model, a rotation model, or even a flex
model. The schedule the management company provided for the Loomis Academy schools did not work for the four participants. Looking back on Figure 2, the blended learning adoption framework, by Wong, Tatnall, & Burgess (2014) showed how schools could create their own adoption of blended learning to atone for their specific environment. These specific participants wanted more time with their students and believed additional time would positively impact student achievement.

While there were many challenges discussed by the participants for their environments, they also explained some strengths for working in the blended environment. The first theme focused on the students. The participants believed this environment really promoted an increased level of rapport with students. Zaka (2013) focused on how important open communication was for everyone involved in blended learning. This was important to create the strong culture Pierce (2017) believed was needed to engage the students and get to know them.

The documented research did not focus on a school that limited their school size. Still, this had been a definite strength for the Loomis Academy schools, according to the four participants. Since Loomis Academy stopped accepting students into each session when they reached 150 it created a very small student environment. This allowed more personalized attention for the students from the teachers and staff. The traditional learning environment was defined as taking place during a limited amount of time (Kazu & Demirkol, 2014). This meant the teacher had to use the time to present all of the information to all of the students. In the blended environment, the four participants were able to rely on the online curriculum to provide additional information to the students. This allowed them to really hone in on specific skills. Teacher D focused on how it allowed her to “get deeper into the different subjects” and really
work with students due to the smaller class sizes. The provided curriculum allowed the participants to “focus on areas of need and areas of enhancement” according to Teacher D.

It was evident in Teacher A’s initial interview that he promoted the open communication and increased his rapport with students since he saw them every day and worked very closely with them. He further stated the environment worked as a “facilitator” that helped him create more communication with his students. The environment and his personality allowed him to “come out of the room when I can and talk to students all the time.” This helped to promote the rapport needed to engage his students when they were in his class and out of it.

The provided curriculum also supported the participants with the ability to create individualized and personalized learning for their students. Loomis Academy offered many courses online that provided the students with additional access to curriculum. The researchers focused on how this supported closing the achievement gap between schools since they could offer additional support and curriculum to their students. The participants discussed how the provided curriculum provided them a starting point for their classes. It showed them the final assessments and the curriculum committees’ expectations. The participants were then able to differentiate for their students based on their skill level. Olthouse (2011) stated the online curriculum provided teachers within the blended environment with additional options to individualize student instruction, to engage students through audiovisuals and to provide students with different content levels. Once comfortable with the content, the participants stated they were more willing to change the curriculum for the benefit of the student. For example, Teacher C stated as this is her third year teaching the curriculum she was not afraid to throw something out and replace it with something more relevant to the students. At Loomis Academy 1 they also started incorporating skills sessions to promote mastery learning. Teacher B stated this wouldn’t
happen in a traditional school because of the size of the buildings and the way the schedule was set up. Within this environment, they were able to switch the face-to-face schedule to pull students in for additional support in their courses. All of these opportunities supported more personalized learning for the students within the blended environment. This related to the teachers need to create a healthy combination between what the students were doing online and what they were doing within their classroom.

One unintentional finding focused on the benefits of looping. Franz, Fuller, Hare and Walker (2010) defined looping as “a school structure where students remain with one group of teachers for two or more school years” (p. 298). Three of the participants were the only core teacher in their building so they saw the same students for class every single year. The fourth participant, Teacher D, had two English teachers within her building but she still participated in looping by working with the junior and senior English classes while the other teacher worked with the freshmen and sophomores. This allowed the students to know what each teacher expected because they had already been through one of their classes. It allowed the teachers to make specific adjustments for students from the beginning since they already know their skill level.

In conclusion, there were many challenges and strengths based on the teachers working within the blended environments. The research and participants agreed the teachers needed to have great time management skills and to be very involved with both aspects of the school, online and face-to-face. However, all of the additional time and involvement needed to be accounted for when creating a schedule for the teachers involved. The teachers focused on all of the additional work they had to do which took them away from teaching. Nevertheless, the biggest strength of blended learning from the teaching standpoint focused on the relationships
and rapport created within their specific schools. The environment supported creating a strong student-centered culture which was important for the teachers.

**Research Question 3.** One of the challenges working within the blended learning environment focused on the availability of blended courses. The researchers stated there was minimal information available on the blended environment. Some researchers believed this was due to a lack of interest but Powel et al. (2011) stated some countries prohibited this learning environment. In reference to training programs, it was important to spread the word about the blended environments. Teacher A stated he didn’t even know what blended learning was until he started working at Loomis Academy 1. Teacher C stated people assumed she worked at an alternative school. During Teacher D’s check-in meeting she said they needed better public relations, PR, on what they did because she did not work at an “alternative education or credit recovery,” school. So, to start with, the four participants wanted to see more information available on the background of blended learning and for the research to explain what exactly it was for everyone but especially for possible teachers.

