

2020

## Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, Blogging Groups, and Interpretation in the Literature Classroom

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Michael B. Nester

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning, Blogging Groups, and Interpretation in the

Literature Classroom

by

Michael B. Nester

MA, University of Maryland, 1990

BA, Lynchburg College, 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Technology

Walden University

May 2020

## Abstract

Community college world literature students are often ill prepared to analyze and interpret passages of creative fiction because traditional, teacher-centric pedagogical approaches do not promote students' literary interpretive authority. However, a method to fill the interpretation gap remains unclear. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore the efficacy of using computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) blogging groups to promote students' interpretive authority and critical thinking skills. Blending transactional reading theory, social constructivist theory, and transformative learning theory provided the conceptual framework for the study. Participants were 8 students and their instructor from a purposefully selected community college literature class in the Northeast United States that included group blogging as part of its approach to interpreting literature. Data sources were student journals, blog posts, student questionnaires, and an instructor questionnaire. Data analysis was an inductive coding process to discover emerging categories and themes. Results indicated that students felt more comfortable and capable of interpreting literary texts after engaging in a CSCL literary interpretation process, and the course instructor affirmed the perception that students gained authority in interpreting literary texts. Findings may be used by community college literature instructors to promote CSCL blogging activities as a student-centered pedagogical approach for literary interpretation.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Kim, Ronan, and Giada, the three most important people in the world to me.

## Acknowledgements

In addition to my family, who had to endure many hours without me as I wrote this dissertation, I wish to thank the following people. To Mat, Tracey, and Rebecca, thank you for all your support and friendship. To Terri and Meghan, I appreciate your help through the IRB process. Lastly, I wish to thank the members of my committee; to Dr. Adragna and Dr. Dawidowicz, I appreciate all of the thoughtful feedback and suggestions, and to Dr. Adcock, my committee chair, I thank you for your patience, encouragement, and advice throughout the entire dissertation process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Students in college-level world literature courses are often ill prepared to analyze and interpret in-depth passages of creative fiction (Heinert & Chick, 2017). Part of the problem appears to be their lack of confidence in their authority to form meaning in a text (Heinert & Chick, 2017; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). In traditional literature classrooms, teachers at both the high school and college levels often have difficulty helping students understand the nuances of the interpretive process, and as a result students often mistakenly believe that the teacher's interpretation is the only interpretation for a given work (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016; Levine & Horton, 2015; Rainey, 2017). Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) may provide a means of facilitating an effective literary interpretation process, one designed to help students discover their interpretive authority. This study addressed the possibilities of using CSCL blogging groups to promote students' interpretive authority and critical thinking skills in an early world literature survey class at a community college in the Northeast United States.

CSCL described any eLearning activity in which students collaborate with one another through computer technology; these activities can occur within fully online and hybrid courses or within face-to-face courses that integrate computer technology into group activities (White, 2018). With the advent of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogging and wikis, CSCL activities have become prevalent components of eLearning courses in many academic disciplines (J. Lee & Bonk, 2016). Because of the improved sharing capabilities, CSCL platforms permit users to develop their own interactive online content

and receive both synchronous or asynchronous feedback and responses from other connected users (Harney, Hogan, & Quinn, 2017). Although blogging has been found to be an effective pedagogical approach for writing instruction (Jesson, McNaughton, Rosedale, Zhu, & Cockle, 2018), its capacity for improving an individual's perception of interpretive authority has not been explored. When students recognize that they have authority to shape the meaning of creative texts by filtering the words and ideas through their core perspectives, their confidence in interpreting literature can increase, which could lead to intellectual, critical, creative, and empathetic growth. This chapter includes the background, conceptual framework, problem, purpose, research questions, limitations, assumptions, boundaries, and significance of the study.

## **Background**

### **Blogging and Literary Interpretation**

Blogging's role in establishing a student-centered process for promoting literary interpretation and literary authority has not been explored. The following discussion provides a brief overview of current CSCL blogging research that parallels current literary research.

### **Blogging**

**Meaning making and outcome attainment.** As a Web 2.0 technology, the web log (blog) features strongly in the research literature on CSCL. Most blog-related studies addressing CSCL have focused on group meaning making and learning outcome attainment. Sharma and Tietjen (2016) used a qualitative case study design to examine student participation and meaning making through the blogging process in a higher



education eLearning course. Sharma and Tietjen discovered that students in CSCL groups negotiate meaning through the elaboration of their own and other students' ideas.

Likewise, Mansouri and Piki (2016) used a mixed-methods case study approach to explore the effects of blogging on student learning in a postgraduate business program.

Mansouri and Piki examined possible connections between blog participation and student learning preferences and between participation and student achievement. Findings indicated that higher levels of blogging activity led to higher student grades, but no correlation was found between student learning preferences and the level of blog participation (Mansouri & Piki, 2016). Additionally, Wang, Hou, and Wu (2017) conducted a quantitative study to explore blog use in relation to four active-learning strategies (problem solving, peer assessment, role playing, and peer tutoring) and found through quantitative content analysis and lag sequential analysis that when dissonant ideas emerge in blog discussions, students negotiate meaning to solve the specific problem.

**Group interaction and student satisfaction.** Researchers have also explored how CSCL blogging activities affect group interaction and student satisfaction. Alterman and Harsch (2017) used a qualitative case study approach to explore how college students engage in joint problem-solving activities in asynchronous CSCL situations, specifically relating to wiki and blog development. Alterman and Harsch sought to understand how students overcome the absence of physical copresence to solve problems in an asynchronous online venue. In relation to blogging, Alterman and Harsch found that the individual who created a blog was recognized by group participants as the owner of that

blog and the authority figure in relation to the material posted. Student responses to initial blog posts tended to focus on helping the owner improve or strengthen their initial comments (Alterman & Harsch, 2017). Similarly, Stephens (2016) employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the perspectives of students toward blogging communities and their effectiveness in relation to learning in a college-level library science class. Stephens found that 62% of the participants felt the blogging community improved their learning abilities in the course.

**Transformational.** Few studies have focused on how blogging can be used as part of a pedagogical process leading to a transformational change among students (J. Lee & Bonk, 2016), especially in relation to perceived changes in interpretive authority for students in literature classes. In the English discipline, many blog-related studies focused on writing instruction, but few addressed literary interpretation and reading at the high school or college level. In addition, few studies—blog-related or not—addressed the process of literary interpretation, even though many teachers struggle to find effective pedagogical practices to help students master the interpretive process (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016).

Some researchers have begun exploring the transformative effects of reading on students. Gogan (2017) posited that reading “transforms readers from passive receivers to active meaning-makers and thereby changes readers’ agency” (p. 46). Likewise, Hoggan and Cranton (2015) showed that reading works of creative fiction can trigger transformative learning among college students. However, neither study addressed how

this transformative process occurs or the interpretive process necessary to elicit the transformation.

For several decades, literature instructors have asked students to record their reactions to literary texts in a personal reading journal, but students have rarely had the added meaning making and interpretive advantages offered by CSCL blogging group interactions (Cease & Wilmarth, 2016). Cease and Wilmarth (2016) conducted a mixed-methods study in which elementary students could choose between responding to a creative text in a handwritten notebook entry or in a blog post. Cease and Wilmarth found that elementary students preferred making blog posts and that their responses, when compared to the responses in the notebook entries, illustrated more engagement with the literature. Cease and Wilmarth speculated that having an interactive audience helped to make students more excited about completing the activity.

### **Problem Statement**

Students in college-level world literature courses are often ill prepared to analyze and interpret in-depth passages of creative fiction (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016; Heinert & Chick, 2017; Levine & Horton, 2015). In most traditional literature classrooms, the teacher-led discussions tend to reinforce the teacher's interpretation and point of view rather than encouraging each student's individual interpretations (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). By learning how to analyze literature through the filter of their perspectives and worldviews, students can develop a higher level of interpretive and critical thinking skills (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), which, when coupled with CSCL activities with their peers,

could improve their abilities to evaluate and integrate divergent points of view, make informed decisions, and interact with others in critical discourse (Harney et al., 2017).

Students need encouragement to develop higher-order interpretive skills (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016; Heinert & Chick, 2017; Levine & Horton, 2015). Teachers could promote higher-order learning skills in online, blended, and computer-enhanced classrooms designed to foster more intrapersonal reflection and interpersonal collaboration through a CSCL environment (Khadijah, Ibrahim, & Jamalludin, 2017). A gap exists in research related to CSCL in community college world literature classes, especially regarding the teaching of literary interpretation. Dalkou and Frydaki (2016) found this oversight in their study of face-to-face group interactions in literature courses. By implementing asynchronous collaborative peer blogging groups, literature instructors may increase student engagement with literary texts and help students develop interpretive authority and critical thinking skills through the process of negotiating meaning.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this single case study was to explore the efficacy of using CSCL blogging groups to promote students' interpretive authority and critical thinking skills in a world literature course at a community college in the Northeast United States. The intent of the study was to add to research on CSCL blogging and to explore the potential for computer-based approaches that may enhance the interpretive authority of college-level literature students.

### **Research Question and Subquestions**

RQ: How do CSCL blogging groups influence the literary interpretive process and the perception of student literary interpretive authority?

SubRQ1: How do CSCL group blogging activities influence students' perceptions of their authority to interpret literary works?

SubRQ2: How do student group blogging activities influence the instructor's perceptions of students' authority to interpret literary works?

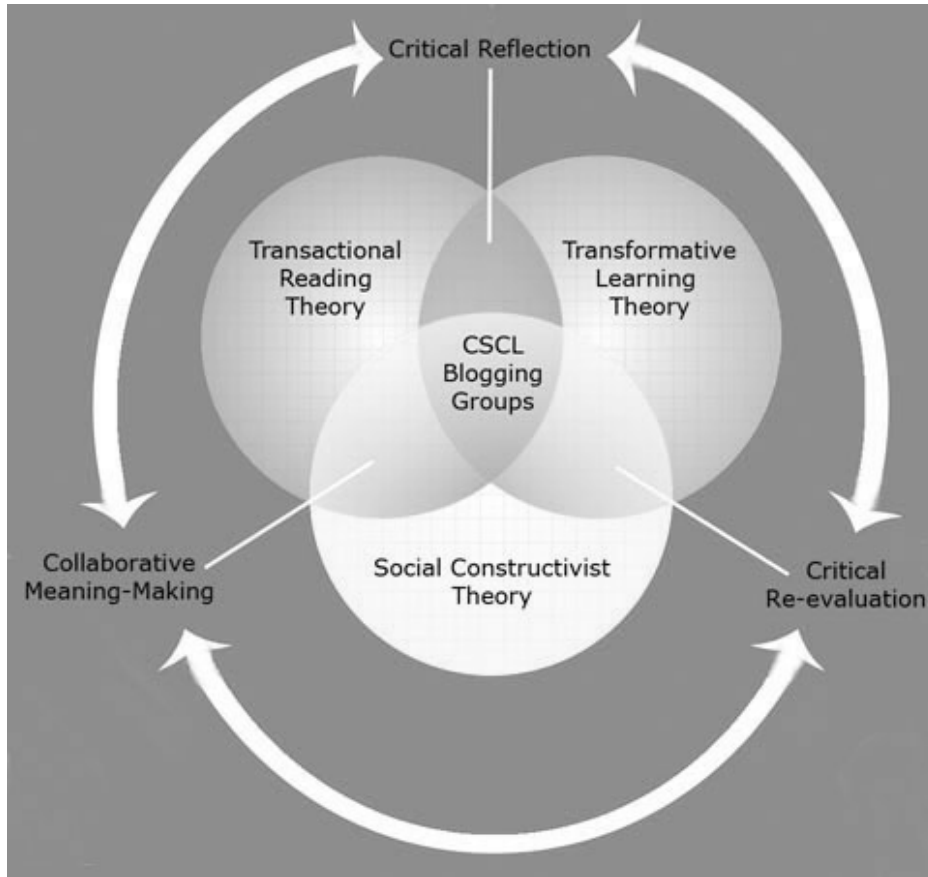
SubRQ3: How do students demonstrate their critical self-reflection through CSCL group blogging posts?

SubRQ4: How do students demonstrate their critical thinking abilities in CSCL group blogging posts?

### **Conceptual Framework**

To explore the research questions, I combined elements of transactional reading theory (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997), and social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1930/1978). As students read, they filter meaning through their beliefs and worldviews (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). If the work of literature triggers a disorienting dilemma relative to students' beliefs, they will reflect on how the event conflicts with their core perspectives and worldviews (Mezirow, 1997). By engaging in a CSCL group blogging activity designed to highlight personal reflection and group meaning making, students can construct knowledge through the active sharing of experiences in a social setting (Ng, 2017; Vygotsky, 1930/1978). Mezirow (1997) explained that this type of self-reflection could lead to a transformation of core

perceptions. In the current study, I explored how participation in a group blogging activity could lead to a change in an individual's interpretive authority and critical thinking abilities. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the conceptual framework.



*Figure 1.* Concept map of the conceptual framework.

### **Nature of the Study**

I explored how CSCL group blogging activities influenced students' perceptions of their interpretive authority and how the participants demonstrated critical self-reflection and thinking through their group blogging posts. Because the study included *how* questions, was concerned with a current phenomenon resistant to researcher control, and included multiple sources of data to answer the research questions, a single case

study design was warranted (see Yin, 2014). The case study methodology is intended to promote an in-depth understanding of a real-world phenomenon (Yin, 2014). In the current study, the meaning making and interpretive processes involved in group blogging activities constituted the bounded case. Specifically, I explored perceptions of students' interpretive authority of creative texts in an introductory world literature course at a community college in the Northeast United States. From a class of approximately 20 students, eight students and their teacher chose to participate in the study. Because the case study approach requires a variety of data collection methods and sources (Rallis & Rossman, 2012), student journals, blog posts, student questionnaires, and an instructor questionnaire served as the data sources.

### **Definitions**

*Agency:* The ability of an individual to act in a given situation and to shape events (Bandura, 2006). Bandura (2006) provided four properties of human agency: intentionality (planning), forethought (looking ahead to possible outcomes), self-reactiveness (putting the plan in action and self-regulating), and self-reflectiveness (re-examining of thoughts and actions).

*Autonomous learning:* An activity in which an individual, through self-regulation, can take ownership and responsibility for their learning (Elgin, 2013; L. Lee, 2016).

*Critical reflection:* An assessment of an object, event, idea, action, or perception—after it has been experienced—which can either be implicit (an immediate response based on an individual's core beliefs) or explicit (a carefully weighed and considered re-examination; Mezirow, 1998).

*Disorienting dilemma:* A circumstance in which a situation, event, or life experience triggers a “feeling of discontent” (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978, p. 7) that could lead to critical self-reflection and a transformation of the individual’s core meaning perspectives.

*Interpretive authority:* The power ceded to an individual whose insights into the meaning of a text or event are deemed acceptable and relevant by others (Flint, 2000).

### **Assumptions**

The reliability of the study’s collected data rested on the following assumptions:

1. Participants in the blogging groups honestly and diligently reflected on how the assigned work of literature influenced their core perspectives.
2. Blogging group participants honestly revealed their interpretations through their initial blog post.
3. Participants honestly responded to the blog posts of their group members and engaged in a process of negotiating meaning.
4. Participants honestly and thoroughly responded to interview questions.

Keeping the participants informed about the nature and goals of the study, ensuring that they understood the expectations for engagement with the text and their groupmates, and reminding them of the confidentiality they were receiving in relation to their participation in the study helped to support each assumption.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Yin (2014) defined a case study as a thorough examination of a contemporary phenomenon with clearly established location and time boundaries that makes use of



various data collection methods. In this single case study, the participant sample was determined by the makeup of one world literature class at a community college in the Northeast United States. Participants included the students and instructor. Purposeful sampling, which involves “strategically selecting information-rich cases to study” (Patton, 2015, p. 265), was used to determine the sample for the study. One community college world literature class that included group blogging and transactional reading as part of its interpretive process established the boundaries of the case. The case consisted of participating students and the teacher in that one class, and it excluded all others.

### **Limitations**

Empirical research is limited in humanities-related fields. As noted by Kroeze (2017), research methodologies appear on a continuum between rational and empirical, and humanities research typically involves the rational approach while social science research involves the empirical approach. In rational studies, the researcher starts from an assumption of knowledge and proceeds through logic to analysis; however, in empirical studies, the researcher makes observations to arrive at knowledge (Kroeze, 2017). Most research in literature-related fields has focused on exegesis, analysis, and argumentation of an existing document—the meaning and interpretation of a text—not on empirical evidence to determine how an interpretation or interpretive authority develops or can be improved. Dalkou and Frydaki (2016) observed that little empirical research exists relating to the interpretive process involving group work or CSCL. I explored how the interpretive process worked within the boundaries of one world literature course in which students used CSCL blogging groups to develop interpretive authority while reading one

piece of dramatic fiction. The small number of world literature courses that employ group blogging as an interpretive aid was a limitation in this single case study, and study findings are not generalizable to other settings.

### **Significance**

According to Walden University (2014), social change occurs when individuals participate in activities that lead to the betterment of human lives at the micro, macro, and mega levels of society. Rogers (2003) recognized social change as a desirable process through which transformations develop in a social system. Findings from the current study may be used to help students develop authority to interpret texts and to enhance their critical reflection and critical thinking skills.

Using group blogging during the initial stage of the literary interpretation process may have ramifications for student authority and voice. Asking students to share interpretive blogs with their classmates and to respond to the interpretations of their peers while reflecting on how the literary text influences their worldviews may help students become critical readers and active meaning negotiators. When faculty members later initiate large group discussions about the literature, students may demonstrate more authority in interpreting the text and engaging in critical discourse. Through the CSCL group blogging process, students may improve their interpretive and critical thinking skills while also learning to interpret complex social and intrapersonal interactions. At the micro (individual) level, CSCL blogging groups may lead to a transformation of a student's self-perception as well as a transformation of their view of others.

At the macro level, findings may lead to a shift from teacher-centric classroom approaches, which in a literature classroom often rely on the teacher's unique interpretation, to a student-centric, active-learning approach in which varying perspectives are shared in a collaborative community of peers. Students often believe a faculty member can establish the meaning of a literary work, that the teacher's interpretation must be the right interpretation (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016; Eckert, 2008). By working in collaborative groups and inspecting works of literature through the varying worldviews of students within the group, students engage in a critical process that helps them recognize their authority to read and respond to texts. Using CSCL blogging groups in the literary interpretation process may augment the traditional meaning-making process and help students feel more authoritative in their abilities to read and respond to texts of any kind.

At the mega (societal) level, the interpretive skills students develop through collaborative meaning making in a computer-supported environment may influence their interactions with others, their reading of other types of writing, and other activities that involve critical reflection and thinking. As students discover their interpretive authority by filtering texts through their worldviews, perceptions, and beliefs to construct meaning, their potential for intellectual and psychosocial advancement may be increased. According to Freire (1983), the act of reading involves the mental rewriting of the text; as a person reads, they experience the world. When students discover their interpretive authority rather than accepting the interpretive perspective of others, they may change their world.

## Summary

Because of limited research relating to CSCL group blogging in literature classrooms (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016), this study served an exploratory function in addressing how blogging groups influence literary interpretation, interpretive authority, and critical thinking. Using a conceptual framework comprising transactional reading theory (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997), and social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1930/1978), I explored how group blogging may improve critical thinking and literary interpretive authority.

This chapter outlined the problem, purpose, research questions, and nature of the study with the goal of situating this case study within its larger epistemological, paradigmatic, and conceptual framework. This chapter also included the assumptions and limitations in this qualitative case study and an explanation of how they were mitigated. Chapter 2 provides a literature review addressing current research on CSCL and group blogging. I also provide a more detailed description of the problem relating to interpretive authority in a world literature course, as well as the conceptual framework used to address the gap in the CSCL literature.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Although literary studies have a broad history in educational settings, classroom pedagogical approaches have tended toward faculty-centric models in which the teacher transfers their interpretive meanings to students as a by-product of a one-way exchange of information (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). Even with the rise of social constructivism and group-based approaches in English/language arts instruction, student-centered pedagogical approaches have garnered more attention in relation to writing instruction (Bruffee, 1973; Dale, 1994; DiPardo & Freedman, 1988) than they have in relation to literary interpretation (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). This chapter includes an examination of CSCL research and pedagogical approaches in relation to the problem of interpretive authority in the community college literature classroom. Using a conceptual framework that positioned CSCL blogging groups as the nexus of social constructivist, transactional reading, and transformative learning theories, I explored group blogging as a pedagogical approach for encouraging students to develop interpretive agency as they read and analyze works of creative fiction.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Google Scholar served as the primary search engine to locate relevant and timely source materials. Being affiliated with two community colleges and one university during the dissertation process, I took advantage of Google Scholar's Library feature to link searches to various library databases. Keywords typed into the Google Scholar search engine returned resources from general and subject-matter databases.

Because the conceptual framework included aspects of CSCL, blogging, social constructivism, transactional theory, and transformative learning theory, the following search terms proved effective in locating sources: *computer-supported collaborative learning, CSCL, blogging, Web 2.0, social media, group blogging, social constructivism, Vygotsky, transactional theory, reader-response theory, Rosenblatt, Fish, Freire, transformative learning theory, Mezirow, textual authority, literary interpretation, agency, epistemic agency, autonomous learning, self-regulated learning, co-regulated learning, and socially-shared regulated learning*. Combining terms and using Boolean connectors led to the following search terms: *CSCL blogging, computer-supported collaborative learning and interpretation, humanities and technology, and transformative learning and reader response*. From the relevant articles identified, I used Google Scholar's Cited in feature to locate additional sources. Bibliographies at the end of articles also provided sources for this study. Beyond database searches, the archives of the *International Journal of Computer-supported Collaborative Learning* provided relevant articles for this study, such as those dealing with theory, blogging, and educational uses of social media. *The Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology* (Spector, Merrill, Elen, & Bishop, 2014) provided additional search strategies.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Social Constructivism**

Computer-supported collaborative learning had its origins in the social constructivism espoused by Vygotsky (1930/1978). In research on child development,

Vygotsky observed that language development, with its reliance on socially constructed signs and symbols along with a growing reliance on tools, helped children to develop higher-order behaviors; as children grow, they make sense of their world by internalizing complex social interactions and activities (Vygotsky, 1930/1978). As the World Wide Web entered the daily interactions of human beings in the 1990s, it became only a matter of time before researchers began exploring how social interactions across computer networks could advance learning and meaning making. Early in the 21st century, Koschmann (as cited in Stahl, 2002) provided the following definition: “CSCL is a field of study centrally concerned with meaning and the practices of meaning-making in the context of joint activity” (p. 1).

Not long after Koschmann’s definition, Web 2.0 technologies came into existence, providing more possibilities for social interaction on the Internet. These tools allowed individuals to collaborate on a variety of asynchronous platforms, including wikis, blogs, and social media networks. With more opportunities for social interaction within Internet platforms, students have more opportunities to internalize the socially constructed meaning-making processes afforded through online collaboration (Smith, 2017). This is especially true if students have not mastered certain concepts or abilities, such as interpreting a work of creative fiction. By collaborating in groups with peers of differing levels of ability in interpreting texts, students can work within their zone of proximal development (ZPD), which Vygotsky (1930/1978) defined as the difference between the level of actual development and the level of development an individual can

achieve with help from others. As a result of collaboration in their ZPD, students can increase their knowledge base and grow as individual learners.

### **Transactional Theory**

Before students can benefit from working in their ZPD by participating in group blogging activities to interpret works of creative fiction, they must first engage in a transactional reading process (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). The transactional reading process occurs when students shape the meaning of the text based on their worldviews, beliefs, and perceptions (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). Each reader creates a unique literary work as they interact with the text, filtering the symbols and marks on the page through their previous experiences (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994).

In the traditional introductory college-level literature classroom, students are often expected to possess high-level interpretive abilities. However, the reality is that students in K-12 classrooms usually focus on the act of reading, which is the act of decoding words, not the nuances of interpretation and interpretive strategies (Eckert, 2008). When students arrive in the college classroom, they are often unable to engage in the critical analysis and interpretive processes expected by their teachers (Eckert, 2008). As a result, they cede their authority to interpret texts to their instructors (Eckert, 2008). Many teachers in traditional faculty-centric classrooms, in an effort to enlighten students about a text's intricacies, unwittingly subvert the interpretive process by presenting their interpretations of texts and letting students assume that the teacher's interpretations are the authoritative interpretations (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016; Heinert & Chick, 2017; Vijayarajoo & Samuel, 2013).



Many literature classroom experiences subvert the student's ability to transact with the text, replacing the interpretive process with an imposition of the teacher's interpretation (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). Collaborative peer activities, such as group blogging, are designed to augment the meaning-making process (Jarvela et al., 2015), and small-group work in the literary classroom setting has been shown to enhance literary interpretation more than a solitary student's individual transaction with the text (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). Members of a collaborative reading group form what Fish (1976) called an "interpretive community" (p. 483), one that shares similar interpretive strategies to shape and create the work of literature from the text on the page. Although group interaction and collaborative learning have been explored in online and face-to-face classrooms, they have not been examined in computer-supported classes focused on the interpretation of literary texts (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016).

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

By engaging in transactional readings of texts and negotiating meaning with peers in a blogging group, students can reclaim their interpretive authority and transform into critical readers. According to Mezirow (1997), participating in a discourse community leads individuals to examine various points of view, which can lead to a critical self-reflection of assumptions, beliefs, and habits of mind. As Mezirow further explained, "The more interpretations of a belief available, the greater the likelihood of finding a more dependable interpretation or synthesis. We learn together by analyzing the related experiences of others to arrive at a common understanding" (pp. 6-7). As students share ideas about a work of literature, the discussion could trigger a disorienting dilemma

(Mezirow, 1981), a situation that could lead to a critical self-reflection of belief structures. Hoggan and Cranton (2015) confirmed that the reading of literature can elicit disorienting dilemmas and critical self-reflection; however, Hoggan and Cranton did not explore the connection between a transformation of interpretive agency and the incorporation of CSCL blogging groups in establishing an effective interpretive process. As illustrated in Figure 2, group blogging appears at the nexus of a collaborative interpretive process, one that empowers students to recognize their influence over the meanings of the words they read.

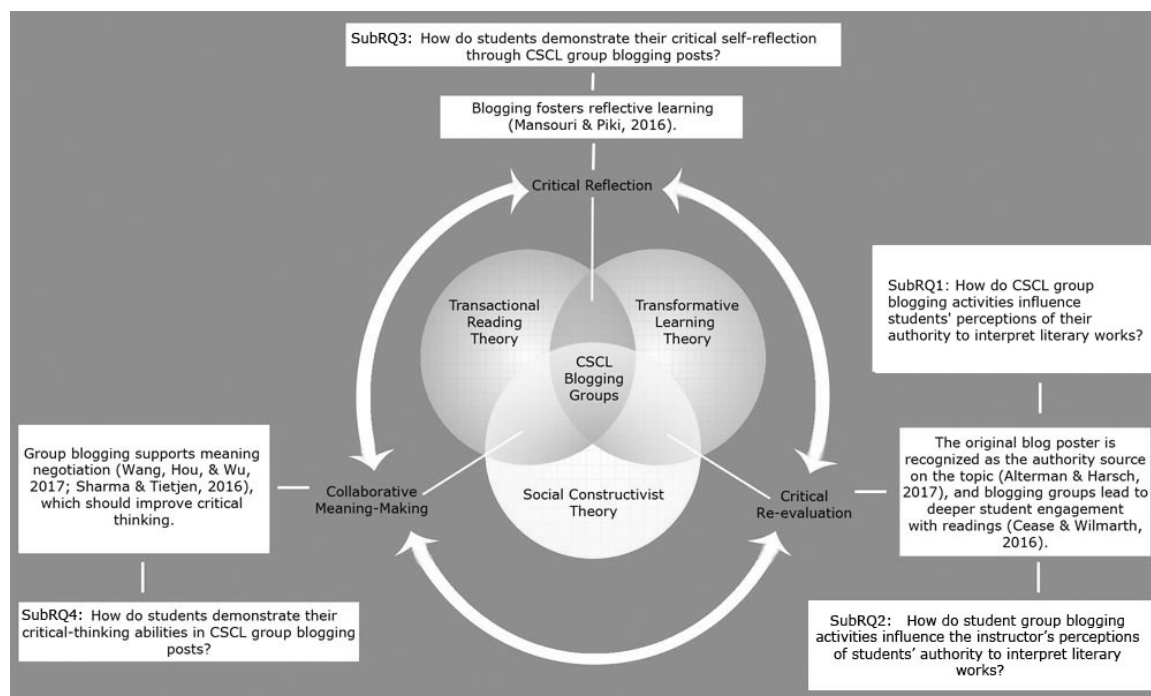


Figure 2. Concept map including research questions.

In the humanities, where literature courses are taught, little research exists on how a student interprets (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). Most college literature instructors incorrectly assume that students enter their classrooms with knowledge about conducting literary analyses (Eckert, 2008; Heinert & Chick, 2017); however, the process of

interpretation is often overlooked, and the instructor spends more time explaining their analysis rather than helping students develop their interpretative authority (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016; Eckert, 2008; Heinert & Chick, 2017).

A student-centered interpretive process focused on a combination of transactional reading and CSCL may help fill the gap between the teacher's expectation for literary analysis and the student's interpretive abilities. Blogging gives individuals the opportunity to express their perspectives to a larger audience, one that allows for immediate feedback from a group of peers (J. Lee & Bonk, 2016). In relation to educational blogging, research indicated that the blogging environment stimulates motivation, confidence, and attention to detail (Cease & Wilmarth, 2016) and improves critical reflection and student voice (Mansouri & Piki, 2016). The process by which students filter a creative text through their core beliefs and perspectives, share those ideas with others via a blog post, and negotiate meaning based on response posts may help students gain confidence in their interpretive abilities and help them join larger discourse communities relating to literary analysis.

### **CSCL Group Blogging: Impact on Interpretive Agency**

#### **CSCL**

CSCL refers to any educational endeavor in which a computer figures prominently in a collaborative learning process (Simpson, Bannister, & Matthews, 2017). The learning process can occur in a face-to-face, blended, or online classroom environment, but the collaborative interactions between students must occur primarily through a computer (Simpson et al., 2017). As reported by Koschmann (1996), the term

*computer-supported collaborative learning* first appeared in a workshop sponsored by the NATO Special Program on Advanced Educational Technology in 1989. However, at the time of Koschmann's report, the practical application of CSCL was limited to two platforms: email (asynchronous) and chat sessions (synchronous). It took the creation of Web 2.0 technologies, beginning in the first 5 years of the 21st century, for the full interactive potential of CSCL to be realized (Dohn, 2009). With the development of wikis, blogs, and social media platforms, educational research focusing on CSCL, which Koschmann (1996) described as "an emerging paradigm in IT" (p. 11), flourished.

Collaborative learning, in relation to writing and literary skills, has an even longer history. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, professors in the U.S. English/language arts field started reflecting on issues of authority in traditional lecture-based classroom settings, and those musings led to research and pedagogical practices relating to group work and other forms of collaborative learning (Bruffee, 1984). However, while collaborative learning found its way into composition classrooms in the form of peer writing and editing groups focusing on the writing process, the inclusion of collaborative learning activities related to literary interpretation and meaning negotiation has been limited. Though Bruffee (1984) suggested the potential for collaborative learning in relation to literary studies, small group interpretations addressing creative texts remain relatively unexplored (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). In addition, research related to collaborative learning using computer technology to explore the literary interpretation process is practically nonexistent (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016).

The research related to CSCL has focused on group processes and tools generally rather than on group processes and tools in specific disciplines like literary studies. Kent, Laslo, and Rafaeli (2016) examined interactivity within online groups and explored how participants work together to construct knowledge. To gain an understanding of students' interactivity, Kent et al. used a tool that allowed participants to identify how their responses in an asynchronous thread related to previous posts. Kent et al. found that students interacted more in relation to the creation of content as opposed to the digestion of information. Similarly, Lin and Xie (2017) constructed an experiment to determine whether group discussions sparked by computer-generated tag clouds of blog posts resulted in more knowledge construction than the group discussions sparked by the blog posts alone. Lin and Xie found that the analysis of the tag clouds by group participants led students through the five phases of knowledge construction outlined by Schellen and Valcke (2005) more effectively than did discussions based only on the blog posts. These studies were conducted to improve understanding of the knowledge construction process in the CSCL environment.

CSCL research has also emphasized group dynamics. Kimmerle, Moskaliuk, Brendle, and Cress (2017) analyzed the phases of collaboration when high school students with different perspectives attempted to create an artifact that illustrated a shared perspective. Although their study focused on the group production of a writing activity and not on literary interpretation, the researchers found that collaborative activities go through three basic phases: “knowledge introduction, restructuring, and the development of shared opinions” (Kimmerle et al., 2017, p. 203). First, individuals share their

knowledge of the subject, then the group members begin to realign and organize the collective information, and finally, the group members synthesize and adopt a shared perspective. When this process becomes routine and group members begin anticipating which group members will have answers to specific types of questions, the group's transactive memory (their shared consciousness) increases, leading to a recognition of learning growth both on the individual and the group level (Yilmaz, Yilmaz, & Cakmak, 2017). This socially shared regulation of learning (SSRL) must be encouraged pedagogically to maximize the learning effects of collaboration (Jarvela et al., 2015).

**SSRL.** Individual students filter any learning process through their previous learning experiences, understandings of the subject, emotional perspectives, and motivational considerations; this self-regulated learning (SRL) occurs internally and at the individual student level (Jarvela et al., 2016). When a student collaborates with another individual, both students must add to their individual regulation of learning a component that accounts for the learning of the other; this coregulated learning (CoRL) can be enhanced through the assistance of external scripting prompts and technology (Jarvela et al., 2016). When CSCL employs small group dynamics, SSRL also comes into play. Group consciousness, group cognition, or transactive memory (Yilmaz et al., 2017) does not happen effectively unless all members of the group jointly pay attention to the problem and work together to explore their own group processes (Borge, Ong, & Rose, 2018). To support this idea, Borge et al. (2018) found that groups who reflected on the effectiveness of their own group processes during collaboration activities actually enhanced their future group interactions. Similarly, Su, Li, Hu, and Rose (2018) found

that students in lower performing wiki groups relied almost entirely on self-regulated behaviors, which limited the effectiveness of any collaborative activities, while higher-performing wiki groups made use of both CoRL and SSRL. Additionally, Splichal, Oshima, and Oshima (2018) found that when group members encountered emotional disturbances or considerations within a collaborative exercise, those individuals enhanced their SRL and CoRL internal scripting to address the issue, and they found that students enhanced their SSRL-related internal scripting when they encountered group-level cognitive issues. Thus, CSCL group-based activities can help students enhance their learning toolkits at the individual, pair, and group levels.

However, as shown by Madaio, Cassell, and Ogan (2017), the closeness of interpersonal relations between peers as well as each person's perception of his or her own authority can influence the success of collaboration. In their study, Madaio et al. (2017) found that peer tutors who recognized their own authority and abilities carried out their functions more effectively because they used the proper balance of direct and indirect, face-saving instruction. If the peer tutor had a close interpersonal relationship with the other student, then the face-saving strategies tended to disappear and the recipient of the instruction benefitted less. Madaio et al. (2017) encouraged teachers who employ CSCL pedagogical techniques to maximize the benefit of indirect, face-saving interactions by creating groups that minimize preexisting friendships.

Other CSCL researchers have explored collaborative tools and group interaction on a more granular level, such as focusing on the visual components that enhance or impede online discussions. For example, Sherry (2017) studied the visual rhetoric (the

design elements) used in three distinct discussion board platforms. Examining layout and design concepts in relation to threaded, anchored, and sticky note discussion board platforms, Sherry found that effective student interaction and collaboration depended on the visual contrast between sections in the thread (i.e., between question and response posts, headings, and quotations from previous posts); the repetition of pertinent stylistic elements such as fonts; the alignment of information within a consistent format, such as through indentations and clearly-identified levels; and the proximity or grouping of response posts near the original post in the thread. Without these considerations, the researcher found that discussion beyond the level of one response rarely occurred (Sherry, 2017).

The interactions within CSCL groups are much more complex than they appear on the surface, and those complexities result in even more complex regulation considerations. Kumpulainen and Rajala (2017) studied how the juxtaposition of formal and informal learning environments in a CSCL learning activity affected the group dynamic of elementary students. The participating students worked in an online environment using synchronous editing tools to produce varying aspects of a school-wide musical. The online interactions occurred at set times during the school day as well as during the students' time at home. The authors of the ethnographic case study found that the students' interactions reflected a melding of their institutional (i.e., formalized social expectations and practices), relational (i.e., collaborative negotiations and relationship building), and personal (i.e., collaborative negotiations of personal identities and perspectives) spheres of influence (Kumpulainen & Rajala, 2017). Students brought



perspectives from their pasts, presents, and futures into the discussion, and then the group had to regulate the information in order to negotiate a finished product. This process parallels the interpretive process a person undertakes when reading words on the page; varying concepts and ideas are filtered through an individual's meaning perspectives—which are created through social interactions (Vygotsky, 1930/1978)—in order to arrive at the meaning of the text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). When this process includes the varying interpretations of individuals in a reading group, the meaning negotiation process and group dynamics become identical to the process outlined by Kumpulainen and Rajala (2017).

**Agency, autonomy, and authority.** In the world of literary theory, the concept of authority serves as the *primum mobile* for all discussions of literary interpretation: Whether the text itself, the author, or the reader assumes the dominant consideration when interpreting a work of literary fiction varies greatly depending on historical time frame, social context, and political ideology (Barthes, 1977; Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). During the 20th century, theorists such as Fish and Rosenblatt recognized that readers transact with the words on the page, filtering them through their own experiences, beliefs, and core perspectives, thus elevating the reader as the authority figure in interpreting works of literature. Each reader actually creates their authoritative understanding of the text whenever they read it. However, in most high schools and colleges during the last century, the locus of authority in the literature classroom has remained the teacher (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016; Heinert & Chick, 2017). Even with the rise of social constructivism and active, student-centered classroom pedagogies in most

disciplines, some literature teachers continue to dictate their quasi-authoritative interpretations to students, who often believe the teacher's interpretation is the correct interpretation (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). A disconnect apparently exists between current theoretical models and the reality of classroom instruction. When students are allowed to engage literature individually and in small groups of peers, they can claim agency; in other words, they can start interpreting for themselves.

Current CSCL researchers explore notions of agency, self-efficacy, and autonomy within computer-mediated and online environments, and although most of these research studies intertwine with discussions of SRL, CoRL, and SSRL, they also focus on student ownership, control, and autonomy. For the current study, these concepts help to unite the various theoretical underpinnings of CSCL with the practical pedagogy needed to enhance students' ability to think critically and gain literary authority.

Bandura (2000) outlined three forms of agency: (a) personal, (b) proxy, and (c) collective. In personal agency, individuals exert control over situations within their environments; with proxy agency, individuals exert control over others to indirectly act within a given situation; and with collective agency, the members of a group collectively interact to achieve action within a given environment (Bandura, 2000). Personal, interpersonal and collective agencies feature strongly in CSCL research and pedagogy. For example, Ligorio, Impedovo, and Arcidiacono (2017) examined the effects of an online asynchronous CSCL environment on individual, interpersonal, epistemic (the ability to act objectively to form beliefs), collective, and transformative agencies. Ligorio et al. found individual and interpersonal to be the most prevalent agencies evident in the

study's CSCL environment; however, when students switched groups halfway through the course, both forms of agency dropped while epistemic agency increased. As the reformed groups progressed, the individual and interpersonal forms of agency increased again. When individuals within the groups took on the role of tutor for the other group members, both epistemic and collective agencies for those individuals increased substantially. These findings suggest that when group members engage in interpersonal collaboration, especially in a tutoring capacity, the potential for reexamining, reforming, and recreating beliefs increases (Ligorio, 2017).

As students recognize their own capacities to act within CSCL groups in particular and learning environments in general, they progress toward the level of autonomous learning (Elgin, 2013). As pointed out by L. Lee (2016), CSCL blog group interactions allow students to revisit content and peer responses to postings, thus making students more reflective and thoughtful as they create additional content and interact with their peers. This added reflexivity increases the student autonomy in the learning process, especially if students become aware of and monitor their own learning processes (L. Lee, 2016). Using specifically articulated, task-based assignments, the 48 participants in L. Lee's study gained the self-regulation skills necessary to complete the course with 80% stating that they felt autonomous in completing the tasks. However, Yeh and Lan (2018) found student motivation and commitment to be a necessary component of autonomy when they studied 29 fifth grade students who used a virtual-world simulation to apply knowledge gained during the course. Students who rated themselves as more motivated and more committed made greater advances in relation to autonomous learning; however,

Yeh and Lan found that all of the students preferred the CSCL approach to learning more than the traditional classroom approach.

Once literature students can recognize their agency in interpreting texts, they start becoming autonomous readers, those whom others can recognize as authoritative. As discussed by Shalem, De Clercq, Steinberg, and Koornhof (2018), a person becomes an authority when their point of view is accepted as relevant and approved by others. Thus, the CSCL environment—which helps students socially share in the learning process, engage in active learning within their ZPD, gain agency in establishing beliefs, negotiate meaning, and advance their collective agency—should help students gain interpretive authority as other students and the teacher accept their interpretations as justified.

Current CSCL research focuses on an array of interrelated topics concerning collaborative tools, collaborative platforms, group dynamics, and design within the eLearning environment. This study, however, focused on one particular aspect within current CSCL research: group blogging and its potential for promoting interpretive authority.

### **Group Blogging**

With the proliferation of Web 2.0 technologies, collaborative platforms have become ubiquitous. One such platform, blogging, provides students with a means to share information in the form of written reflections, photographs, videos, and hypertext with an audience much larger than the teacher alone; with the larger audience comes the potential for more feedback, collaboration, and discourse related to the topic at hand. In their study, Kuo, Belland, and Kuo (2017) found that among adult African-American students,

group blogging led to improvement in student knowledge and abilities, mainly due to the increased level of communication among students in the groups. Likewise, J. Lee and Bonk (2016) discovered that students participating in group blogging activities perceived an increase in their learning and a strong emotional connection with their group members. In relation to English-related coursework, blogs appeared to be the preferred platform for writing instruction (Black & Lassmann, 2016; Williamson & Jesson, 2017); however, studies exploring group blogging within English classrooms as a means to promote literary interpretation are practically non-existent (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016). Primarily, current CSCL research relating to group blogging focuses on four main aspects: (a) group interaction and learning, (b) scripting, (c) meaning making, and (d) meaning negotiation.