One interesting theme focused on the fact that not one of the four participants had any training in blended education prior to becoming a blended education teacher. This was shown in research conducted by Powell et al. (2011) by stating that out of sixty countries only 11% of them stated their teachers needed a specific license to work in the blended environment. While obtaining their undergraduate degrees the participants did not participate in a blended style course or have a teacher explain what blended learning was. Two of the participants stated through continuing their education they were exposed to courses that were sort of blended which provided them insight on what it was like to be a student within the blended learning environment. Teacher D said “those in place to teach these things to students have never taught
blended learning either.” The participants in this study felt without experiential knowledge it was very difficult to understand all of the idiosyncrasies that went along with teaching in the blended environment.

Limited experiential knowledge supported the participants focus on the amount of time teacher candidates experienced this setting prior to working in one. Teacher D stated “there really needs to be more student teaching opportunities or field opportunities where they can come and do observations.” Teacher C also supported this by referencing how college courses required candidates to obtain hours observing so they should require teachers to go “where there is online learning schools and observe there and see how their day works.” An article by Jokinen and Mikkonen (2013) stated “it is not appropriate to use the same methods as in face-to-face teaching when using a blended learning approach” (p. 527). So, it was crucial for teacher candidates to be taught the different methods for different learning environments.

The participants also wanted to see more specific technology courses provided. Teacher A stated that it was not a matter of knowing how to use a computer, but instead how to incorporate technology into the curriculum to create the most successful class. One article explained how in over 60 countries, 72% of them stated teachers took additional professional development sessions in order to support those technical skills needed for their environment (Powell et al., 2011). However, this was still after they were already in the environment.

In addition to the specific training that was created when teachers worked with the environment, the participants also focused on all of the additional skills they’ve had to pick up while working in the blended environment. The participants focused on the need to multi-task, to work with the face-to-face classroom in front of them and also to interact with the online component of the course. The Loomis Academy environment created a constant need to redirect
students and to motivate them to focus on their work. The Blended Learning Teacher Competency Framework, focused on the mindset, qualities, adaptive skills and technical skills needed for successful blended learning teachers (Powell, Rabbitt, & Kennedy, 2014). This framework focused on learning how to meet students where they were in the curriculum, the ability to adopt new teaching methods, to be flexible and transparent, and to be a problem solver. Understanding those four components of this framework would be beneficial for teachers and prepare them to grow those additional skills brought up by the participants.

Finally, the teachers focused on an increased use of data. Some participants even focused on the desire to have classes that only focused on looking at data and understanding it. The Ohio Blended Learning Survey for 2015 showed that of the schools that offered teacher training about 56% of them provided information on how to use data (Arnett, Benson, Bridges, Bushko, Duty, & Mohammed, 2015). This showed the schools realized the importance of understanding data within that environment but the four participants believed that practice should come before they were placed in front of students. Teacher B stated the amount of data “thrown in our faces” is too much especially since she didn’t have time to “digest all of it or know what to look at.” She further stated this wasn’t something that would just benefit the blended education teacher but teachers in general by allowing them to look at any kind of data like state report cards and other testing results.

An unintentional finding that was discovered through the research, but not supported by the participants in this study, focused on the lack of funding provided for training teachers within the blended environment. The participants focused on how they went to additional professional development trainings and conferences that provided them with some supplementary support within their environment but that was after they had started working and was done on their own
time. Nevertheless, the researchers stated schools did not require special training and because of the lack of funding they weren’t able to provide it.

So, teacher education programs should be able to provide more experiences for their teaching candidates. They needed to explain how to do practical things like incorporate data more fluidly in their lessons and provide instances that promoted time management and multi-tasking abilities before being placed in charge of their own classroom. Teacher education programs needed to explain what blended learning was in the same way they would explain the traditional or online environment and support these environments.

**Conclusion**

After comparing the participant data to the current research it created a picture of the teacher-perceived blended environment. In reference to the first research question, the research and the participants agreed blended learning required both face-to-face and online interaction with students. They defined their work in the blended environment as a collection of differences. Those differences are shown below in Figure 10. The teachers also explained how their environment did not change their main focus. This meant they defined their work as a teacher first and foremost no matter what environment they were working in.
It required an aspect of readiness from all stakeholders to really thrive in this environment. The second research question, provided multiple challenges and strengths from the teacher’s perspective. Teacher’s desired more time to work with their students and the majority of them wanted fewer additional jobs added to their plate. Figure 11, below, shows three specific strengths and challenges.