**Group interaction and learning.** One of the concerns with eLearning environments in general and online instruction in particular is the effective creation of social presence within the learning community (Kozan & Richardson, 2014). Social presence fits under the social constructivism umbrella; students must effectively interact with each other so that they can create group cohesion, which can facilitate open communication, leading to critical thinking and cognitive growth (Kozan & Richardson, 2014).

In a study of 101 students using a community blogging platform, Stephens (2016) found that 61% of the students perceived that they had made connections with other members of the class; they believed that reading the personal reflections of their classmates and then providing feedback and responses to those initial posts helped to bring about a sense of connectivity with their fellow students. Likewise, respondents in

Stephens' study reported that blogging communities helped them to improve their learning competence. As discussed by Mansouri and Piki (2016), students must effectively contribute to and engage in blogging discourse for effective learning to occur. In their study of group blogging in a post-graduate setting, Mansouri and Piki found that the majority of respondents preferred blogging because it allowed for critical reflection of the course material; additionally, a large percentage found that hearing multiple points of view from their classmates and carrying on discussions with them helped in knowledge construction. Mansouri and Piki found that students interacting with one another in blog posts felt like they could express themselves more effectively than they could in the classroom setting.

Likewise, in an experimental study examining the use of blogs as an individual writing journal or as a group-based interactive and collaborative activity, Petko, Egger, and Cantieni (2017) found that students in blogging groups, especially those receiving peer feedback in problem-based learning groups, showed more growth in relation to self-efficacy than those in the other experimental and control conditions. For the study, students were randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups: (a) blogging with problem-based assignments with peer feedback; (b) blogging with problem-based assignments without peer feedback; (c) blogging with emotion-based assignments with peer feedback; (d) and blogging with emotion-based assignments without peer feedback (Petko et al., 2017). The control group did not use blogs but wrote reflective reports. Petko et al. found that problem-based assignments significantly improved students'

perceptions of their own self-efficacy, and with the addition of peer feedback, the effects proved even greater.

Getting students to interact effectively to achieve the maximum benefit from group blogging also features strongly in the available research (Michailidis, Kapravelos, & Triatsos, 2018; Pavo & Rodrigo, 2015). Using interaction analysis, Pavo and Rodrigo (2015) found that peer interactions within blogging groups go beyond simple knowledge construction; the study's data illustrated instances of collaboration as well as social, cognitive, and affective interchanges. Michailidis et al. (2018) took interaction analysis a step further by developing an automatic, graphical representation of interaction statistics for students to explore in real time, encouraging them to provide more interaction within their blogging group. Their case study found that self-regulated learning and student interaction in blog discussions increased as a result of the automated interaction analysis tool (Michailidis et al, 2018). Metacognition of group-level interactive and interpretive processes could help literature students in blogging groups to provide more valuable feedback to their peers, promote self-regulation of learning, and enhance students' perceptions of their own authority to interpret texts.

**Scripting.** Many researchers have explored the need for individual and group regulation in CSCL contexts (Jarvela et al., 2015; Jarvela et al., 2016; Naykki, Isohatala, Jarvela, Poysa-Tarhonen, & Hakkinen, 2017). Jarvela et al. (2015) discussed the shift from faculty-centric to group-oriented, student-centered learning in the context of the regulation of learning; as researchers discovered the advantages of collaborative learning relating to knowledge construction, they also discovered participant dissatisfaction with

online discussion groups because students viewed the activities as confusing and less straightforward than within the classroom setting. As explained by Jarvela et al. (2015), novice online learners have a difficult enough time regulating their own learning strategies, so trying to regulate their learning and the interactions of others within a group could seem impossible. As a result, scripting, the use of more detailed prompts and directions to guide online collaboration, came into being (Fischer, Kollar, Stegmann, & Wecker, 2013).

According to Fischer et al. (2013), learners possess internal scripting to cognitively organize and structure information; if a learner is not familiar with a situation, the internal script needs to be revised based on the situation. Teachers or others within the student's ZPD (see Vygotsky, 1930/1978) can help the internal rewriting of scripts through the implementation of an external collaboration script, which guides the individual learner through a transactive process, one that helps the learner use their groupmates' knowledge as the basis for new learning (Fischer et al., 2013).

Harney et al. (2017) compared the benefit of teacher-generated scripting prompts to peer-generated prompts. They recognized that peer collaborative discourse not only focuses on the correctness of information; it also deals with matters of elaboration, interpretation, and reactions to the interpretations of others (Harney et al., 2017). In their quantitative study, Harney et al. determined that students in the peer-prompt group perceived higher levels of consensus than the students in the teacher-prompt group. To prepare students in the peer-prompt group, the teacher modeled appropriate scripting techniques and then helped students to apply them, all prior to allowing the students to



work on their own. With greater feelings of consensus, students felt more comfortable sharing knowledge and critically engaging in discourse (Harney et al., 2017). Likewise, CSCL scripting could help to promote student literary interpretive authority.

Tan (2018) took peer scripting a step further by examining the best sequence teachers could implement to encourage high levels of student collaborative inquiry. Employing a quasi-experimental case study design, Tan investigated whether individual study followed by group interactions would prove more beneficial than the inverse. In both sequences, the teacher began with an introductory/instructional session (Tan, 2018). However, in one of the testing conditions, students next engaged in individual inquiry prior to group-study inquiry, and in the second testing condition, students engaged in the group-study prior to individual inquiry (Tan, 2018). Tan found that the introductory, individual, group-work sequence more effectively led to higher levels of collaborative inquiry. Based on these findings, students in a literary classroom could potentially increase their interpretive success if they individually reflect on the assigned literary text prior to engaging in collaborative group activities.

**Meaning making.** Koschmann (as cited in Stahl, 2002) defined CSCL primarily in relation to meaning making. Within the educational setting, blogging allows students to reflect on issues, post those reflections to a larger audience, and receive feedback from others on those reflective comments. In essence, blogging establishes a discourse community whereby students can collectively construct meaning (Sharma & Tietjen, 2016). Using a multiple case study design, Sharma and Tietjen (2016) examined the meaning-making process in two sections of a course on emerging technologies that used

group blogging as the primary means for student interaction. In the qualitative aspects of their study, Sharma and Tietjen coded hundreds of initial and response blog posts for meaning making, and discovered that students regularly used the comments and resources provided by their peers to advance their own knowledge of the issue at hand. This process clearly supports social constructivist objectives relating to the co-construction of knowledge and the ZPD (see Vygotsky, 1930/1978).

In outlining the various activities illustrated by participants in the study, Sharma and Tietjen (2016) identified *elaboration* and *sharing* as two of the key forms of discourse students used to collectively construct meaning: *Elaboration* took place when bloggers responded to initial posts from their unique perspectives on the subject, offering new insights on the original poster's ideas, and *sharing* referred to response posts in which students provided personal experiences and gathered support for their comments from other students' opinions as well. Thus, elaboration and sharing represent two processes students can employ within their individual ZPD in order to make meaning and gain understanding.

In a slightly different context, Chamberlain (2017) found that group blogging activities helped elementary students more effectively find meaning in a novel. Chamberlain discovered that blogging facilitated the sharing of multiple voices, which led to more critical reflections and the strengthening of each student's voice. Ultimately, students engaged in a rigorous meaning-making process as they collaboratively shared insights into the nuances of the novel (Chamberlain, 2017). In relation to the literary interpretation process, these findings suggest that group sharing and interaction in a

CSCL environment could also lead students to become critical thinkers and to gain interpretive authority as readers.

**Meaning negotiation.** When students in a group discover significantly different points of view among the group members, they usually engage in a negotiation process to create a shared consensus of meaning (Wang et al., 2017). In some ways, this meaning negotiation process parallels on the group level what Mezirow (1997) found within the cognitive processes of the individual undergoing a transformative event. When a disorienting dilemma or discordant concept presents itself to an individual or group, the individual or group members must negotiate how the new information should be integrated into their current model of thought (Mezirow, 1997; Wang et al., 2017). For example, Lin, Shie, and Holmes (2017) found that high school students in an intercultural blogosphere containing individuals from Taiwan and England negotiated cultural meaning based on the content of initial blog posts, the arguments that accompanied response posts, and the varying points of view expressed by participants from both countries. Participants in the study came to understand more about their perceptions of the other's culture through an internalization of the various points of view expressed in the blogs (Lin et al., 2017). This process of sifting the thoughts of others through an individual's perceptions and belief structures parallels the transactional reading process (see Rosenblatt, 1978/1994).

In research relative to literary interpretation, Nachowitz (2018) found that middle school English language arts students following CSCL pedagogical techniques effectively synthesized varying points of view relating to the interpretive process, thus

leading students to think more critically while engaging in a knowledge-construction activity. In relation to the reading process in the college classroom, Gogan (2017) found that the act of reading gave readers authority by bringing about a shift from passive reception to active meaning negotiation, and when students read and shared in group settings, Janzen (2015) found that the interpretive process extended beyond the text to the reader's own identity and the identities of their reading collaborators. Thus, the act of literary interpretation, especially in a group setting, leads to critical reflection, critical thinking, and a recognition that each individual crafts a text from their perspectives, the words on the page, and the views of their community.

### **Summary**

The traditional college literature classroom predominantly adheres to a faculty-centric model, one in which the teacher assumes that students understand the nuances of literary analysis; often in these types of classes, the teacher guides students to accept the teacher's understanding of a literary text instead of helping the student claim interpretive authority (Heinert & Chick, 2017). Without understanding the process an individual goes through to interpret a work of creative fiction and without recognizing that all people have the authority as readers to filter the written words through their core beliefs and perspectives (see Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), literature students will continue to rely on others to gain an understanding of complex texts. Current humanities research does not significantly explore advancements in the interpretive process related to creative fiction; instead, most literary-focused research provides a single researcher's exegesis or interpretation of a work, not the process by which interpretations develop. Because of the

disciplinary differences between humanities courses and the hard or social sciences (Kroeze, 2017), very little empirical research exists that would address a solution to the problem. Fortunately, the Digital Age provides a possible solution to help students gain interpretive authority: CSCL blogging groups.

As discussed throughout the chapter, CSCL blogging groups could help students transact with a piece of creative fiction, interact with others to negotiate meaning, and achieve interpretive authority. Using a conceptual framework that combines elements of transactional reading theory (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997), and social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1930/1978), I explored CSCL blogging groups as a possible solution to the research problem. When students read a text, they filter the words through their beliefs, experiences, and cultural perspectives (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), and as a result, each student's reading of a text produces a unique interpretation, one that could significantly differ from the teacher-imposed interpretation. If students can hone their interpretations with input from their peers within a group setting, they could advance their interpretive abilities through their ZPD (see Vygotsky, 1930/1978).

As illustrated by current research in CSCL, the meaning-making and meaning-negotiation processes are inherent in blogging activities. Mansouri and Piki (2016) found that blogging led students toward critical reflections of course material, and Sharma and Tietjen (2016) clarified the elaboration and sharing processes within blogging groups that led students to improved understanding and learning. Often with the sharing of ideas from multiple perspectives, a position will rise to the surface that could challenge an

individual's meaning perspectives and core beliefs; this disorienting dilemma (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978) could lead to more critical reflection on the individual level and toward meaning negotiation at the group level. As explained by Wang et al. (2017) and Lin et al. (2017), when students in blogging groups experienced discordant points of view, they worked together to reach consensus. In large part, active-learning pedagogical techniques that employ CSCL are not occurring in the literature classroom (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016), but group blogging could rectify the problem by helping students to gain the interpretive authority they need to advance their understanding of texts and the world around them.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this single case study was to explore how using CSCL blogging groups may promote students' interpretive authority and critical thinking skills in a world literature course at a community college in the Northeast United States. The intent of the study was to add to research in CSCL blogging and to explore the potential for computer-based approaches that may enhance the interpretive authority of college-level literature students. This chapter provides information about the research methods that were used to address the study's purpose and research questions. The chapter provides information about the research design, role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, data analysis plan, and trustworthiness of the study. The chapter concludes with information related to ethical considerations to ensure the appropriate treatment of study participants.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

#### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ: How do CSCL blogging groups influence the literary interpretive process and the perception of student literary interpretive authority?

SubRQ1: How do CSCL group blogging activities influence students' perceptions of their authority to interpret literary works?

SubRQ2: How do student group blogging activities influence the instructor's perceptions of students' authority to interpret literary works?

SubRQ3: How do students demonstrate their critical self-reflection through CSCL group blogging posts?

SubRQ4: How do students demonstrate their critical thinking abilities in CSCL group blogging posts?

### **Central Concepts of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of CSCL blogging groups on literary interpretive authority and critical thinking. To address the purpose and answer the research questions, I first analyzed students' journal entries that indicated their worldviews on four thematic topics that were addressed in a subsequent reading assignment. Understanding the students' baseline beliefs about these topics assisted me in determining whether the subsequent reading assignment and group blogging activity elicited a shift in core perspectives, interpretations, and interpretive authority. During the second stage of the study, students read a work of creative fiction, wrote a blog post reflecting their interpretation of the work in relation to the four previously identified thematic topics, and responded to the posts of their blogging group members. I analyzed the blogging interactions to explore concepts such as meaning making, meaning negotiation, agency, authority, regulation of learning, and critical thinking. Lastly, I conducted email interviews with students and the instructor to triangulate the data for increased reliability; the interview questionnaires were designed to elicit student and instructor perceptions about the interpretive group blogging activity and the students' interpretive authority.



## **Research Tradition**

Because the study addressed the perceptions of a small group of students concerning the use of CSCL blogging groups in relation to their literary authority, a qualitative approach was warranted. Unlike a quantitative approach, which includes numerical data and testing of hypotheses, I used an inductive process by reviewing student documents, examining online interactions, and conducting interviews with open-ended questions to discern patterns and themes from the data. Unlike in autoethnographies or action/participatory research, I did not serve as an active participant. Unlike in phenomenological research, I did not attempt to understand the essence of the lived experiences of the participants. Because I asked *how* questions, was concerned with the phenomenon of group blogging as part of the literary interpretation process, and examined multiple forms of data to answer the research questions, a single case study design was appropriate (see Yin, 2014). Additionally, because the case study approach allows for a variety of data collection methods and sources (Yin, 2014), I included student interviews, teacher interviews, student initial blog posts, student response blog posts, and student journal entries.

## **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher in this single case study, I served as an analyzer of student-created documents/archival records and as an email interviewer. Throughout the research process, I constantly reflected on how my own biases or previous experiences influenced the objectivity of the study. Ravitch and Carl (2016) highlighted the need for ongoing reflexivity through each step of the research process. Likewise, Patton (2015) suggested

the need for the researcher to constantly question his or her motives and how others (the participants or the audience reading the study) will perceive the researcher's role. Part of this reflexivity or self-reflection occurred during the interview and coding processes through field notes and memos, which provided a view of the internal processes that might affect the researcher's interpretation of the interview content (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In relation to case study research, Yin (2014) offered the analogy of the researcher as a detective. As a detective, I interpreted what I read; however, I am quite familiar with the phenomenon under investigation, so I took great care to investigate the reality of the phenomenon and not a preconceived notion of it. Therefore, because I made interpretations of the journal entries students wrote, the blog entries they provided, and their interview comments as I coded them, I can help the readers of my study by being as transparent as possible in my interpretive decisions.

I taught literature survey courses within community colleges for most of the past 25 years; however, approximately 8 years ago, I gave up my full-time faculty role to become an administrator. For 6 years, I served as the English Department Chair at a community college in the Northeast United States, and then, two years ago, I moved to another community college to serve as the Dean of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies. This case study was conducted within a general education world literature survey course at the first community college mentioned above. I am no longer affiliated with that college, but one member of the faculty employed blogging as a pedagogical activity to help students explore their literary interpretations.

## **Methodology**

This section provides information about the specific methodology employed to address the study's research questions, specifically including the following: participant-selection criteria, data-collection instruments, data-collection procedures, and data-analysis plans. Each of the selected methods is appropriate for a qualitative case study.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

As discussed by Yin (2014), a case study is an in-depth exploration of a contemporary phenomenon that has been bounded by time and location and that uses multiple methods for data collection. Thus, the case itself—the students and instructor within a given world literature class at a community college in the Northeast United States and their perceptions of student interpretive authority—established the inclusion and exclusion of participants within the case. I selected the specific class of students using purposeful sampling strategies; Patton (2015) noted that purposeful sampling involves “strategically selecting information-rich cases to study” (p. 265). As a result, I selected a world literature class within a community college that already integrated group blogging and transactional reading theory as part of its approach to interpreting literature. The students within the class represented a convenience sample; students entered the class based on the community college's established course-selection procedures for students. The case only included those participating students and the teacher already in that class, and it excluded all others.

According to Yin (2014), in a case study, a researcher should focus on designing for replication as opposed to designing with sampling logic in mind. As Yin pointed out,

sampling suggests a representation of an entire population; however, case study research does not have that goal. This particular study, I explored the *how* and the *why* of one case. Based on the finding of the current single case study, a future multiple case study designed to replicate the findings would add even more reliability.

Most of the literature classes taught in community colleges have a capacity of 20 to 25 students. Based on a meta-analysis of 83 qualitative studies relating to information systems research, Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) found that between 2005 and 2009, single case studies on average used a sample size of 16 participant interviews. Additionally, Ware and Kessler (2014) conducted a case study that examined telecollaboration of 38 total students in a two-classroom case. Likewise, Hollingshead, Kroeger, Altus, and Brubaker Trytten (2016) conducted a classroom-bounded case study examining the impact of positive behaviors on seventh graders; the participants included roughly 25 out of 31 total students. Thus, the willing participants within a community college world literature class appeared to be in line with established sample sizes for single case studies.

### **Instrumentation**

As part of the already-existing pedagogical approaches within the case study classroom, students discussed how past experiences and worldviews influenced the interpretive process. With that background knowledge, the students wrote a journal entry in which they discussed their perspectives on four thematic topics: infidelity in marriage, being a stranger in a strange land (being an outsider), gender roles, and a mother's relationship with her children (see Appendix A). These topics reflected themes within

Euripides' play *Medea*, which the students read after they had completed their journals. I read and analyzed their written journal entries to discover each student's baseline perspectives relating to the thematic topics.

After the students read *Medea*, they created blog posts, in which they discussed their interpretations of the play in relation to their views on the four thematic topics written about in their journal entries (see Appendix B). Students posted their blogs for the other members of their blogging group to read and address. The response post prompt (see Appendix B) encouraged each student to respond to each of the other group members' posts, offering collegial debate about differing perspectives or sharing additional insights into perspectives already outlined by the original poster. I read and analyzed the blogging transcripts, paying special attention to any shifts in perspective and the meaning-negotiation process.

To triangulate the previous two data sources and to more effectively address the research questions, I conducted email interviews with the students and their instructor. Meho (2006) noted that participants in email interviews provide more in-depth, reflective responses than in face-to-face interviews. Likewise, since the students in the case study wrote about their perspectives in the two earlier data collection stages, email interview questionnaires allowed them to continue the overall reflective process. Thus, the interview questions emerged from the two student-produced activities within my case study and the overarching research question.

### **Basis for Interview Protocol**

Since students first wrote a journal entry, in which they reflected on their beliefs and worldviews in relation to four thematic topics, I designed my first few interview questions to draw forth the students' stories about their beliefs and background experiences. As suggested by Patton (2015), Jacob and Furgerson (2012), and Turner (2010), I developed open-ended questions for the email interview questionnaire. Additionally, I followed the advice provided by Jacob and Furgerson about structuring interview questions in the "tell me about..." form. "Tell me about" questions allow students to take the conversation down their own paths, which helped add to the reliability of the interview data. Likewise, in creating the interview questions, I worked diligently not to ask *why* questions and not to make assumptions about the way I expected or wanted the interviewee to respond.

In the interview protocol for students (see Appendix C) and the interview protocol for the instructor (see Appendix D), I followed the beginning and ending script suggestions provided by Jacob and Furgerson (2012). In the opening or introductory comments, I reminded the interviewee about the nature of the study and the activities they had already completed in relation to it. Likewise, I reminded the interviewee about the informed consent document, stressed that they could leave the study at any point in time, and emphasized the confidentiality of any information they provided. The closing script thanked the participant, provided my contact information, and reminded them about the promises I had made about sharing a synopsis of the final study.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

After identifying the appropriate classroom section as the basis of the case study and after consultation with the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB, approval number: 05-01-19-0515719), the community college IRB, and the course instructor, I sent an introductory email to all students registered in the course section. The introductory message included information about the nature and purpose of the study, the specific expectations of participation in the study, information about data-collecting methods, assurances of confidentiality, emphases about the voluntary nature of participation, and details about the handling of data and privacy concerns. Within the introductory email, I also asked them to provide consent so that I could view their class assignments/archival documents.

Once the semester began and as part of the normal instruction for the course, the instructor provided students with information about three types of authority relating to textual analysis: textual authority, authorial authority, and reader authority. From that point forward, students turned in their assignments via the college Learning Management System. The course instructor gave me access to the course shell within the learning management system so that I could view the students' journal entries and their blog posts. I created a master grid of those students who had consented to participate in the study; therefore, if a student chose not to participate in the research project, I did not review their coursework. Journal data and blog data were only collected once, after students had completed each activity. Within a week of the completion of the blogging activity, I sent each participating student a set of open-ended interview questions in a questionnaire,

which the students completed and returned to me. Additionally, to support the data about the students' perceptions of their own interpretive authority, I conducted an email interview with the course instructor.

Prior to finalizing the research study, I shared my findings with the participants and asked for their feedback. Throughout the process, I securely stored all data sources electronically, and I will securely delete them after five years.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I analyzed data from numerous data sources. Students wrote a journal entry outlining their beliefs on four thematic topics. Then, they wrote a blog entry in which they discussed how their interpretation of the play *Medea* intersected their beliefs and worldviews as illustrated in their earlier journal entry. Next, they read the posts of their groupmates and commented on the various interpretations and viewpoints, with their own perspectives shaping their comments. Finally, I interviewed the student participants and the instructor. I coded each of the abovementioned documents/activities with the goal of discovering thematic patterns.

As discussed by Patton (2015), content analysis is the process by which qualitative data are reduced to patterns or themes. Through content analysis, I examined the answers provided by participants in the email interview questionnaire and developed descriptive and value-based codes to make meaning of the data and identify broader themes. As I conducted the coding process, I adhered to Saldaña's (2016) suggestions by applying the same codes to various sections of the data to recognize developing patterns and create overarching categories under which a collection of codes could fit. Once I



completed the coding process for all interviews, I recoded them to determine whether any newly constructed codes could be applied to the first interview data (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Next, I grouped the codes to categorize how they related to stages in the interpretive process and how they fit within the conceptual framework (see Saldaña, 2016). Based on the recommendations by Saldaña, I used two second-cycle coding techniques that are recognized as effective in case study research: values coding and theming the data.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

The credibility of my study rested on the following considerations. First, because I employed the qualitative single case study methodology, I followed established data collecting methods such as collecting participant journals (documents), blog posts, and blog responses (documents) and conducting interviews. The methods correspond to the acceptable data collecting methods listed by Yin (2014) for case study research. Next, because I used multiple types of data sources, my research findings demonstrated triangulation of data. Shenton (2004), Tracy (2010), Toma (2011), and Yin (2014) all stressed the impact on credibility brought about through the triangulation of data sources. Last, as noted in the Methodology section, my recruitment of participants transparently followed purposeful sampling protocols, and each of my participants provided informed consent for participation. Finally, in actually completing the dissertation, I provided all participants with a synopsis of my findings so that they could check them for accuracy.

**Transferability**

As noted by Shenton (2004), transferability in qualitative research rests on the researcher's ability to thoroughly detail the contextual parameters of the study—particularly the setting for the data collection and selection of the participants—so that readers and future researchers can determine the likelihood of recreating the study. I have thoroughly outlined the setting and participant selection processes in the Methodology section. Once readers understand the rich description of the community college world literature classroom setting that I have provided in the Results section and the boundaries of my case study, they can decide if the study contexts would be transferable or not.

**Dependability**

Shenton (2004) defined dependability as the likelihood that the study can be repeated based on the procedural details. In relation to case study research in particular, the idea of replication features strongly in the design of multiple-case studies (Yin, 2014), and while this study is not meant to be a multiple-case study, I sought to design my research so that I (or others) could one day replicate the study and get similar results. To achieve this end, I connected all aspects of the research plan to the conceptual framework and the research questions so that all parts of the study are aligned. Additionally, I have detailed all aspects of the data-collection process.

**Confirmability**

Readers must be assured that the results accurately reveal the experiences of the participants, not the researcher. As Shenton (2004) noted, triangulation helps the researcher establish confirmability: if data illustrating the participant's view or

experience with a given phenomenon supports a similar view obtained from a different data source, then it is more likely the data confirms the participant's beliefs/experiences and not the researcher's bias (Toma, 2011). As mentioned earlier, my case study included the following data sources from the same group of students: journal entries, blog posts and responses, and interviews. Since student attitudes and responses show similarity across these data sources, the data is trustworthy.

### **Ethical Procedures**

To assure ethical treatment of participants, I completed and submitted IRB documentation for Walden University and for the community college that served as the site for the study. From the beginning, I informed students that their participation in the process was completely voluntary and that they could leave the study at any point. If any student in the case classroom chose not to participate prior to the beginning of data collection, I did not collect, review, or consider that student's journal and/or blog postings. If any student decided to leave the study once data collection had begun, I removed that student's data from consideration and deleted it. I stored all data sources confidentially, and no personally identifiable information appears in the study. The data will be stored for 5 years after the completion of the study, and then it will be securely destroyed.

### **Summary**

Students in college-level world literature courses do not recognize their authority to interpret texts; however, they can gain literary authority by engaging in CSCL group blogging activities designed to cultivate the tenets of transactional reading theory (see

Rosenblatt, 1978/1994), transformative learning theory (see Mezirow, 1997), and social constructivist theory (see Vygotsky, 1930/1978). In producing a journal entry in which they reflect on their core perspectives and worldviews relating to four thematic topics, students acclimated themselves to a reflective process that prepared them for the transactive reading of Euripides' *Medea*. Then students read the play and wrote blog posts about how the play transacted with their core beliefs; this process set up the meaning-making and meaning-negotiation processes inherent in CSCL group blogging groups. Lastly, students participated in an email interview (see Meho, 2006) designed to provide reflection of the entire interpretive process and to allow for triangulation of the data sources.

Throughout the data-collection process, I collected the data and reviewed it objectively. During the data-analysis phase, I coded data following established protocols (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). By following the tenets of case study research as outlined by Yin (2014), I have assured that the processes and results of this research plan are trustworthy, and throughout the study, I followed all Walden University and site-based IRB requirements to ensure the protection and ethical treatment of my participants. The following chapter will provide the results of the research project, specifically the demographic data, the data-collection record, and the findings from the data-analysis phase of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

To explore the feasibility of using CSCL in a world literature course at a community college in the Northeast United States to promote literary interpretive authority, I sought an answer to the following primary research question: How do CSCL blogging groups influence the literary interpretive process and the perception of student literary interpretive authority? Additionally, I sought answers to the following subquestions, which were designed to provide a more complete understanding of the primary research question:

SubRQ1: How do CSCL group blogging activities influence students' perceptions of their authority to interpret literary works?

SubRQ2: How do student group blogging activities influence the instructor's perceptions of students' authority to interpret literary works?

SubRQ3: How do students demonstrate their critical self-reflection through CSCL group blogging posts?

SubRQ4: How do students demonstrate their critical thinking abilities in CSCL group blogging posts?

In this chapter, I provide information about the formal study beginning with contextual information relating to the pilot study, the setting of the study, and participant demographics. Next, I describe the data collection and data analysis processes. After an examination of the trustworthiness of the formal study, I provide the results and a summary of how the results answer the research questions.

### **Pilot Study**

During the academic term prior to data collection, I identified two students who had taken the same course with the instructor who would be participating in the formal study, and I asked them for consent to complete the email interview portion of the study. I administered the pilot version of the email interview to determine whether the questions would provide pertinent data that could be used to answer the research questions and would be nonleading in nature. Only one of the students responded and agreed to complete the questionnaire. Approximately one week after emailing the questionnaire to the participant, I received the complete document. Because each question in the questionnaire followed the “tell me about” structure suggested by Jacob and Furgerson (2012), the returned answers provided me with assurance that the email interview portion of the formal study would yield beneficial data in relation to the main research question and each of the subquestions. Therefore, I did not alter the questionnaire when I conducted the formal study the following academic term.

### **Setting**

The formal study took place at a mid-size community college in the Northeast United States. As with most community colleges, the school has an open admissions policy, so students in the study site classroom came from varying levels of academic preparation. The fully online course occurred over a 7-week period during the school’s summer term. At this community college, students take world literature for one of three reasons: (a) They need a general education humanities course, (b) they need a general education diversity course, or (c) they are English majors. Of the 19 students who took

the world literature course, nine consented to participate. Because students in the class had no way of knowing which individuals other than themselves had chosen to participate, the participants' written data records did not provide any indication of personal or organizational influence. However, because the instructor organized the blog groups without knowing who had agreed or declined to participate in the study, the amount of collectable data, which ideally would have included substantial blogging interactions between participants, proved to be limited.

### **Demographics**

Of the individuals enrolled in the class, seven female and two male students agreed to participate, as did the male instructor. During data collection, one male participant did not return the email interview, so I excluded all of that individual's data from the study. Seven female students, one male student, and one male instructor provided usable data for the study. I maintained student confidentiality by assigning unique alphanumeric identifiers to each student participant (see Table 1). The class contained more students than those in the study, and no one knew which classmates had agreed to participate.

Table 1

*Alphanumerical Identifiers for Student Participants*

Participant identifier	Sex
P1	Female
P2	Female
P3	Female
P4	Female
P5	Male
P6	Female
P7	Female
P8	Female

**Data Collection**

When I received the consent documents from the eight student participants and the instructor, I created a table in which I included both a student name column and a pseudonym column. For each participant, I selected an appropriate pseudonym from an online database of popular names, making certain that each name did not betray any of the participant's identifying characteristics other than their gender. I saved the pseudonym table to a password-protected USB drive, and I used the same pseudonyms for each of the data collection instruments.

**Journal Entries**

The students in the world literature course wrote journals, blog posts, and blog responses as part of the normal course expectations. I collected electronic journal entries from each of the eight students who chose to participate in the study, and I removed their names and replaced them with assigned pseudonym from the pseudonym table. Then I saved each journal file to a password-protected folder on the hard drive of a personal



computer. Because the study focused on the initial encounter these students had with the interpretative process during the course, I collected only the journal relating to the first activity. Students had to submit the journal—their impressions of four topics—by the end of the second day of the class through the Canvas learning management system. The instructor gave me access to the Canvas course shell, so I had access to the submitted journals.

### **Initial Blog Posting**

Before the blogging activity, the instructor assigned each student to a blogging group; each group consisted of three or four students. Students had until the first Saturday of the term to create a blog post using Google Blogger. The blog focused on how the Greek drama *Medea* exhibited the same four thematic topics the students had written about in their journals. Once all of the initial blog posts had been submitted, I cut and pasted the content from each of the participants' blogs into a Microsoft Word document, removed the student's name, attached the appropriate pseudonym, and saved each document as a separate file to a password-protected folder on a personal computer.

### **Blog Responses**

By the end of the day on Sunday, students had to respond to the original postings created by the other members of their groups. Not all of the participants completed this portion of the interpretation activity. Five participants responded to members of their group, but three did not write response posts. Once students completed the response post, I cut and pasted each comment into individual Microsoft Word documents, removed the

student's name, attached the appropriate pseudonym, and saved each file to a password-protected folder on a personal computer.

### **Email Interviews**

After collecting all of the blog postings and journals, I sent each of the participants the interview questionnaire via the Inbox feature on Canvas. In each message, I asked the student to complete the questionnaire and to return the completed document to me within a week. When the week deadline arrived, I had not received any of the completed questionnaires, so I wrote the students again to let them know I understood the stress associated with completing a 7-week summer course and that the 1-week deadline was only a suggestion. I then let them know they could take longer to complete the questionnaire. It took almost 6 more weeks before I received the eighth completed questionnaire, and by that point the term had ended. As soon as I received each questionnaire, I removed the participant's name, replaced it with the appropriate pseudonym, and saved each file to a password-protected folder on a personal computer.

### **Data Analysis**

To answer the first two research subquestions, I reviewed the participants' writings related to three classroom activities (an online journal entry, an original blog post, and a response blog post) and their answers on the email interview questionnaire. I observed that progress toward an understanding of their literary authority occurred step-by-step throughout these activities. To help discover a baseline where students started their interpretive processes, the instructor asked students to complete a journal activity, which provided opportunities for them to reflect on their worldviews in relation to the

four thematic topics. Next, the original blog posts revealed how the participants engaged in the literary interpretive process, especially how their interpretations connected with their worldviews; the original blog post also gave students the chance to reflect on the interpretations of their peers. The response blog post gave the participants a chance to negotiate interpretations and to critically reflect on their worldviews. The email interview questionnaires helped me triangulate the data and address students' perceptions of their literary interpretive authority. Lastly, the instructor's answers on the email interview questionnaire provided an additional source of data related to the students' authority.

### **Journals**

The prompts for the journal activity provided specific expectations for the assignment, so the coding process used to analyze the data followed the parameters of the journal writing exercise. Students were asked to discuss their beliefs, worldviews, and perceptions associated with four thematic topics: (a) infidelity, (b) being an outsider, (c) gender roles, and (d) the mother/child relationship. In relation to each topic, students had to address the following questions: (a) What past experiences have you had with this topic? (b) What lessons have you been taught or what beliefs do you have in relation to the topic? and (c) What is your "gut level" reaction when you hear about this topic? Most of the journals had individual sections devoted to each of the four topics, and each section addressed the three prompt questions (see Appendix A).

After coding each sentence from the first two journals, I observed several categories emerge (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Emerging Categories for Journals*

	Infidelity	Outsider	Gender roles	Mother/child
Categories	Personal connection	Personal experience	Personal reaction	Personal belief
	Details of experienced infidelity	Clarification about personal belief	Clarification about gender roles	Clarification about personal belief
	Personal beliefs	Overcoming the barrier	Lesson learned	Gut-level reaction
	Clarification about personal beliefs	Gut-level reaction	Gut-level reaction	
	Gut-level reaction			

As I analyzed the categories across the story-related topics and compared the journal comments provided by each of the eight participants, the following three themes emerged from the journals: (a) personal beliefs and experiences, (b) clarification of beliefs/experiences, and (c) gut-level reactions. These three themes help me organize the baseline worldviews and beliefs held by the participants. The following quotations from participants' journal entries provide illustrations of the emerging themes.

**Personal beliefs and experiences.** Because the prompt for the journal assignment asked the participants to reflect on their past experiences and beliefs, all of the participants shared insightful comments about their worldviews. For example, P3 provided the following statement about her personal experience with the topic of

infidelity in marriage: “With infidelity in marriage, the only experience I have with the topic is hearing of friends’ parents having issues with infidelity. I do not have many personal or close experiences with infidelity in marriage.” P3 followed up this experiential statement with a belief-related comment: “I believe that infidelity can rarely be forgiven, and personally do not think I would stay in a marriage if infidelity ever became an issue.” As P3 read the play, her beliefs appeared to shape her interpretation of the play.

I also observed that different personal experiences may have shaped different beliefs and different interpretive processes. Unlike P3’s limited personal experience, P1 had a more direct experience with infidelity: “I experienced infidelity within my marriage about three years ago.” P1 followed up her experience statement with a nuanced belief-type statement:

I still believe that marriage is a life-long commitment and infidelity should not be enacted within it. Marriage is not just another relationship status on Facebook. Spouses need to stay true to one another and be able to work through any issue or obstacle together. I also believe that there is no reason why someone should cheat within their marriage. If one is unhappy and does not want to be faithful to one individual, then they should have enough respect to end things before moving on to someone new.

P1’s unique experiences and beliefs led to a different interpretation of the play compared to P3’s interpretation. It appeared that as students became more attuned to their beliefs, they gained more authority over their interpretations.

**Clarification of beliefs/experiences.** Throughout the journaling process, students provided clarifying details of their personal beliefs and experiences, apparently making certain that readers understood their point of view. Six of the eight participants provided clarifying details in relation to three of the assigned topics, and all eight provided comments that clarified their beliefs and experiences in relation to the fourth topic, the mother/child relationship. For example, when P3 stated that she had very little personal experience with infidelity, she clarified the point with the following comment: “I have a friend whose parents stayed together after infidelity and a friend whose parents split after infidelity.” She followed up this comment with a clarification about her beliefs: “Part of my beliefs stem from my strong values of honesty and loyalty.” With these clarifying statements, P3 signaled how she might approach the issue of infidelity within the play *Medea*. Likewise, in relation to the mother/child relationship theme, P2 shared the following about her beliefs: “I believe as an adult, we must keep our children out of our problems or conflicts because they are the fruit of a past love and we have to protect them.” She followed this belief with a personal clarification about the issue: “[A]s a mother I could never thinking [*sic*] about hurting my child.”

**Gut-level reactions.** Following the instructions in the journal prompt, each student also provided a “gut-level reaction” to the topic. The students expressed the most likely way they would react to a scene or experience relating to each of the four topics. In relation to the infidelity topic, P3 provided the following gut-level reaction: “My gut level reaction is that it is wrong and unforgivable, which I think comes from not being very personally connected to my few experiences hearing of it.” Thus, P3 posited a

personal and specific reaction to the topic that may or may not have been shared by the instructor or any other member of the class. Similarly, P8 provided the following gut-level reaction to the theme of being an outsider: “This topic brings out many emotions such as, loneliness, scared, worried, etc. It also makes me feel sympathetic, and sad because I personally have had experiences and have felt what it was like to be an outsider.”

### **Initial Blog Post**

In a similar fashion, the world literature instructor provided a specific prompt (see Appendix B) for the creation of a blog post to illustrate how the students’ personal beliefs influenced their interpretations of the play *Medea* in relation to the same four topics: (a) infidelity, (b) being an outsider, (c) gender roles, and (d) the mother/child relationship. To add to the depth of the students’ posts, the instructor asked students to support their comments with quotations from the play. Coding these blog posts proved to be a complex exercise because both the student’s blog structure/construction and the student’s interpretive slant had a bearing on the analysis.

To start the coding process, I assigned a short phrase that described the formal characteristic of the interpretive content, a short phrase characterizing the formal feature of the literary analysis, or both to each sentence in the blog posting. Next, I created a matrix so that I could compare each participant’s comments relating to each of the four topics. From this matrix, categories developed (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Emerging Categories for Initial Blog Posts*

	Infidelity	Outsider	Gender roles	Mother/child
Categories	Motivation	Causes	Ancient Greece	Complexity of the relationship
	Infidelity responses	Effects	Double standard	Motivations
	Emotions	Civilized vs. barbarism	Unique observations	Outlier comments
	Comparison of actions	Emotions	Emotions	Emotions
	OP's feelings/reactions	OP's feelings/reactions	OP's feelings/reactions	OP's feelings/reactions

As I analyzed the categories across all four story-related topics, the following thematic patterns emerged: (a) motivation/causes, (b) responses/effects, (c) emotions observed, (d) original poster's feelings/reactions.

To maintain confidentiality when quoting from the participants' blog posts and responses, I have not identified the speaker, even by pseudonym or alphanumeric identifier. Since the participants posted their blogs for class-wide viewing, my inclusion of the pseudonym could allow other participants to identify the authors of the confidentially written journals and questionnaires. The following quotations from participants' original blog posts provide illustrations of the emerging themes.

**Motivation/causes.** Most of the participants attempted to analyze the main character's motivation in relation to the four examined topics. For three of the topics, six



of the eight participants posited at least one statement about the motivations of the main characters in the play; in relation to the final topic (the mother/child relationship) only five of the eight participants provided a motivation-related comment. Just as the students attempted to explain, clarify, and justify their beliefs and gut-level reactions in the journal activity, the students attempted to explain the actions and reactions of the characters in the story through their blog posts. For example, one participant interpreted all of Medea's actions as directly motivated by Jason's infidelity:

All of Medea's anger stems from her husband's infidelity, and she cannot stop her consequent actions. She feels, perhaps, that because her husband had an affair, there is no other way in which she can act. Medea feels that she has given everything to him, and he has not met her with the same love or respect.

The student's comments illustrate empathy for Medea and anger toward Jason, Medea's husband. The use of the word *perhaps* demonstrates the student's recognition that interpretations are not definitive. In the final sentence, the student speaks for Medea by placing herself in Medea's shoes, apparently using her belief structure to justify Medea's motivations.

**Responses/effects.** Likewise, students attempted to connect their knowledge of the characters' backgrounds and motivations to the characters' eventual response to the topics. To illustrate the effects of gender inequality, one participant identified Medea's revenge as the direct result of the gender role system found in Ancient Greece:

She was a woman, and that I can say was the beginning of her downfall, having to bend and kneel to every command Jason had put upon her.... She is also in [*sic*]

upset, and is seeking revenge instead of moving on because he is leaving[:] a typical female response, which is not correct.

The student's use of the words *bend* and *kneel* demonstrates the individual student's views of social inequality as a negative impact on women, and she has transferred those perspectives to Medea in this interpretation. In fact, the student proclaims that such a "typical female response" is wrong. The student's points of view on the topic have shaped her interpretation of the play, something that would not have occurred in the same way if the student had simply accepted the teacher's authority to interpret.