Figure 10: Teacher Determined Differences

Figure 11: Teacher-Perceived Strengths and Challenges of Blended Learning
The third research question, determined all stakeholders needed to have more experience with blended learning. Teaching candidates needed to have more observations, teachers needed to know how to prepare teaching candidates through experience, and others just needed to understand what blended learning really was. Finally, Figure 12 shows additional skills needed to be successful in the blended environment.

Figure 12. Teacher-Perceived Skills Needed

**Recommendations**

After reviewing all of the data collected it was recommended that research on blended learning continued to be a focus. Many participants and researchers provided information focused on the fact that blended learning was the future of education and the numbers continued to grow due to that. Yet there still was not enough information about blended learning readily available. In order for blended learning to be the 21st century learning tool it was believed it should be, people needed to be more open about what it entailed. Many colleges offered blended learning opportunities to their students but who taught them how to be successful in them?
Teachers left with teaching degrees but they had no idea what a blended learning environment was. It was recommended that, in general, people started talking about blended learning. Everyone could learn more if people were not afraid to share their experiences, both negative and positive. One research study specifically focused on not being afraid of the unknown and instead to embracing it because the unknown should be “an opportunity rather than a threat” (Fisher & White, 2017, p. 43).

Specifically in reference to the first research question, how to define blended learning, it was recommended the research continued to focus on how teachers in different environments, apart from the Loomis Academy schools, defined their work. These four participants provided a similar definition to the research, blended learning was a combination between online education and face-to-face education.

The second research question, strengths and challenges within the environment, provided additional support on where to go with blended learning for the future. With the increase in blended learning schools and students that wanted to complete their education within these environments it was imperative for schools to look at the research focused on the expectations placed on the teachers. The teachers were at the front of these environments, they worked with all of the stakeholders, they dealt with all the problems, and then had to come up with solutions on a daily basis. So, focusing on real-life examples could allow future schools to create success based on what did and did not work for those already involved in the environments.

Finally, the third research question, how teacher education programs could better support teachers within the blended environment, provided recommendations for how these participants felt they could have been better prepared for what was expected from their job within the blended environment, and all of the strengths and challenges they had dealt with. Blended
education, while still defined as teaching, was not the same as a traditional teaching environment. The teachers had to constantly take what they were provided and make it work for them because nothing was specifically created for their environment. So, to start with, the teaching programs needed to obtain more experiential knowledge for themselves, their teachers, and their teaching candidates. This would allow them to begin to understand what blended learning was and would allow them to create programs that supported these teachers. Once everyone was more comfortable with what blended learning was and how to manage a classroom within this environment it would promote further growth and discussion. This would allow these programs to transition away from focusing on one teaching model and instead encompass all avenues for future teaching.

**Future Research Opportunities**

One area of future research came about due to the number of teaching participants that believed longer class sessions would increase student participation. It would be interesting to determine if longer class sessions really would increase student participation. They also focused on the need for additional core teachers in the buildings. Teacher D knew Loomis Academy 6 was moving to a company that planned on keeping the blended learning aspect but making those two specific changes to the school. It would be interesting to use the same study to see how the teacher’s views changed when those two previous concerns were changed.

An additional area of future research, focused on the need for additional teacher training. It would be fascinating to follow teacher candidates through their training to become a blended teacher through their actual work in blended learning. This could also be a comparative study on the perceived strengths and challenges based on someone trained to work in this environment and someone that had to learn as they went.
Loomis Academy was not part of the local public schools. This meant a student was not required to attend and instead they chose to attend. During Teacher D’s initial interview she stated one of the problems with the blended environment was the attendance rate. During her discussion on attendance problems within her blended environment she said “I guess if you can attribute student attendance… or link that specifically with our blended learning which you can…” Nevertheless, there had been no given or provided evidence that stated blended learning created attendance problems so a comparative study on attendance in a blended school and other model schools would be interesting. It might help to also determine if the attendance rates were worse within the blended environment for the specific students compared to their previous schools.