**Emotions observed.** Throughout their blog postings, the participants also commented on the characters' emotions. Four of the participants discussed character emotions relating to infidelity; five participants discussed character emotions relating to being an outsider; three participants discussed character emotions relating to gender roles; and six participants discussed character emotions dealing with the mother/child relationship. Since emotions are often subject to interpretation, the students apparently called their emotional experiences into the interpretative process, thus providing them with another level of ownership over the text. For example, in observing the various characters' emotions, one of the participants placed Medea, Jason, and Aigeas on a continuum:

Both of these polar opposite tendencies – Medea's passions untampered by reason and Jason's pragmatism untampered by empathy for his wife's feelings – are warned against by the Nurse.... [The] Greek ideal of moderation is exemplified in Aigeas, who is presented as a kind and noble figure. Aigeas responds to Medea's

story with sympathy and acknowledges Jason's infidelity as a despicable act while still maintaining his levelheadedness and generosity.

This same participant provided comments within the journal activity illustrating the ability to see both sides of an issue and to recognize "polar opposite tendencies." A different participant explored Medea's emotions in relation to the mother/child relationship: "It is obvious she is conflicted over this issue, which is not surprising considering a mother should love her child dearly." In the journal activity, this same participant commented that "every mother should have a strong positive relationship with their child." The act of interpreting the play apparently grew out of the participant's cognitive and perceptual structures, which helped to bring about a sense of literary interpretive authority.

**Original poster's feelings/reactions.** Just as they had done in their journal entries, many of the participants expressed a gut-level reaction or response to the actions of the characters in the play. Although fewer participants made these types of comments in relation to three of the topics, every participant included a gut-level comment addressing the mother/child relationship topic. For instance, after reading Medea's decision to murder her children, one participant shared a gut-level response, a response designed to show how the participant felt about Medea's actions:

Medea's plays taught me a lesson about revenge. Sometimes people let their anger and sadness take control of them. They act first and do not consider the consequences. What Medea did was morally incomprehensible and shocked me. Her solution to her husband's infidelity was her downfall.

Connecting their beliefs with their interpretations helped the participants establish literary interpretive authority.

### **Response Blog Posts**

As with the journals and the original blog posting, the instructor provided a detailed blog response post prompt (see Appendix B). The instructions required each respondent to explain how their worldview affected the interpretation and to consider if the initial blog post brought about a change in the respondent's perspectives. Although the instructor assigned the journals, initial blog posts, and the response blog posts as graded assignments, only five of the eight participants completed the response posts. Using the same basic procedure that I used to code the initial blog posts, I assigned a short phrase that described the characteristic of the blog post's form, a short phrase characterizing the feature of the literary analysis, or both to each sentence in the blog posting. Next, I created a matrix to compare each participant's comments. Because the responding participant might choose to focus on one or several of the story's thematic topics, I compared the response posts based on their totality, not based on individual topics. From this matrix, the following four themes developed: (a) agreement/disagreement statements, (b) stressing own beliefs or points of view, (c) statement of emotional reaction about characters, and (d) emphasizing the original poster's point of view. The following quotations from participants' response blog posts provide illustrations of the emerging themes.

**Agreement/disagreement statements.** Each of the five participants who completed the response-post assignment provided statements illustrating their agreement

or disagreement with their groupmates' interpretation. These agreement/disagreement statements appeared to boost the students' interpretations and to help in the meaning-negotiation process. When a student agreed, it apparently helped to strengthen their belief structures, and when a student disagreed, it apparently showed the presence of a disorienting dilemma or a clash of perspectives. Some of the participants noted both agreements and disagreements in the same response:

I agree that Medea's role showed bother [*sic*] aspects of a woman [:] the traditional, docile type that mourns the loss of her husband and her life, and a capable, independent type that commits murderous acts to regain control.

Later, in relation to a comment from a group member that Medea did not love her children, the same participant made the following comment:

As I read all the evidence presented in the play, I was inclined to believe that Medea still had love for her children. Due to Jason's infidelity, her rage and need for revenge turned her into someone she was not. Although I can see how it might be unclear if her desire to take her children's bodies to bury them was truthful since she used her "love" for her children to manipulate many in the story, I do believe her word to be true.

Whether the responding student agreed or disagreed, the interaction and negotiation of ideas apparently helped each participant gain confidence with and ownership of the interpretive process.

**Stressing beliefs or points of view.** Four of the five participants who completed the response-post assignment shared their opinions or beliefs in response to their group

members' original blog posts. Stating their beliefs in response to another student's comments appeared to help the responding student reinforce their core beliefs and gain confidence about the validity of their interpretations. For example, in responding to comments about infidelity, one participant shared the following:

Passionate instincts can overtake us, guilty feelings will wash over us and paranoia will take control of us. When women face infidelity, they tend to lose their dignity...and may act [v]indictive against their ex-husband or his new love interest, much like Medea.

In a similar vein, another participant shared her point of view in response to a group member's comment that Medea would have acted differently in relation to present day society than she did in the play:

Like many people I know who are making wrong or hurtful decisions, they do not tend to listen to the advice given to them and instead want to learn their own lesson in their own way before realizing how wrong their actions truly were. This is why I believe that, regardless of the era or generation, Medea would have committed the same vengeful actions.

Reinforcing and stressing their core beliefs in this manner appeared to illustrate the students' growing confidence in their interpretive ability.

**Statement of emotional reaction about characters.** Three of the five participants who completed the response-post assignment made emotive and judgmental comments about the actions of the characters in the play. Gut-level reactions tend to spring from an individual's core belief structure, so the participants felt comfortable

enough about the other group members to express their feelings. For example, the following comment from one participant in relation to Medea's killing of her children demonstrated a visceral passion on the subject:

She [Medea] is the epitome of evil, and no remorse was felt for her actions. This was insane [;] no one in their right state of mind would ever kill their own children. Medea was beyond different then [*sic*] other women during this time. We can conclude that she had no morals of protecting her children, nor did she care for them like a mother would for her children.

Although the student's emotive reaction might not illustrate critical thinking, it does illustrate that the student had become emotionally invested in the story. At the same time, such a passionate response might suggest that the student faced a disorienting dilemma after reading the original poster's comment. Participating in these types of peer interchanges apparently helped students engage in the meaning-negotiation process.

**Emphasizing the original poster's point of view.** Many of the participants agreed with the other group members' points of view, and two of the five who completed the response-post assignment reiterated and emphasized the original poster's point of view. By stressing points of agreement, the participants reinforced their interpretations and beliefs while encouraging the interpretations of their group members. As illustrated in the following comment from one of the participants, this shared interpretation apparently helped to boost the students' confidence in their interpretive authority:

I think that your point about Medea's exile is very interesting. You pointed out that not only was Medea being exiled to a strange land, but that she had already

experienced coming to a strange land when she found a new home with Jason. I think having to go through this experience a second time elevates Medea's emotions about the situation.

The responding student had already commented about Medea's emotions in relation to being exiled, so the original poster's suggestion of a second reason apparently helped the author of the above comment feel vindicated in her interpretation.

### **Email Interview Questionnaire for Students**

To triangulate the data from the journals and blogs and to gain more insights into the participants' self-reflective perspectives about the blogging activity, I developed and pilot tested a 15-question email interview and distributed it to the participants once they had completed the other three activities. In relation to two questions, student could choose which to answer based on their circumstances, so most participants provided 14 answers.

To answer subquestion 3 and subquestion 4, I explored the participants' questionnaire responses through the lens of transformative learning theory. To code the data, I created a matrix so that I could see participants' answers to each question collectively. From this matrix, categories developed for each question (see Appendix E). Analysis of the interview questionnaire data relating to each participant appears in the Results section. Generally, participants commented that the journals helped prepare them for the topics that would appear in the literary text; that the original blog posts helped them to feel confident in their interpretations; and that the response posts helped them to confirm their interpretations or to adjust them through a reconsideration process.



Overwhelmingly, the participants concluded that the CSCL group blogging activity made them more confident in their interpretation of creative texts.

### **Email Interview Questionnaire for Instructor**

To further address the trustworthiness of the students' perceptions, I interviewed the course instructor. The questionnaire contained six questions, and I analyzed the instructor's responses through the following process: First, I used a short phrase to code each idea or sentence in the instructor's answers. Then, I created a matrix to analyze the instructor's answers, and the following themes emerged: (a) confidence and ownership of text, (b) preparation to evaluate and compare, (c) freedom and comfort, and (d) reflection and rethinking. The following quotations from the instructor's responses illustrate the emerging themes.

**Confidence and ownership of text.** The instructor made comments about gains in student authority and confidence as they participated in the entire interpretive activity. For example, after the participants had completed the initial blog post, the instructor made the following observation:

Having completed the initial journal entry as well as the reading of Euripides' "Medea" in its entirety, students showed confidence in their interpretive authority in their blog posts. Judging by the depth and breadth of the posts, students felt comfortable writing about what they perceived was Euripides' take on the four respective topics.

The instructor equated both confidence and comfort in the interpretive process as an illustration of interpretive authority. Likewise, in discussing the entire interpretive

process from journaling through blog posts, the instructor added, “Clearly, the process fostered their ownership of the text, not to mention the topics, so that they were confident in taking interpretive leaps in the blogs.” As emphasized in the instructor’s comment, the entire CSCL blogging-related process apparently led students to claim ownership of the literary text, and that process helped them claim authority for their interpretations.

**Preparation to evaluate and compare.** At various points throughout the interview questionnaire, the instructor discussed how the journaling and blogging activities prepared participants for evaluation of the text. After the class’s journaling activity, the instructor noted the following:

As a result of articulating these experiences, lessons, emotions and views, they clearly gained confidence and “ownership” of them so that they seemed well prepared to evaluate what the authors had to say and compare/contrast it with their own claims.

The instructor perceived that the journaling activity focused the students’ attention on their beliefs related to the topic, and as a result, the students gained authority as they encountered the topics in the literary text.

**Freedom and comfort.** The instructor noted that the journal and blogging activities provided students with a level of freedom. In his interview questionnaire responses, the instructor made the following observation:

Students seemed to relate easily to the topics presented: infidelity, gender roles, a mother’s love for her children, and being a stranger. Since the journaling activity allowed them the freedom to write about their own experiences with these topics,

as well as life lessons they had learned about the topics and emotional responses to it, students took the opportunity to share (in detail) their personal and very candid views.

With the student-centered approach explored in this study, students apparently discovered the freedom to connect their worldviews to the work of literature. After the students completed their initial blogging posts, the instructor again discussed their perceived comfort in writing about the subject matter: “Judging by the depth and breadth of the posts, students felt comfortable writing about what they perceived was Euripides’ take on the four respective topics.” Comfort in the literary interpretive process apparently followed from the students’ freedom to explore their worldviews in relation to the literary text.

**Reflection and rethinking.** The instructor discerned that the text or their fellow classmates forced the participants to re-examine their original perspectives. In relation to the play itself, the instructor said, “Euripides’ text also challenged them, forcing them to reflect on some of the assumptions and claims they had presented in their initial journal entries.” In relation to the students’ blog post responses, the instructor noted that students reflected on their original interpretations:

Another consequence of the group interaction on their interpretive authority was to show the necessity for collaboration in working to analyze literary texts. A common refrain in the responses was something like “I never considered that” and “I didn’t mention that.”

Giving students the freedom to explore the literary text with their worldviews (as opposed to the worldviews of the instructor) as the foundation of their interpretive process apparently led students to question and reflect on their beliefs and interpretations while helping them to engage in a meaning-negotiation process with their blogging group members.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Students registered for the world literature class without any foreknowledge of the present study. Thus, the students in the class represent a typical online world literature class in a summer session of the course. As a result, the study conformed to established procedures for case study research, purposeful sampling, and the data collection plan. My analysis of student-generated course documents (the journals, original blog posts, and response blog posts) and the participants' completed emailed interview questionnaires resulted in data triangulation, especially in relation to growth in literary interpretive authority, critical reflection, and critical thinking.

#### **Transferability**

The characteristics of the case study students and environment provide other researchers with the context necessary to determine whether or not the present study would be applicable in their situations. The formal study took place in a world literature survey course at a community college in the Northeast United States. The students in world literature courses at this school typically fall into three categories: (a) those needing a general education humanities course, (b) those needing a general education

diversity course, or (c) those who are English majors. As with most community colleges, the study location was an open-door institution of higher learning, and individuals with varying levels of academic preparedness and personal backgrounds took the class.

However, in order to enter the world literature course, students had to successfully complete the two courses in the freshman composition sequence: the first focusing on essay organization, mechanics, and the inclusion of source material to support a claim, and the second, which guided students through the research process and argumentation.

The selected course section was offered as an online class during a seven-week summer session. Summer classes at this community college often include students from four-year colleges and universities who are attempting to fulfill general education requirements while they are on summer break. In addition to the online nature of the course, the instructor embraced student-centered pedagogical approaches and had previously included group blogging activities as a means of assisting the literary interpretation process. Although the community college used Canvas as its learning management system, students were not required to complete training or orientation sessions to take courses in the online environment.

### **Dependability**

The prompts for the journal, original blog post, response blog post, student email interview questionnaire, and the instructor email interview questionnaire appear in the appendices (see Appendices A-D). The data provided by students during the journaling activity set the baseline for their beliefs and worldviews; the students' written journal comments and their answers to the email interview questionnaire support the students'

perceptions that the journal helped to set the stage for the interpretive process. When students then created blog posts and responded to their group members' blogs, the written blog comments themselves and the answers to the email interview questionnaire support the students' perception that the blog posts connected their worldviews to their literary interpretations and that the interaction within their blogging groups helped them to negotiate meaning. Thus, the three student-generated writing activities (the journals, the blogging activities, and the email interview questionnaire) helped to triangulate the data, allowing me to answer the primary research question and subquestions 1, 3, and 4.

In order to add dependability to the questions on the email interview questionnaire, I first completed a pilot study, which confirmed that the questions would provide useful data in answering the study research questions. To add a further level of triangulation, the instructor's perceptions as illustrated in his answers to the email interview questionnaire helped to further support the data provided by the students, and as a result, I could answer subquestion 2. Finally, after completing the initial stages of data analysis, I sent my findings to the participants and asked for their review and feedback. Thus, the conceptual framework, research questions, and data analysis plans all align, and the data-collection process is thoroughly outlined.

### **Confirmability**

Throughout the data analysis process, I kept a journal of memos to document the steps I had taken and to reflect on ways I attempted to avoid bias in my analysis. As a former literature instructor, I understood the need to keep my own literary interpretive processes out of the data analysis process. When coding, I made a conscious effort to

consider the function of the participant's comments in relation to the research question as opposed to the value of the interpretation provided by the student. For example, if a student made a comment about the motivation of a given literary character in a blog post, I coded for motivation, not the value of the interpretation itself. By creating matrices to compare categories that emerged from each participant and across data sources by participant, I could better identify the emerging themes and reduce the intrusion of any biases on my part.

Data triangulation resulted across the data sources provided by students (journals, original blog posts, response blog posts, and email interview questionnaires), and the instructor's perceptions of the student's literary authority further helped to triangulate the data and confirm the findings. Lastly, after my initial data analysis, I sent my findings to the participants and asked for their review and feedback.

## **Results**

Throughout the study, the participants engaged in activities designed to answer the following primary research question: How do CSCL blogging groups influence the literary interpretive process and the perception of student literary interpretive authority? To answer this question, I sought answers to the four subquestions, each designed to address key considerations of the primary research question.

### **Perceptions of Student Authority to Interpret Creative Literature**

Students overwhelmingly saw the CSCL group blogging process as a path to their literary authority. The journaling activity helped focus their attention on their beliefs and prepared them to engage in transactional literary analysis; the blogging activity helped

them to exert their authority and to critically reflect on how their points of view compared to those of their peers.

**Journaling.** Overwhelmingly, the participants appeared to recognize how the journaling activity helped to focus their attention on the topics implicit in the literary text. For example, in relation to the mother/child relationship theme, two of the participants were mothers, and their journals emphatically proclaimed that mothers must stand by and protect their children. This trait of motherhood featured so strongly in P2's beliefs that upon reading the climactic scene in *Medea*, she wrote,

When it got to the part when Medea killed her children, it was heartbreaking because as a mother I could never thinking [*sic*] about hurting my child. She was focused on her revenge against her husband. As I was reading, I was praying for her not to kill her children [,] but tragically she did.

Asking students to write their beliefs and experiences about the four topics in the journal appeared to help them focus their perspectives and prepare them for the themes they would explore in the piece of literature: P1 commented that the “journal entries were to get us thinking about the incoming themes of the literature,” and P3 stated, “The journal activity focused my subsequent reading of the text.” However, the most telling comment about the journaling activity, especially in relation to critical reflection and interpretive authority, came from P1, who said, “I personally opened up a bit with some of my journal assignments and it felt rather freeing to write it down and share it.” As a result, when students then read *Medea* and engaged in the blogging activities, they were primed for reflection on the juxtaposition of their points of views and those of others. After



completing the blog post and reconsidering the journal activity, P3 declared, “It is clear that my worldviews did affect the way I interpreted the text,” and P8 added that it “was interesting to compare my initial thoughts to the story.” The act of critical reflection and negotiation between their past and present selves helped P4 to “rethink what we as humans think is normal.” Thus, students appeared to discover that their worldviews and beliefs are integrally connected to their interpretations.

**Blogging.** When students completed the original and response blogging assignments, they overwhelmingly commented upon the benefit of seeing their peers’ perspectives and interpretations of *Medea*. With some students being more experienced in the literary interpretation domain, and other students being more fully attuned through their personal experiences with some of the thematic topics being explored in the literary text, the CSCL blogging groups appeared to help students realize the benefits of sharing their perspectives with their peers. Almost all participants stressed the benefits of reading their group members’ differing perspectives on the work of creative fiction. As P3 expressed, “Feedback is valuable and it is interesting to hear from people who may have had a different interpretation.” P8 added, “They helped me see different aspects of the story.” Beyond seeing varying perspectives, two students noted that the interaction with their group members helped to fill in knowledge gaps. In discussing blog responses, P6 commented that the posts proved to be

Very insightful and some of the points they made in their response were things I didn’t catch in the text or didn’t think about in my own interpretation. I found it very interesting to read what they had to say about the text.

P2 added, “The way they interpreted the stories help[ed] me a lot...and I was able to understand better the concept [*sic*].”

When the study participants had critically reflected on their perspectives and critically thought about the perspectives of the text and their fellow classmates, the transformative learning process appeared to commence. Based on the responses of the participants on their email interview questionnaire, most of the students in the study engaged in various stages of the transformative learning process. P4, in particular, noted disorienting events that changed her perspective on a number of the thematic topics explored during the assignment:

A perspective can really be a misleading and changeable aspect in one individual’s thought, and I never believed that until I took this class. The class had challenged my beliefs and thinking in subjects I thought I had mastered.... My perspective on gender roles and a mother’s relationship with her children have definitely been tainted on the image I had previously had.

P4 followed up the above comment with the following:

The play challenged my mind not to believe the norm and take a challenge when it comes to your reading. I was interpreting the play while writing my views on how the morals and worldwide views differ from the plays [*sic*] status quo. At first it was disturbing and frustrating, because the way I thought would be normal was definitely not, and made me rethink what we as humans think is normal.

The views and actions expressed by Medea in the play challenged P4’s core perceptions. In fact, she noted Medea’s selfishness and explained that the killing of Medea’s children

made her upset; these reactions are the outward manifestations of an internal debate. The instructor, too, noted that several students in the course had been challenged by the text, “forcing them to reflect on some of the assumptions and claims they had presented in their initial journal entries.” As P4 tried to integrate the challenging concepts into her core perspective, she began the transformative process by “rethink[ing] what we as humans think is normal.”

Other students in the class chose not to integrate the conflicting perceptions into their overall belief structure. For example, in talking about response posts, P6 made the following declaration:

Of course, we didn't agree on everything [;] however their input made me see a different side of the topic which I found very interesting. Sometimes their input even changed my perception of my interpretation [;] however my beliefs on each subject did not waiver.

Likewise, P5 stated that his core perceptions “did not shift in the slightest based on our interactions.”

Most of the students did perceive a positive shift in their authority to interpret works of literature as a result of the CSCL blogging group literary interpretation process. In describing how the blogging activity had affected their perceptions of interpretive ability, students used words and phrases like “more awareness,” “interpret things better,” “capable,” “more confident,” and “interpret ideas differently.” The instructor perceived that the students “clearly gained confidence and ‘ownership’” of the thematic topics through the journaling process and that they “showed confidence in their interpretive

authority in their blog posts.” Unlike in a traditional literature class, in which the instructor often professes interpretations and students write down every word the instructor says because the students lack confidence in interpreting the text themselves, the participants in this study gained ownership of the text, linked the text to their core perceptions, and confidently made interpretive claims, thus exhibiting their authority and agency in interpreting works of creative fiction.

### **Critical Self-Reflection Through CSCL Group Blogging Posts**

The participants in the present study engaged in varying activities that led them to reflect upon and even reconsider their worldviews. The instructor summed up how the creative literature helped to facilitate this process when he stated, “Euripides’ text also challenged them, forcing them to reflect on some of the assumptions and claims they had presented in their initial journal entries.” Critical reflection allowed P3 to make the following comment in the interview questionnaire: “It is clear that my worldviews did affect the way I interpreted the text...” Likewise, P4 (perhaps the individual who demonstrated the greatest transformative experience in the study) recounted her journey through the critical reflection process:

A perspective can really be a misleading and changeable aspect in one individual’s thought, and I never believed that until I took this class. The class...challenged my beliefs and thinking in subjects I thought I had mastered.... My perspective on [g]ender roles and a mother’s relationship with her children have definitely been tainted on the image I had previously had. Due to the

readings I now know both [are] very open subjects that have different views both basic and extreme.

Reading the literature, which included ideas at odds with her core perspectives, and interacting with her blog group members made P4 re-evaluate many of her previously held beliefs. The class content and pedagogical approach created a disorienting dilemma for P4, so she engaged in critical reflection to reevaluate her core perspectives. For P6, however, the act of critical reflection occurred in a more tangible sense when she received blog responses from her groupmates:

Well, when I read my groupmates [*sic*] comments...about my interpretations as well as their blog posts, I looked back at my own post to see how they differed. When reading their posts, I felt very insecure about my own interpretation because I felt that because I had different details or interpretations [,] I was wrong. However, after I read their comments on my post, I felt a lot more confident in my interpretations because they agreed with a lot of my points and said how good they were. Of course, we didn't agree on everything [;] however their input made me see a different side of the topic which I found very interesting. Sometimes their input even changed my perception of my interpretation [;] however my beliefs on each subject did not waiver.

P6 engaged in critical reflection about her interpretations as a result of the group blogging interaction, and those reflections led to reevaluations of her earlier interpretations. Thus, the collaborative nature of the blogging groups helped P6 to reexamine how her personal

beliefs transacted with the words within the text, and that act led her to be confident with her interpretations.

The interpretive process implemented in this world literature class not only allowed the participants to critically reflect on their previous beliefs; it apparently went a step further by helping them recognize their participation in the critical reflection process. For example, P4 expressed that the class “has selected passages that [have] captivated and questioned my way of thinking and my moral status.” She goes on to express how the creative text helped her to actualize her own critical self-reflection:

The play challenged my mind not to believe the norm and take a challenge when it comes to your reading. I was interpreting the play while writing my views on how the morals and worldwide views differ from the plays [*sic*] status quo. At first it was disturbing and frustrating, because the way I thought would be normal was definitely not and made me rethink what we as humans think is normal.

The CSCL group blogging process apparently led to a metacognitive awareness of the juxtaposition between the text and P4’s core perspectives. This awareness led to a reevaluation of her core beliefs. In a similar fashion, P8 discovered and summed up the reflective nature of the blogging activity: “I liked the feedback my group mates provided me with [;] it helped me see the topics differently. It helped me reflect on what I wrote and why I wrote it.” She continued this comment by adding more clarification:

The blog activity helped me interpret the ideas differently. While complete [*sic*] the journal [,] you compare it to your personal life and aspects of yourself. While

completing the blog [,] you compare it to the story which brings out different perspectives and ideas.

In the traditional, teacher-centric literature classroom, students tend to take the instructor's interpretation as fact, so they are less likely to filter the instructor's thoughts through their core perspectives. By exploring their beliefs as part of a journaling activity in a student-centered pedagogical approach, students must reflect on what they believe and to what level they believe it. When they then present their interpretations of the literature to their blogging groups, they again critically reflect on how the literature transacts with their beliefs. When their blogging group members respond to their initial posts, the students must critically reflect on how the meaning-negotiation process influences their interpretations and their overall worldviews. All of this critical self-reflection helps students to successfully integrate their interpretations into their overall core perspectives and helps them feel more confident about their abilities to interpret works of creative fiction.

### **Critical Thinking Abilities in CSCL Group Blogging Posts**

During the blogging activities, most of the participants noted the benefit of hearing the varying perspectives of their group members, and after much critical reflection, several individuals even changed their points of view. As illustrated in the following comments from the participants, CSCL blogging activities proved beneficial in fostering critical-thinking skills. In relation to the original and response blog posts, P8 commented, "I liked that we were able to see our classmates' thoughts and opinions on the topics given to us. It was interesting to see the different views and thoughts everyone

had.” Likewise, P2 noted, “It was very interesting to see how each of us has a different way to see things and interpreted the stories,” and she later emphasized her point by stating, “By interacting with my group mates, I was able to see how each of us has a different point of view.” Recognizing that other perspectives exist is key to critical thinking; synthesizing various perspectives is crucial to objective analysis. However, not only differences of points of view proved valuable to the participants; the recognition of substantially similar points of view with subtle shades of differentiation also proved essential to the critical thinking and interpretive process. For example, P6 said,

I did like when I got to agree with them on points because the fact that we had the same point of view on a topic was cool, plus they had different details in their interpretations of a topic so it opened my eyes to things I missed within the text.

P1 gave a similar perspective:

Having my groupmates agree with my interpretation showed me that I am not the only person who has my way of thinking and understanding so it made me a bit more confident with my points of view.

Developing their interpretations started the critical thinking process, and recognizing that their peers shared many of the same interpretive points helped the participants to become more confident in the interpretive process itself. However, in relation to critical thought, differences in point of view provided greater benefits to the students’ interpretive processes. P6 explained,



Of course, we didn't agree on everything [;] however their input made me see a different side of the topic which I found very interesting. Sometimes their input even changed my perception of my interpretation....

As part of the critical thinking process, varying viewpoints must be analyzed, justified, synthesized, and evaluated to produce a meaningful conclusion or claim. The CSCL group blogging process gave students many interpretive perspectives to explore and evaluate.

The instructor summed up the benefit of the blogging activity in relation to critical thinking as it applies to the interpretation of literary texts:

Another consequence of the group interaction on their interpretive authority was to show the necessity for collaboration in working to analyze literary texts. A common refrain in the responses was something like "I never considered that" and "I didn't mention that." Hence, I believe they came to see that a literary text is never fully explained, and that each interpretation offers a key piece to the overall puzzle that they are all building to get the best overall approximation of a text's meaning.

The synthesis of varying points of view proved invaluable to the meaning-negotiation process, which in itself illustrates critical thought. With students engaging in critical thought to shape their interpretations and critical reflection to integrate their interpretations into their core perspectives, they became more confident with the interpretive process and thus gained interpretive authority.

### **Influence of CSCL Blogging Groups on Student Literary Authority**

The collective answers to the four subquestions provide a clear understanding of the answer to the primary research question: How do CSCL blogging groups influence the literary interpretive process and the perception of student literary interpretive authority? CSCL blogging groups helped students recognize how their beliefs and worldviews influenced their interpretative choices. The journal activity helped students understand what they believed, and the blog post helped them to understand how that belief structure shaped literary interpretations. Recognizing ownership of their unique interpretations helped participants feel confident about the value of their interpretation at the same time that they gained agency to express their interpretations to others. Because their blogging groups operated within a system of peers sharing with peers, the students felt safe to explore their interpretations and those of others within their peer group. The interaction within the blogging groups led students to engage in critical self-reflection about their beliefs and interpretations while also bringing about critical thinking as students negotiated meaning as they synthesized interpretive perspectives. The results, therefore, support the answer that CSCL blogging groups promote the student's ownership of the literary interpretive process while elevating student and teacher perceptions of the students' literary interpretive authority.

### **Individual Paths to a Perception of Literary Authority**

Recognizing the emerging themes in relation to the research questions and the participants collectively, however, only tells part of the story in capturing the growth of participants through the CSCL group blogging process. In order to fully demonstrate how

the process guided individual students with differing backgrounds and literary achievements toward a similar recognition of their interpretive authority, I will outline each student's path through the CSCL group blogging process as well as the perceptions of the instructor.

**P1.** Of all the participants in the study, P1, alone, entered the class as a novice reader. As she stated in her questionnaire answer, “[Before the class] I didn’t really read much creative literature let alone take time to interpret it.” Though she had not read much creative literature prior to the class, her journal entries reveal that she had connections to the four thematic topics explored during the interpretive activity: She had directly experienced infidelity in a relationship; she (like all of the participants) had direct knowledge of being an outsider; she was brought up with traditional views of gender roles, yet she wanted to instill her children with a more well-rounded sense of responsibilities; and she had experienced the mother/child relationship from both sides. P1 saw the journal activity as “freeing”: “I personally opened up a bit with some of my journal assignments and it felt rather freeing to write it down and share it.” As a novice reader, P1 had limited experience connecting her belief systems to the few literary texts she had read; based on her comments, she had never explored her personal beliefs in writing before, so writing them down became a freeing experience for her. Being free to explore her own beliefs in relation to a literary text served as the foundation for gaining her literary interpretive authority.

The blog posts and responses provided a natural continuation for P1's interpretation process. Based on her interview questionnaire responses, P1 clearly understood the connection between her beliefs and her interpretations in the blog posts:

I enjoyed this blog post because it allowed us to take all of the drama that we just read from Medea and address it in regards to our point of view, so it really allowed me to share my opinions of the play.

Within her initial blog post, P1 made an interpretation that directly identified a causal relationship between Jason's infidelity and Medea's actions. P1 carried this interpretation even more strongly into a blog response in which she disagreed with a point made by a group member. Even though she felt free to disagree with the group member's comment about infidelity, she agreed with the group member's interpretations in general, and as she expressed in the interview questionnaire, that similarity of opinion provided a boost of confidence:

Having my groupmates agree with my interpretation showed me that I am not the only one who has my way of thinking and understanding and so it made me a bit more confident with my points of view.

As a novice reader, P1 felt more confident in her own interpretations because she had the support of her blogging group (those within her ZPD), and that process helped her to recognize her authority to interpret creative texts. When asked her perception of her interpretive abilities following the group blogging activity, P1 provided the following answer: "I feel as though I read with more awareness and can interpret things better." Thus, the group blogging process helped P1 rely on her belief structures and the

meaning-negotiation process with her peers to discover her authority to interpret creative texts.

**P2.** P2 started the class as a casual reader, someone who predominantly read for enjoyment; however, she had concerns that her status as a second language learner might cause issues within her blog group: “I was nervous because English is my second language, and I was afraid my classmates could not understand what I was trying to say.” Instead, she brought personal experience, as revealed through her journal entries, related to infidelity and the mother/child relationship, and those experiences helped her to feel more comfortable with the interpretive process.

In her journal, P2 revealed that not only had she personally experienced infidelity; she also grew up witnessing her mother having to deal with the issue. As a result of her experiences, P2 attempted, through her initial blog post, to dig into the motivation of the emotions exhibited by Jason and Medea in the play and equate them to something she had witnessed. This empathetic examination of the text colored her interpretation with a more reflective perspective of both the male and female points of view in the play.

Based on her interactions with her groupmates, P2 related the following about blogging: “It helps me to have a better understanding of each story. It was interesting [seeing] the point of view from each student.” For P2, interacting with her group blogging members helped her to fill in the gaps in meaning that she experienced while reading the work of literature. As a second language student, P2 pointed out another benefit of blogging: “My classmates did an amazing job interpreting the stories. The way they interpreted the stories helps me a lot because it was easy to read, and I was able to

understand better the concept.” Thus, her blogging group (within her ZPD) helped her to discover not only literal meanings within the text that she might have missed; they also served as guides for interpreting the figurative meanings of the text. Interacting with her peers through the blog also helped P2 make a discovery that strengthened her potential for critical thinking: “By interacting with my group mates, I was able to see how each of us has a different point of view.” Recognizing that each participant had a differing point of view helped P2 actualize the concept that each reader brings unique worldviews and beliefs to the interpretive process. This realization serves as the foundation for a reader’s claim of literary authority.

**P3.** In her journal, P3 revealed that she had participated in a study abroad course in India, studying gender equity in education; therefore, she brought a unique perspective to the discussions for both gender roles and being an outsider. In relation to those two topics, P3’s close connections tended to result in more thoughtful and analytical journal and blog posts, much as a social scientist exploring a complex social problem. For example, she made the following comment in her journal:

Gender roles should not limit people or force them to act in a certain way. People should not need to conform to the prescribed social norms of their gender [;] it should instead be an individual’s choice.

As a result, P3 tended to view Medea’s actions and dilemma’s through the lens of her personal belief system. For example, in her blog post, after noting that Medea starts the play conforming to the social norms for women, P3 observed Medea’s struggles against

the gender role expectation and quoted Medea's comments about the gender role inequities as support for her claims.

However, in relation to topics for which P3 did not have direct experience, her comments tended to be more emotive and reactionary. For example, in her journal she admitted that she does not have a direct connection to the topic of infidelity and that the lack of experience with the topic could affect her point of view: "My gut level reaction is that it [infidelity] is wrong and unforgivable, which I think comes from not being very personally connected to my few experiences hearing of it." Likewise, in a blog response to one of her groupmates, P3 tended toward an emotive response relating to the mother/child relationship. Not being a mother and only experiencing the relationship from the child's point of view, P3 commented viscerally about the complex struggle Medea undergoes, without providing supporting evidence from the play. Thus, without direct experience of a theme, P3's reactions to the story's protagonist tended to be reactionary as opposed to the in-depth analysis she provided in relation to the themes with which she had more experience. As a result, P3 had to be more reliant on the meaning-negotiation process within her blogging group (within her ZPD) in order to more critically interpret those sections of the play with which she had the least personal experience.

In her questionnaire responses, P3 revealed that she was an experienced literary interpreter, having completed two literature courses in college prior to the studied course. Even though she had other literature courses, none of them required any prereading activities like those in the study: "Completing the journal assignment was a unique

experience for me, as I have not engaged in any prereading assignments like this before.” In the traditional literature classroom, students are rarely asked to connect the text to their own worldviews, mainly because most instructors strive to promote a given interpretation, one that will satisfy a narrowly focused goal of the course. However, after completing both the journal activity and the blog post, P3 discovered the following: “It is clear that my worldviews did affect the way I interpreted the text.” She also recognized the value of the blogging group interchange: “I think feedback is valuable and it is interesting to hear from people who may have had a different interpretation.” The recognition of differing perspectives is the foundation of critical interpretations and an individual’s perception of literary authority. To add details to the preceding comment, P3 pointed out an instance where a group member shared a unique perspective:

My groupmate agreed with parts of my interpretation but pointed out an aspect that she had a different view on. She mentioned the context of Ancient Greece as a reason why she had a different viewpoint, and it made me consider context more, which is something I initially overlooked.

When peers share perspectives within their ZPD, they negotiate new understandings and meanings of the text, and they feel empowered to explore their interpretations in more detail. When asked about her perceptions of her interpretive abilities after completing the blogging activity, P3 responded, “I felt capable of successfully interpreting and sharing ideas about a creative text.”

**P4.** Although P4 strives to read two books each month, she felt uncomfortable interpreting the creative works for the blogs because she could not rely on an authority



figure, like the teacher, to guide her: “I had many dilemmas interpreting the work, especially not having an instructor take you guide by guide.” She, therefore, felt like she was “slow and unreliable” in her responses. As clarification, she added, “The interpretation of each piece was completely up to me, which made me frightened a little bit, because there was no direct answer.” P4 (and most participants) had only experienced traditional, teacher-centric classroom approaches previous to this study; they had become reliant on the teacher to give them the meaning they needed to know about the piece of literature. Thus, the student-centered CSCL group blogging approach served as a disorienting dilemma itself in relation to several of the participants. Their own worldviews had never been requested or required in this type of classroom environment before.

From the first journal entry, P4 revealed herself to be critical in her approach to analyzing the literature. In relation to infidelity, P4 had not directly experienced the issue prior to the class, but one of her siblings had experienced infidelity, so she had observed the devastating effects on the relationship: “I saw how one decision one stupid night could ruin what two people built in a lifetime. So I am one who is completely biased on the matter of infidelites [*sic*] and how they do more harm than good.” However, even though she characterized herself as “completely biased” on the issue, she recognized and stated an aspect of the infidelity topic that others in the class did not mention: “Infidelity within a marriage [--] some would say the love is lost [;] others would say a new love was found.” Most participants approached the topic of infidelity from the predominant social viewpoint that infidelity is wrong; however, P4 could see that there could be an upside to

infidelity: a new love experience. This awareness of differing points of view highlighted much of P4's interpretive process and led her to make several statements about the transformative effects of the interpretive process using blogs. First, she made the following comment related to her experience in the class: "This class has selected passages that [have] captivated and questioned my way of thinking and my moral status." The work of literature served as a disorienting dilemma in itself; it presented ideas that did not jibe with P4's worldviews. In order to clarify this comment from her email interview questionnaire, she specifically stated the following:

A perspective can really be a misleading and changeable aspect in one individual's thought, and I never believed that until I took this class. The class had challenged my beliefs and thinking in subjects I thought I had mastered.... My perspective on Gender roles and a mother's relationship with her children have definitely been tainted on the image I had previously had. Due to the readings I now know both have very open subjects that have different views both basic and extreme.

In other words, through reading the text and interacting with her blog group, P4 came to realize that issues are often more complex than they at first appear; different perspectives and points of view are shaped by the varying worldviews of those involved. This critical revelation helped P4 to overcome her initial fear of interpreting without the help of an outside authority figure; she began to see herself as an equal authority in interpreting the issue.

The process by which P4 came to a clearer understanding of her own authority to interpret literature can be seen throughout the CSCL group blogging interpretive process. In her original journal post, P4 made the following comment about the mother/child relationship: “The mother relationship with her child is the only bond on earth I truly believe is unbreakable.” She saw a mother’s responsibilities as “survival tactics where the mother is protecting her young, not just in nature but in civilization.” This initial, gut-level reaction to the topic demonstrated P4’s bedrock belief that a mother’s bond with her child is unbreakable. In the blog entry, however, her struggle with Medea’s mother/child relationship is palpable: She seemed to have a difficult time juxtaposing Medea’s angry response and actions with a mother’s proclivity for protecting her children. In one of her questionnaire answers, P4 addressed her struggle and her own self reflections:

The play challenged my mind not to believe the norm, and take a challenge when it comes to your reading. I was interpreting the play while writing my views on how the morals and worldwide views differ from the plays [*sic*] status quo. At first it was disturbing and frustrating, because the way I thought would be normal was definitely not, and made me rethink what we as humans think is normal.

Thus, upon reading the play and writing her original blog, P4 apparently confronted a disorienting dilemma in relation to the mother/child relationship.

As the group blogging interactions commenced, P4 appreciated the collegial environment for sharing ideas, even when the group members disagreed with each other: “My group members and I all seemed to have similar outlooks on one or two opinions but differed and respected each others [*sic*] in meaningful positive ways.” P4 saw the group

responses as meaningful and the group itself as a safe environment—one that encouraged positive interpretive discourse. She further characterized the group as a “free and stable environment.” Notwithstanding these positive reactions, P4 appeared shocked that others would agree with her interpretations:

My groupmates actually surprised me in a positive way [;] they all understood my theories and gave feedback, but I also understood their[s] and it was a cycle of relating and helping one understand each view point, in a way we could all see it.

This shock related to the response of others appears to echo her fears of interpreting literature without the help of an authority figure; earlier experiences with faculty-centric approaches to learning apparently had led to P4’s doubting of her own interpretive abilities. Continuing these shocked reactions to her groupmates’ responses to her posts, P4 further clarified,

When my group mates agreed with my interpretation, I was actually puzzled because I assumed they would have completely different views on all subjects to the matter. It made my decision more clear [*sic*] and I love the insight they were able to provide me with.

Relying on the support of her groupmates (within her ZPD), P4 recognized that she could shape her interpretations based on her original worldviews and her revised worldviews, which developed through critical reflection and the meaning-negotiation process. As a result, P4 concluded her perspectives on group blogging by saying, “If anything it opened my possibilities for a broader view on the topic.” Therefore, she gained a new

appreciation for her own interpretive authority, which she revealed by stating that her interpretive decisions had become clearer.

**P5.** As the only male participant in the study, P5 came to the class as one of the most experienced readers of creative fiction. In fact, P5 had literary ambitions: “One of my pipe dreams is to start a tiny publishing company and/or litmag someday.” However, his past experiences made him less committed to engage in a more reader-response approach to interpreting the literature in the class: “I’m more interested in literature from a ‘universal’ perspective than how I personally relate to it, so the journal entry was just an assignment to complete rather than a way to get the interpretive juices flowing.” In other words, the transactional reading and interpretive process seemed foreign to P5, so he resisted the new approach.

As a result, P5 reacted to almost all aspects of the course in a negative way. First, he disliked the chosen edition/translation of the play: “The lousy translation provided killed a lot of my enthusiasm for it. The ‘Baby’s First Greek Play’ style set a bad tone for the course in my opinion.” Second, he did not respect his fellow blogging group members. When asked his perceptions of his groupmates’ blog response posts, he answered, “Unimpressed,” and he followed that up with his perception of the other group members’ interpretive abilities: “I don’t think they understand the assignments, nor do I think they could complete them in a way I’d call successful even if they did.” P5 had flourished in the traditional, faculty-centric literature classroom, so being asked to step out of his comfort zone seemingly triggered negative views of the entire reader-response

interpretive process and a feeling of superiority toward anyone advocating for or participating in it.