Finally, this research focused on the face-to-face teachers within the blended environment. It would be beneficial to also focus on the virtual teachers in future research. I’d be intrigued to see how their responses were similar and different based on their online component. One concern brought up by Teacher A focused on how much time he spent trying to motivate students to turn in their virtual assignments. This research would help explain how a student’s lack of motivation or desire to do their assignments for their virtual classes impacted them as teachers within the blended environment.
REFERENCES


### APPENDIX A

**Interview Questions Related to Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1: How do teachers in blended learning environments define their work?</th>
<th>Research Question 2: What are the teacher-perceived strengths and challenges of working in a blended learning environment?</th>
<th>Research Question 3: How do teacher education programs need to better develop and support teachers who work in blended learning environments?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. How do you feel working in the blended learning environment? Explain.</td>
<td>5. What does your daily routine look like at your current job?</td>
<td>12. What did your daily routine look like at your previous job (s)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do your previous educational experiences influence your current view on your blended setting?</td>
<td>6. What impact does the blended environment have on the tasks you have to complete on a daily basis?</td>
<td>13. What teacher program, if any did you attend that supported your work in blended learning? Explain how it supported you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you believe your learning environment hinders your ability to teach? Explain.</td>
<td>8. Do you believe your learning environment facilitates your ability to teach? Explain.</td>
<td>14. What teacher program, if any, do you believe would have better supported you to work in a blended learning environment? Explain how it would support you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What changes, if any, would you like to see in your current situation? Why would you make those changes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What things, if any, would you like to remain the same in your current situation? Why do you think it is important to maintain the things you have mentioned?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX B**

**Check-in Meetings**

Teacher: __________________________________________

School: Loomis Academy ____________________________

Subject: ______________ Time: _____________ Date: _______________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial Greeting/ How are you doing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good things happening within your school with the environment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems happening within your school with the environment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since we last talked, have you used any of the skills/materials from previous jobs within your lessons and activities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since we last talked, has your environment made it difficult to complete your daily tasks? Like working with students, grading, and teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since we last talked, has your environment made it easier to complete your daily tasks? Like working with students, grading and teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any additional information you’d like to share?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Check-in Meetings Related to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Any additional information you’d like to share?
APPENDIX D

Observation Form

Teacher: ______________________________

School: Loomis Academy ______________________________

Grade: ___________ Subject: ______________ Time: ___________ Date: ______________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Goal:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers Expected Plan/Expectations for the Lesson:</th>
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<tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do I see?</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How is the lesson ‘blended’?</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflections</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</table>
### APPENDIX E

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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>How is the lesson “blended”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>
Institutional Review Board

Date:  October 20, 2016

To:   Nicole Williams

Cc:  Lauren Tiell

RE:  An Ethnographic Case Study on the Phenomena of Blended Teaching

Project Expiration date:  October 20, 2017

The University of Findlay Institutional Review Board (IRB) has completed its review of your project utilizing human subjects and has granted authorization. This study has been approved for a period of one year only. The project has been assigned the number 1044.

In order to comply with UF policy and federal regulations, human subject research must be reviewed by the IRB on at least a yearly basis. If you have not completed your research within the year, it is the investigator’s responsibility to ensure that the Progress Report is completed and sent to the IRB in a timely fashion. The IRB needs to process the re-approval before the expiration date, which is printed above.

Understand that any proposed changes may not be implemented before IRB approval, in which case you must complete an Amendment/Modification Report.

Following the completion of the use of human subjects, the primary investigator must complete a Certificate of Compliance form indicating when and how many subjects were recruited for the study.

Please refer to the IRB guidelines for additional information. This packet can be obtained within blackboard under community section. Please note that if any changes are made to the present study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please include that number on any other documentation or correspondence regarding the study.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact IRB at (419) 434-4640 or email irb@findlay.edu.

Sincerely,
Susan W. Stevens, EdD., AT
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Cc: IRB Office
Email that was sent to teachers:

Hello. I am currently working on my doctorate through the University of Findlay. Now that I have approval to start the study I would like to get your support. Below is a brief introduction to my Doctoral Dissertation.

I am doing an ethnographic case study on the phenomena that is blended learning. This research study will offer a narrative style approach on blended learning. I plan on talking to five teachers from the Nexus Academy schools depending on which teachers are willing to participate. I will conduct an initial thirteen question interview that will focus on your current environment, your views on blended learning and how the blended aspect impacts your day-to-day tasks and activities. I will also conduct some observations contingent on availability, review classroom lesson plans, and conduct check-in meetings throughout the semester. I will then look over the different material and present it based on the different themes that arise.

Throughout the study you will remain confidential to guarantee minimal risk. I plan on providing each participant with a pseudonym to help maintain your anonymity. The data gathered will also be saved on a password protected computer to shield your responses.

I know this is not an in-depth description of my study. However, if you are willing to participate and want some additional information I would be happy to provide you with answers to any of your questions.

If you are willing to offer your support I would just need you to respond to this email stating that you are willing to be one of the teachers studied. Once I have collected those responses five teachers will randomly be selected to continue on in the study.

Thank you so much!

Lauren Tiell
Loomis Academy 7
9-12 English Teacher