Throughout his own journal entries, P5 appeared to paint himself as an outsider, a loner, in relation to the four selected topics. For example, his knowledge of infidelity was limited to how it had been portrayed in popular culture; he had never experienced it firsthand. He labeled the intense reactions that others appear to display in relation to infidelities in their own lives as “emotional overreactions,” and when he acknowledged that these overreactions have occurred for millennia, he conceded, “Maybe I’m the odd one out and would feel more strongly about its negativity were I to experience it.” Although P5 could identify with being an outsider, “both metaphorically and literally,” he further reinforced his preference for being an outsider himself when he stated, “I believe an outsider’s perspective teaches one to see the value in other outsiders of all kinds and the flaws of in-groups, even those one may belong to.” Evidently this viewpoint influenced P5’s approach to the entire CSCL process: He preferred to remain on the fringe.

This same desire to see himself as different—unique—appeared in P5’s comments about the mother/child relationship. In discussing his relationship with his mother, he at first appeared to profoundly recognize the complexity of people and this relationship:

My relationship with my mother has been fraught at times, due to her oscillating between superhuman efforts in difficult circumstances, out of obvious love for her three children, and sometimes falling far short due to issues both external and

self-inflicted. Reconciling these two facets of one person has been difficult, but I've found it a fruitful exercise in acceptance, forgiveness, and self-preservation. However, in the next sentence, he turned the conversation into how his own perceptions of the relationship make him different from other people:

My experience apparently diverges from that of people whom I tell about it to such an extent that they invariably react with confusion and disapproval, which eventually taught me my long-held belief that it fell within the normal variation of maternal behavior was incorrect. This realization has led me to essentially have no "gut reaction" to discussions of mothers' relationships with their children, as my own point of reference is, for better or worse, so far removed from the standard mother/child relationship that to compare them would be apples and oranges.

All of these comments tend to reveal an individual who does not like group work or engaging in an activity that everyone else in the "in-group" finds meaningful.

Nevertheless, at the end of the interview questionnaire, P5 labeled his perceptions of his ability to interpret literature as a result of the blogging activity as "better than I thought."

Though he did not specifically explain why he arrived at that conclusion, perhaps P5 came to recognize that his own worldviews on being an outsider helped him to profoundly understand that topic and, therefore, helped to shape his interpretations.

**P6.** P6 came into the class with her experiences from an AP literature course in high school. Although she labeled her previous experiences as making her "comfortable with interpreting literary works," she also acknowledged that she did not really like deep

analysis of literary works because, as she stated, “the deeper I dive into analyzing the works the more my head would spin with ideas and I would end up with so many but I struggled to connect them so I would end up confusing myself.” This tendency toward uncertainty and confusion emerged from several of her journal entries as well. For example, in relation to infidelity, a topic to which she had no personal connection, she explained, “My gut level reaction to this topic is I feel disgusted and confused because I can’t fathom why someone would be willing to cheat on their partner.” After making a connection to the outsider topic, she again expressed her unease: “Whenever I hear about this topic it makes me anxious since I didn’t like being the new kid in town and having to make new friends.” As someone who identifies her support for gender equality, P6 again vocalized her unease with the topic because she did not want the issue to confuse any future children she might have:

My gut level reaction to this topic is it makes me feel sick to my stomach because I don’t like when someone says I should wear makeup or dress nice because I am a girl, but I also don’t want gender roles to be too blurred since I’m scared my future children will be confused about their own gender. Therefore, because I am so conflicted it makes my stomach turn.

Although the traditional, teacher-centric literature classroom might help to alleviate student uncertainty in interpretations because the onus for the interpretive process falls on the instructor and not the student, it robs the students of claiming their interpretive authority. Discomfort with topics suggests a conflict within a person’s core perspectives,



and the main way to alleviate the discomfort is through self-reflection and critical thinking.

With the blog posts and responses however, P6 discovered a safe environment which allowed her the comfort to explore her true feelings and concerns. Upon posting the first blog, P6 related how her apprehensions quickly turned to enjoyment of the process:

Honestly, I was a little nervous because you don't know how others are going to react and I am not the best at taking criticisms. However, once the comments rolled in [,] I felt more confident as this is not a place where people will belittle you for having wrong information or a different interpretation of the text.

As P6 began enjoying the group blogging process, she felt more comfortable expressing herself. Ultimately, the blog-posting environment allowed P6 the confidence to express her interpretive opinions: She bluntly made comments against infidelity, and as she discussed the mother/daughter relationship, a topic P6 felt positively about because of the great relationship she had with her mother, she felt comfortable enough to express an opinion that few in the class had the courage to make: Even with Medea's extreme actions at the end of the play, P6 argued that Medea loved her children.

P6 successfully outlined her journey from uncertainty and fear to confidence with her answer to the following email interview question: What can you tell me about your personal reflections on your own interpretations and beliefs when you were interacting with your groupmates?

When reading their posts, I felt very insecure about my own interpretation because I felt that because I had different details or interpretations [,] I was wrong. However, after I read their comments on my post, I felt a lot more confident in my interpretations because they agreed with a lot of my points and said how good they were. Of course, we didn't agree on everything [;] however their input made me see a different side of the topic which I found very interesting. Sometimes their input even changed my perception of my interpretation [;] however my beliefs on each subject did not waiver.

P6 discovered that her blogging group (within her ZPD) provided the perfect environment for gaining new perspectives, for exploring interpretive differences, and for engaging in the meaning-negotiation process. Throughout the entire interpretive process, P6's perception of her interpretive authority grew, mainly because she learned that all readers' perspectives and worldviews made their interpretations unique and meaningful:

Well, I perceived that my ability to interpret texts was okay before completing this blog activity, but as I went through each stage [,] I found myself becoming more confident in my ability because I learned that there are no right or wrong answers when it comes to interpretations [,] meaning each person will have their own idea of what the text means [,] and just because someone may think differently than you [,] it doesn't mean that your interpretation is wrong.

Thus, P6 discovered that the fear and unease she had previously associated with the interpretive process faded away at the same time the perception of her literary interpretive authority grew.

**P7.** As a returning, non-traditional student, P7 felt passionately about two of the topics explored through the blogging assignment: being an outsider and gender roles. In relation to being an outsider, P7 made the following comment:

Coming back to school at an older age has made me feel, at times, like an outsider. I have never been a very outgoing person, so making connections with strangers has always been difficult for me. I have a small group of close friends [;] however making new friends or socializing at groups [*sic*] functions with people I don't know can be exhausting and sometimes awkward. Feeling like an outsider can be an uncomfortable situation.

Returning to the classroom after being away for many years made P7 uncomfortable, especially in group situations where she had to interact with strangers. However, the group-blogging environment provided P7 with a discourse community of her peers (within her ZPD), individuals who, like P7 herself, sought better ways to connect their worldviews with their interpretations of a work of literature. The gender-role topic, on the other hand, generated a more progressive but equally passionate response:

I have always been a strong supporter of feminism and equality across the board. I embrace the changes in what a typical gender role used to be. As our society changes, we need to change with it. I find myself getting heated when I encounter situations where people are stereotyped by gender roles. It should not matter what you [*sic*] gender is when it comes to your job, your responsibilities as a person, or what parenting role you take on.

Unlike the discomfort she felt with the “outsider” topic, P7 came into the class already passionately vocal about the gender role topic. Thus, exploring gender roles within the blogging activity could have provided P7 with the ideal pulpit from which to proclaim her interpretive opinions. After all, having a strong voice in relation to one topic might allow her to become more engaged with the blogging group and allow her to receive support (and varying perspectives) on other topics she did not originally discuss with confidence. However, P7 did not begin to find her interpretive voice within the blogging groups until the blog-response posts.

As an English major who had taken other literature classes that followed the more traditional literary interpretation approach of researching to find out what others believed about a text as opposed to connecting the text to their experiences in a reader-response approach, P7 recognized the value of the journaling and blogging activity; as she explained, “It ... makes the readings relatable to our present day lives. I liked having the opportunity to explore the themes through my own personal experiences.” However, her original blog post does not connect her perspectives, as illustrated in her journals, to her interpretations about the play. Predominately, her original post exclusively outlined her plot-based exploration of each of the thematic topics, not her connections to them. People who fear connecting with others often refrain from revealing themselves in any but the most rudimentary ways. By only retelling the story in her blog post, P7 avoided having to open herself up to the scrutiny of others.

Her response posts, however, are more revealing and relevant. When one of the group members pointed out that Medea’s responses to Jason’s actions are intensely

emotive, she added an extra layer by pointing out that Medea's response and pain are visceral. Although she agreed with other points the group members made, she added an extra layer of elaboration. In response to a group member's comments about Medea not loving her children, P7 felt comfortable enough to disagree. Though her interpretation proved to be contrary to most of those in the class, the blog post provided her with the outlet to make her case and overcome her initial fears of upsetting her groupmates: "I was a little apprehensive at first, as I did not feel comfortable disagreeing with a group member if I had too." As she explained in the interview questionnaire, P7 viewed her interactions with the other group members as positive: "I was able to read their blog posts, highlight a few key points that they had addressed, and add a few of my own points as well." Thus, it took the blog-response activity to help P7 recognize that her groupmates had unique perspectives, backgrounds, and interpretation too; after coming to that realization, she found her voice and took part in the meaning-negotiation process. This positive experience helped P7 characterize her perception of her literary interpretive authority in the following way: "After completing the first blog and the assignments, I felt confident in completing the next set of assignments and blog post." As her confidence grew, P7 felt comfortable enough to claim literary interpretive authority for the remainder of the course.

**P8.** Perhaps the prime example of a student in an introductory general education literature course at a community college, P8 wrote lengthy passages when stating her personal opinions in the journals, but when it came to the blog and using the literature itself to support her points, she chose a secondary source—an editor with extreme views

of the character Medea—to justify her claims. Rather than explore her authority to interpret texts, she relied on the authority of another; this approach diverged significantly from the instructor’s prompt and the objectives of the group blogging activity. The abovementioned editor had provided a perceptual interpretation of Medea—one that cannot literally be found in the actual play. Thus, P8’s reliance on another source of authority not only tainted her interpretive authority; as she passed that view to her groupmate, she spread the misinformation.

While it would be easy to dismiss P8’s blog post as coming from someone who had not read the play prior to the assignment, she did reveal much about herself in the journal, and she gained the benefit of her group members’ insights through their responses to her blog posts. For example, P8 emphasized her religious belief that infidelity is sinful because it breaks the vow the couple made to each other; she concluded her comments on this topic by saying, “My gut level reaction when hearing this topic was that it is wrong and sinful. It doesn’t just affect the people who are/were married [;] it affects everyone surrounding them.” If P8 had not relied on a secondary source for her original interpretation, she might have connected the definitiveness of her religious beliefs to her interpretation of Medea and Jason’s relationship; however, she did not. In relation to the topic about being an outsider, P8 again makes a religious connection:

Religion can be an example of being an “outsider.” Everyone does not believe in the same religion [;] everyone has different views. Some people believe in God while others don’t. The people who do believe in God might single [out] and not

associate with the people who do not believe in God, because their religious views aren't the same.

Based on her journal entry, P8 revealed her view that holding a differing religious viewpoint could lead to a person feeling like an outsider. If P8 had not relied on a secondary source for her original interpretation, she might have used her blog post to connect Medea's religious and cultural differences with her outsider status; however, she did not do so. Although she expressed a traditional view about the strength and enduring quality of a mother's love for her child, P8 passionately expressed a progressive worldview in relation to gender roles in her journal entry:

You should not grow up feeling uncomfortable in your own skin, and feeling like you can't do the things you want to do because society says it's "bad." You should be able to do and express yourself how ever your heart desires.

If P8 had not relied on a secondary source for her original blog post, she might have made a connection between Medea's authority and society's gender role expectations; however, she did not.

Each of these perspectives showed P8 to be a complex individual, someone who has much to bring to a literary discussion, but she did not find her own voice until the blog-response activity. The blog responses provided by her groupmates helped her to see that she had not fully grasped many aspects of the play in her original blog post: "My groupmates helped bring attention to parts of the story I [had] not viewed as strong. They brought attention and helped me interpret and understand their ideas." Later in the interview questionnaire, she added, "My groupmates added to my blog post. They helped

enhance parts of the stories I did not interpretation [*sic*] like they did. They brought attention to sections I did not express, which was helpful.” To further this idea, she also noted, “I liked the feedback my group mates provided me with [;] it helped me see the topics differently. It helped me reflect on what I wrote and why I wrote it.” P8 took full advantage of her ZPD; in many ways, they carried her through the blogging activities, but she clearly discovered that each member of the group had a different interpretive perspective. That realization led to critical thinking about the topic and critical reflection about her interpretations. When asked about her perception of her interpretive authority after completing the blog activity, P8 said,

The blog activity helped me interpret the ideas differently. While complete [*sic*] the journal you compare it to your personal life and aspects of yourself. While completing the blog you compare it to the story which brings out different perspectives and ideas.

Thus, the CSCL group blogging process helped P8 discover that varying perspectives and meaning-negotiation are important aspects of the literary interpretation process. While it would have been helpful for P8 to provide her own interpretations in the original blog post, her response posts and her use of the second person “you” in the above comment demonstrated her understanding that anyone who participates in the CSCL group blogging process can claim some level of literary interpretive authority.

### **Instructor’s Perception of Student Authority to Interpret Creative Literature**

The World Literature instructor began the semester with a clean slate in relation to his perceptions of the students’ authority to interpret creative literature; as he noted,



“Since the study began with the first work on the syllabus, I have no experience with the students’ prior interpretive authority.” With each successive activity within the first interpretive assignment, the instructor noted changes in the students’ interpretive authority.

In relation to the students’ journal activity, the instructor provided detailed responses in his answers on the emailed interview questionnaire about the improvement of student literary interpretive authority. Although he provided specific illustrations and examples (many of which came from students who chose not to participate in the study), he concluded his perceptions of the students’ authority after completing the journal assignment as follows:

Since the journaling activity allowed them the freedom to write about their own experiences with these topics, as well as life lessons they had learned about the topics and emotional responses to it, students took the opportunity to share (in detail) their personal and very candid views. As a result of articulating these experiences, lessons, emotions and views, they clearly gained confidence and “ownership” of them so that they seemed well prepared to evaluate what the authors had to say and compare/contrast it with their own claims.

The instructor saw the journal activity as a means for students to gain ownership of the topics they would explore within the play *Medea*. As a result, the instructor also noted that students spent more time engaging with the literary texts and analyzing how the story transacted with their beliefs. This observation paralleled the perceptions of the students,

who saw the journal activity as a preparation for exploration of the topic within the literary text and as a means to express their beliefs on the topic.

As the instructor discussed the students' initial blog posts, he recognized growth in the students' perceptions of literary interpretive authority:

Having completed the initial journal entry as well as the reading of Euripides' "Medea" in its entirety, students showed confidence in their interpretive authority in their blog posts. Judging by the depth and breadth of the posts, students felt comfortable writing about what they perceived was Euripides' take on the four respective topics.

Thus, the original blog post entry helped students gain confidence in their abilities to interpret the work of literature for themselves. The blog post provided a comfortable environment that allowed students to voice their interpretive analyses to their fellow classmates and the instructor. The instructor, however, also noted an additional advantage of the blog posts, one that helps emphasize the importance of authority in the effectiveness of a student's literary interpretations. Completing the journals and then the blogs helped students to successfully find support for their interpretations:

Moreover, students seemed to have little difficulty in homing in on relevant passages that dramatically illustrated the topics they had written about in their journals. For example, several students gravitated to the scene in which Medea airs her grievances about inequities between the genders to the receptive (female) Chorus, focusing on the quote that captured women's frustrations at having their own sacrifices overlooked by the male-dominated Greek culture.

In the traditional, teacher-centric literature classroom, the instructor often does all of the interpretive work for the student, including stating a given interpretive stance and then pointing out how the story supports that claim. With the CSCL blogging group approach, the instructor in the study observed that students not only made interpretive claims based on their worldviews, but they also effectively located passages in the play to back up their claims. The instructor concluded his comments about the original blog posts and their connection to illustrating literary authority by stressing the following:

Overall, students went above and beyond the assignment requirements for length, interpretation of the author's take on the four topics, and number of quotes. Going beyond the requirements demonstrates their confidence in their own interpretive authority: indeed, they seemed eager to "teach" their blog audience about the wisdom and insights of the play that they themselves had discovered.

Thus, the students gained agency in interpreting literary works, and their confidence in their abilities led to their perceptions of increased literary authority. As noted by the instructor, the students in this study went above and beyond his expectations. Confidently sharing their interpretations equates with the students' perceptions of their own literary authority.

The fourth question on the instructor's interview questionnaire put the onus on the instructor to analyze how the students' original blog posts illustrated a connection between their journal entries and their interpretation of the play. The instructor's detailed response provided both a positive and a cautionary take on the assignment. First, the instructor pointed out the obvious benefits in relation to ownership and confidence:

Students carried over their insights on the four topics into their reading and interpretive analysis of the play in their blog posts. Clearly, the process fostered their ownership of the text, not to mention the topics, so that they were confident in taking interpretive leaps in the blogs.

However, the instructor also pointed out how the play challenged some of the students' perceptions, and he emphasized that many of the students failed to reflect on points of view that might help to reveal more complexity in the work of literature. The instructor noted:

Euripides' text also challenged them, forcing them to reflect on some of the assumptions and claims they had presented in their initial journal entries. Many, for example, posited the primacy of a mother's love for her children as the highest value, over an[d] above all other considerations, and while they clearly identified with Medea's plight as a victim of her husband's marital infidelity and her absence of status as a barbarian outsider to the Greek culture, they could not follow her in her rationalization of killing her own children in seeking revenge on Jason....[T]heir sympathies did not extend to Creon or to Jason, the latter of whom they blamed (to a degree) for contributing to Medea's madness and whose reasoning (securing status and influence via his marriage to Glauce) they understood even if they disagreed with it. Overall, their blogs seemed to avoid considering Jason's point of view, the Chorus' tacit approval and enabling of Medea as she plotted her revenge, Medea's previous acts of murder prior to the time covered in the play, the play's fantastic ending in which Medea's status as

tragic hero(ine) is thrown into question, and the probable reaction by a Greek, male audience.

Although students gained confidence in their abilities to interpret literary texts, their abilities to explore complex or counter-point interpretations based on cultural context and authorial intent still suggested the need for additional guidance from the teacher. This recognition led the instructor to add clarifying comments to the students' discussions at the conclusion of the blogging activity. Not wanting to intrude on the transactive reading process in the first assignment, the instructor waited until after the blog response posts to make comments that might add depth, insights, and additional context. The instructor noted:

For these reasons, I supplemented their journal work with a lesson on these parts of the play which they had avoided. The sense of interpretive authority they gleaned from the initial journal entry and reading of the play had a limit when confronted with a complex literary text like "Medea"—a valuable lesson about interpretation as a process involving reflection, close reading, testing and revision.

This study explored the problem that teacher-centric literature classrooms allow teachers to dictate literary interpretations and that students cede their interpretive authority to the instructor as opposed to reading and interpreting the text through their own past experiences. The purpose of the study has never been to remove the instructor from the equation. Instead, as students claim their literary interpretive authority, they will bring their unique interpretations to a larger discourse community, and the instructor, at that point and not before, can then help to guide the students to consider additional

explanations and considerations as part of a more robust, iterative student-centered process.

In relation to the students' interactions in their response posts, the instructor again stressed the benefits of blogging on interpretive authority, noting specifically the necessity of collaboration in gaining a more complete, negotiated interpretation of a literary work:

Group interaction via blog responses revealed that students found affirmation of their interpretations from one another, as well as confirmation of confusing issues and difficult aspects of the text.... Another consequence of the group interaction on their interpretive authority was to show the necessity for collaboration in working to analyze literary texts. A common refrain in the responses was something like "I never considered that" and "I didn't mention that." Hence, I believe they came to see that a literary text is never fully explained, and that each interpretation offers a key piece to the overall puzzle that they are all building to get the best overall approximation of a text's meaning.

The instructor's recognition of the importance of peer collaboration and meaning-negotiation within the blogging groups paralleled the students' perceptions of the blogging-group. Both the students and the instructor noted the positive benefits of elaboration and clarification in helping to raise student confidence in their interpretive abilities. Nevertheless, the instructor commented on one shortcoming he observed in student responses to their groupmates:

I found that students were typically reluctant to challenge one another's interpretations and to disagree with one another's conclusions. While they were quick to compliment one another, and often justifiably, they were just as often silent on what could be seen as inaccuracies. For instance, students were reluctant to call one another out on including quotes only from secondary sources instead of from the play or making fallacious claims, such as Medea calling down a curse from the gods onto herself and her children.

The students, themselves, observed that they mostly agreed with their groupmate's interpretations, but the students also saw slight differences in interpretation as an impetus for stating a contrary interpretive view. The instructor, however, saw the students as being reluctant to challenge other group members' interpretations. The discrepancy appears to be a matter of degrees: For the students, the perception of challenging an interpretation might be the difference between white and ivory; in other words, their challenges often dealt with minimal interpretive disagreements. The instructor accurately observed that students did not engage in large-scale challenges, even when the need for such challenges appeared to present themselves. To address the issue, the instructor decided to step in a bit earlier in future assignments, as he explained in the following comment: "For this reason, in the subsequent unit, I as the instructor have decided to comment on, and challenge, blog posts if the student's peers are reluctant to do so." This plan to supplement the students' interpretive comments and even to challenge them after the blogging activity falls in line with the instructor's role to act as a guide on the side while still allowing the students to develop, shape, and express their interpretations first.

To conclude his remarks and to address his perception about the connection between CSCL and interpretive authority, especially in relation to the interpretive process employed in the class, the instructor provided the following synopsis:

Clearly, CSCL has proven valuable, and even essential, in facilitating the interpretive process employed in the class. The use of the journal and blog formats in particular lend themselves to long-form, personal, in-depth writing and reflecting which, in turn, engenders greater interpretive authority than, for example, a simple discussion board. Popular among in-person, online, and hybrid classes, discussion boards may be convenient and efficient means for students to work on interpreting texts. However, it seems that the individual student first needs the time and space to negotiate his/her own sense of the themes/topics and of the text's take on these themes before collaborating with others to test and refine this work. The journal and blog are the ideal tools for this process.

Like the students who saw the CSCL group blogging activity as beneficial in building their literary interpretive authority, the instructor saw the CSCL group blogging activity as essential in helping students to recognize their connections to the interpretive process. Students must be encouraged to explore their worldviews and beliefs in a safe environment and then use those core perspectives to guide their interpretations and meaning-negotiation processes. As the instructor noted, the CSCL group blogging process outlined in this study provided students with the necessary reflective and collaborative tools to foster student perception of their literary authority.



### Summary

The zone of proximal development (see Vygotsky, 1930/1978) figures strongly in the conceptual framework for this study, and based on the results provided in this chapter, the sharing of literary interpretations and the meaning negotiations that occurred within CSCL blogging groups led students to enhance their perceptions of interpretive authority relating to literary works. Each of the eight participants viewed the interpretive blogging activity in a favorable light with the majority noting that they felt more comfortable and capable of interpreting literary texts after engaging in the CSCL literary interpretation process. The course instructor echoed the perception that students had gained agency in interpreting literary texts, mainly because the CSCL literary interpretation process helped the participants gain ownership of the text and the thematic topics. As students engaged with their blogging groups, they recognized connections between their worldviews, the texts, and the worldviews of their fellow classmates. Thus, the participants engaged in a critical reflection process that helped them to reject or synthesize varying points of view into their perceptual frameworks. The entire process of reflection, analysis, meaning-negotiation, and literary interpretation led students to recognize the complexity of the interpretive process by helping them to discover that multiple points of view exist in relation to the interpretation of creative texts. Thus, students clearly engaged in the critical thinking process, which again led to an increase in their perception of literary interpretive authority.

Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the study results and further explore the implications of the findings for literature teachers, students, and CSCL research. In

addition, the final chapter will outline the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

In community college world literature courses, students often rely on the interpretations of their teachers or secondary sources instead of claiming their own interpretive authority when they read literary texts. This single case study addressed how using CSCL blogging groups may promote students' interpretive authority and critical thinking skills in a world literature course at a community college in the Northeast United States. The intent was to add to CSCL blogging research and explore the potential for computer-based approaches that may enhance the interpretive authority of college-level literature students.

All of the study participants expressed benefits in relation to the online journaling and blogging activities. Five of the participants stated that the blogging activity helped them to interpret literature better and with more confidence, and the course instructor affirmed this point by asserting that students had gained confidence in interpreting creative texts. The other three participants noted that they had gained a broader perspective and could now interpret literature in a different way. Most participants commented that the CSCL blogging activities helped them to discover varying points of view, which helped them critically reflect on their worldviews and led to an increased level of critical thinking.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

I used social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1930/1978), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997), and transactional reading theory (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) to

explore CSCL blogging groups in a world literature course at a community college. The participants came into the course as mixture of novice, recreational, and experienced literary readers. Nevertheless, they all shared one trait: Each student in the class brought their lifetime of experiences, beliefs, and worldviews to the interpretive process.

Rosenblatt (1978/1994) recognized that students create a text when their past experiences and beliefs transact with the printed words on a page, and several students in the current study illustrated this interpretive process. By exploring their belief systems through the journal activity and then juxtaposing those beliefs with their interpretation of a literary text in a blog post, the participants developed literary interpretive authority. The emergence of literary authority grew out of the confidence students gained as they came to understand more about themselves and how they could negotiate textual meaning against their belief structures and those of the other blogging group members within their ZPD. This process supports the findings in Kumpulainen and Rajala (2017) that blogging activities provide opportunities for participants to negotiate meaning within various space times, especially in relation to each student's past and present identities. The act of critical reflection and negotiation between their past and present selves helped at least one student in the current study to reconsider what humans view as normal. Additionally, almost all participants stressed the benefits of reading their group members' differing perspectives on the work of creative fiction. This finding supports Vygotsky (1930/1978), who posited that knowledge construction is a social function and that individuals with differing levels of knowledge attainment could benefit from individuals who are at a slightly higher level. In the current study, with some students being more experienced in

the literary interpretation domain and other students being more fully attuned to their personal experiences with some of the thematic topics being explored in the literary text, the CSCL blogging groups helped students realize the benefits of their ZPD. This discovery also supports the findings of Mansouri and Piki (2016) and Sharma and Tietjen (2016) that the varying points of view provided by blogging group members helped with knowledge construction and the meaning-making process.

Part of the value of the current study comes from the finding that CSCL group blogging activities can augment the pedagogical approaches in a literature classroom. Dalkou and Frydaki (2016) discussed the lack of research on group activities related to the analysis of literary interpretation, and they pointed out that research exploring the benefit of group activities in a CSCL environment related to literary interpretation is practically nonexistent. This study addressed that concern. Additionally, Dalkou and Frydaki noted that in the traditional, teacher-centric classroom approach, “the interpretive authority is generally controlled by the teacher, who also controls the turn-taking during the discussion” (p. 48). By demonstrating that students who are engaged in a peer-interactive meaning-negotiation process can boost their literary interpretive authority, this study advances the notion that active learning is not only a viable alternative to the traditional teacher-centric approaches in literary classrooms. It also supports the notion that students in CSCL blogging groups prefer the active, collaborative search for meaning. Of the five students who identified as experienced literature students, all five declared the CSCL blogging process for the advancement of their literary authority to be

a positive experience, with most noting that they were more confident and better prepared to interpret creative texts than they had been prior to taking the class.

The CSCL group blogging process, when used as part of a literary interpretation process, appeared to serve as a transformative learning tool helping students to critically reflect and synthesize new experiences into their core learning perspectives. This finding supports Mezirow (1997), who found that when learners encounter a disorienting dilemma, they critically reflect on their core perceptions to reject the new concept or integrate it, an act that transforms the learner. In the current study, some of the students reading the work of literature noted conflicts between their belief systems and the actions found in the text; the instructor noted this conflict in students as well. As these students tried to integrate the challenging concepts into their core perspective, they began the transformative process. These experiences support the findings of Hoggan and Cranton (2015) that literary works can bring about disorienting dilemmas and critical self-reflection. However, other students in the current study chose not to integrate the conflicting perceptions into their belief structure. Nevertheless, all of the students underwent transformations in their perceptions of their literary authority.

Much of the growth in students' literary authority came from a boost in confidence after recognizing that the interpretation of literary texts is an individual act, one that grows out of a transactive process between the words on the page and the student's core beliefs. Although Chamberlain (2017) investigated blogging in relation to elementary school students, the current study supports Chamberlain's findings that blogging helps to strengthen a student's voice by boosting their confidence to express

their opinions. In the current study, many participants discovered that their peers often agreed with their interpretations, which led to a greater sense of confidence. When group members disagreed with a student's interpretation or noted a differing point of view, the participants still acknowledged the benefit of the interpretation. This finding supports the principles of the Foundation for Critical Thinking (2019), which included the recognition and synthesis of varying points of view as essential for critical thought. By missing certain information and revisiting the text and their peers' blog postings for analysis, the participants in the current study confirmed L. Lee's (2016) findings that students develop critical thinking and critical reflection when they participate in CSCL blogging activities. Likewise, students' attempts to guide their classmates through blog interactions and meaning negotiations support Splichal et al.'s (2018) findings that the student's quest for enhancing group-level cognitive issues comes about through the student's SRL and CoRL internal scripting tools. The CSCL group blogging process helped students transform as literary interpreters and as more effective collaborators within their ZPD.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Few literature courses include blogging as part of their pedagogical approach, so finding an instructor and course that incorporates CSCL in the literary interpretive process was challenging. Parts of the data collection plan also added to the limitations of the study. Because I did not want the instructor to act differently toward students who chose not to participate in the study, I did not share the identities of the students who consented to participate in the study. As a result, when the instructor established blogging groups, he did not know about any special considerations in forming the groups in

relation to the study; therefore, some study participants did not have other study participants in their blogging groups, and that limited the findings of the study.

Because most of data were collected from normal classroom activities, other limitations were present. For example, three participants did not create response posts to their group members' original blogs. Because completion of the response post would affect a student's grade for the class, I could not interfere in the process to ask the students to complete the activity; however, each participant received feedback from other members of the group, so they still could share perspectives on the usefulness of the blogging activity. Additionally, the script for the response post (see Appendix B) did not stress that ongoing interactions (responses to response posts) should occur, so none of the participants responded more than once to any original blogger; this limited the meaning-negotiation process to only one level.

Lastly, as noted by the instructor and several participants, the students proved reluctant to challenge their group members in their blogging interactions. Although several participants disagreed with their group members, they tended to provide supportive statements as opposed to critical responses; therefore, although students could tout the safe environment provided in the blogging activity, their reluctance to challenge their peers may have limited the critical exploration of the complex themes in the literary text.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure that students provide multiple levels of blogging responses (i.e., responding to those who responded to their original posts), future researchers could



explore how instructor-produced and peer-produced scripting affect group interactions relating to literary interpretation facilitated through CSCL blogging groups. It could be advantageous for instructors to provide ample scripting outlining the expectations for the minimum number of blogging interactions. Likewise, it could be worthwhile for the instructor to spend time training students to provide feedback to their peers by modeling appropriate interaction strategies, as suggested by Harney et al. (2017).

Although the current study followed what Tan (2018) referred to as the introductory, individual, group-work sequence for collaborative exploration, the depth of the blogging groups' collaborations tended toward one student elaborating on what another said (see Harney et al., 2017) and providing encouragement rather than initiating in-depth meaning negotiations. Future researchers could consider scripting that encourages not only SRL and CoRL, but also SSRL. As discussed by Jarvela et al. (2016), constructing knowledge is not enough in a CSCL environment; instead, groups must also metacognitively understand how the dynamics of the group help to bring about meaning negotiation and lead to goal attainment.

Lastly, future researchers could ensure that participants in classroom-based studies can interact in blogging groups with other members of the study. Maqtary, Mohsen, and Bechkoum (2019) performed a literature review on CSCL group formation and found that the current trend in group-formation research is consideration of group member attributes and desired attributes of the group itself. It might be advantageous, therefore, for the instructor to group students after reading the students' journal entries;

students could be grouped to maximize each other's ZPD and to ensure that study participants could interact with other study participants.

### **Implications**

I found that students develop ownership of the text and authority to make interpretations when they reflect on their perceptions of topics found in the literary work, share those topics with their peers via blog posts, and respond to their classmates' interpretations in a collaborative community. At the micro (individual) level, students could feel empowered and could claim agency in interpreting works of creative fiction if they engage in CSCL activities designed to foster personal reflection, analysis, critical thinking, and collaborative meaning negotiation. As students take the skills learned in this collaborative process to other classes and social interactions, the possibilities for social change are significant. When students can more effectively tap into their ZPD (see Vygotsky, 1930/1978), they can enhance their learning through a socially constructed process.

At the macro (classroom/institutional) level, this study's findings could lead to an emphasis on the literary interpretive process in higher education literature courses, and CSCL could serve as the tool for accomplishing this pedagogical change. World literature courses often rely on instructors who present a given interpretation of a text, which is often based on the instructor's point of view (Dalkou & Frydaki, 2016; Eckert, 2008). As students develop authority to express their interpretations and points of view regarding a text, the classroom dynamic in the world literature course could change. As instructors

cede some of their authority to empower students, classroom instruction could shift from a teacher-centric model to a student-centered approach.

The CSCL approach explored in this study does not endorse the removal of the teacher from the literary interpretive process. Instead, as the study's findings revealed, students in CSCL blogging groups could approach each reading with more confidence when they engage in preclassroom discussion activities designed to foster their insights into the themes and topics addressed in the literary text and express how their worldviews align with their interpretations of the literary text through blogging. The steps outlined in this CSCL process should precede any clarification discussions initiated by the instructor. As reported by the instructor in the current study, teachers will need to monitor the students' blog interactions and intervene when students ignore key discussions suggested in the text and when students fail to address the problems with their peers' blog posts. Ideally, the process outlined in the study would precede larger discussions with the instructor. Instead of the more traditional approach in literary classrooms, where teachers dictate interpretations, this CSCL interpretive process could put the students in a position to express themselves, exert their interpretive authority, and generate more vibrant and inclusive discussions of the literary works.

At the mega (societal) level, the findings of the current study could lead students to engage in more collaborative activities outside of the classroom. As digital workplace platforms increase, effective collaboration in an online environment becomes a necessity. Attaran, Attaran, and Kirkland (2019) recognized collaboration as one of the four layers of the digital workspace, which is becoming more prevalent with the shift from the

Industrial Age and its focus on manual work to the Digital Age and its focus on information work. Group blogging activities in the literature classroom could help students acquire the necessary meaning-negotiation and collaboration skills that are required for careers in the Digital Age. Additionally, with their emphases on critical reflection and critical thinking, the CSCL group blogging activities highlighted in this study could lead students to become more objective in their interactions with other people, helping them to reflect on various points of view to become more critical in their decision-making processes.

### **Conclusions**

Blogging groups within a CSCL environment, especially when paired with online journaling activities designed to help students reflect on their existing worldviews, provide community college world literature students with an effective literary interpretation tool that boosts their authority to interpret works of creative fiction. More effective in helping students engage in an active, peer-supported process designed to integrate their past experiences with the text while negotiating meaning with their groupmates, CSCL blogging groups provide a viable alternative to the traditional teacher-centric classroom model for literary studies. Although the traditional classroom model provides literature students with the views and interpretations of an expert in the field, the CSCL model outlined in this study produced engaged students who felt free to voice their opinions and interpretations of a literary text while negotiating meaning with their peers to arrive at an interpretation that allowed each student to claim authority over the process. Instead of passive receivers of the teacher's interpretive point of view, students critically

reflected on how the text intersected or transacted with their worldviews, they engaged in critical thinking and analysis as they sought to integrate their viewpoints with the variety of viewpoints provided by others in their CSCL blogging group, and they authoritatively presented their views to the rest of the class through blog interactions. The purpose of this study is not to replace the literature instructor; instead, students will feel more confident in their interpretive abilities if they have the opportunity to develop and express their interpretations prior to any engagement with the teacher's interpretive point of view. As noted by the instructor in this study, the teacher will still need to enhance the students' understanding of complex textual issues and to guide students to integrate contextual considerations such as authorial background, milieu, literary movements, and the like. CSCL blogging groups provide students with the safe environment necessary to explore a literary text and gain literary authority over their interpretive stance prior to engaging in full-class discussions with the instructor.

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### Appendix A: Journal Entry Prompt

Create a journal entry that outlines your beliefs, worldviews, and core perceptions about several thematic topics. These topics will also feature prominently in the work of literature you will be reading next week.

In relation to each topic listed below, write a paragraph in which you address the following:

What past experiences do you have with this topic?

What lessons have you been taught or what beliefs do you have in relation to the topic?

What is your “gut level” reaction when you hear about this topic?

Topics:

Infidelity in marriage

Being in a strange land (being an outsider)

Gender roles

A mother’s relationship with her children

I will be the only one reading this journal entry, so be as reflective and honest as possible when responding.

## Appendix B: Blog Prompt

### Initial Blog Post

By Wednesday at 11:59 p.m., create a blog post in which you make interpretations about how the play *Medea* addresses the four thematic topics you explored in your journal entry. Write one or two paragraphs for each thematic topic, and include specific passages from the play to illustrate and substantiate your perspectives.

### Response Posts

By Sunday at 11:59 p.m., respond to each of your group members' initial posts. You should engage in a collegial debate about the various positions presented, noting where other group members agree with and contradict your own perspectives. During the interchange, you should share how your worldviews influenced your opinions and interpretations about the play. As you interact with your peers, you will critically consider their points of view and decide if their perspectives influence you to change your opinions or if your initial perspectives will remain unchanged.

### Appendix C: Interview Guide for Student Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As you know, you have been participating for the last week in a study designed to explore how blogging groups might impact students' perceptions of their abilities to interpret creative literature. If you recall, you first wrote a journal discussing your beliefs about four thematic topics. Then, you read the play *Medea* and wrote a blog post in which you discussed how your beliefs on those same four topics intersected with your reading of the play. At that point, your groupmates responded to your post.

The interview questions below will explore your opinions about the process I just outlined and how you feel it affected your ability to interpret creative texts. Before we begin, I want to thank you for signing the informed consent document at the beginning of our study. Let me remind you that you are free to discontinue your participation in the study at any point, and if you do so, none of your blog entries or journal assignments will be included in the study. Should you decide to continue, let me assure you that all your personal information and any data collected from the journals, blogs, or the interview will be anonymously handled, and any data or information that finds its way into the final document will in no way identify you. At the end of the study, I will share the results with you prior to any attempt by me to publish the study.

The interview questions should take approximately 90 minutes.

Questions:

1. What can you tell me about your experience reading creative literature and your feelings about interpreting such works prior to taking this class?

2. Prior to reading the play in this class, you wrote a journal entry about your beliefs and worldviews relating to four thematic topics. What can you tell me about the experience of completing that assignment?

3. What is your perception of the purpose of the journal activity?

4. What can you tell me about your experience writing your initial blog post?

5. The initial blog post assignment called for you to relate your beliefs and worldviews on the four thematic topics to the play *Medea*. What can you tell me about that experience?

6. What can you tell me about your feelings when you hit the “submit” button for that initial blog post?

7. What can you tell me about your reaction to the first response you received from your fellow groupmates?

8. What can you tell me about your perception of the interpretive abilities of your groupmates?

*In relation to the following two questions, answer only the one that applies:*

a. If your groupmate questioned your interpretation, what can you tell me about your reaction and how you responded?

b. If your groupmate agreed with your interpretation, what can you tell me about how that affected your perception of your own interpretation?

9. What can you tell me about any multiple-response interactions with your groupmates in relation to your initial post?

10. What can you tell me about your interactions with your groupmates in relation to their initial posts?

11. How would you describe your feelings about responding to your groupmates' initial posts?

12. What can you tell me about your personal reflections on your own interpretations and beliefs when you were interacting with your groupmates?

13. What can you tell me about your perceptions of your interpretive ability after completing the blogging activity?

Closing Script:

Interviewer: Thank you so much for sharing your responses with me. Let me remind you that I will be sharing a copy of the completed study with you as soon as it is complete. If you have any questions about the process or want to add any information to your interview comments, you can reach me at michael.nester@waldenu.edu, the same address I have been using to communicate with you. Also, if I have questions or need clarification about any of your comments from today, I will reach out to you via email as well. I appreciate your time and look forward to sharing the results from the study with you.



#### Appendix D: Interview Guide for Instructor Interview

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As you know, you have been participating for the last week in a study designed to explore how blogging groups might impact students' perceptions of their abilities to interpret creative literature. If you recall, your students first wrote a journal discussing their beliefs about four thematic topics. Then, they read the play *Medea* and wrote a blog post in which they discussed how their beliefs on those same four topics intersected with their reading of the play. At that point, their groupmates responded to their initial posts.

The interview questions below will explore your opinions about the process I just outlined and how you feel it affected the students' ability to interpret creative texts. Before we begin, I want to thank you for signing the informed consent document at the beginning of our study. Let me remind you that you are free to discontinue your participation in the study at any point. Should you decide to continue, let me assure you that all your personal information and any data collected from this interview will be anonymously handled, and any data or information that finds its way into the final document will in no way identify you. At the end of the study, I will share the results with you prior to any attempt by me to publish the study.

The interview questions should take approximately 90 minutes.

Questions:

1. Tell me about your perceptions of the students' interpretive authority before this research study commenced.

2. Tell me about your perceptions of the students' interpretive authority after they had completed the journaling activity. Please provide specific examples to illustrate your perception.

3. Tell me about your perceptions of the students' interpretive authority after they had completed their initial blog posts? Please provide specific examples to explain your perception.

4. In relation to the students' initial blog posts, tell me about your perceptions of the connections between their journal entries and their interpretations of *Medea*?

5. In relation to the blog responses, tell me about your perceptions of group interaction on students' interpretive authority. Please provide specific examples to substantiate your perception.

6. What is your perception about the connection between computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) and interpretive authority, especially as outlined in relation to the interpretive process outlined in this study?

Closing Script:

Interviewer: Thank you so much for sharing your responses with me. Let me remind you that I will be sharing a copy of the completed study with you as soon as it is complete. If you have any questions about the process or want to add any information to your interview comments, you can reach me at michael.nester@waldenu.edu, the same address I have been using to communicate with you. Also, if I have questions or need clarification about any of your comments from today, I will reach out to you via email as

well. I appreciate your time and look forward to sharing the results from the study with you.

## Appendix E: Emerging Categories from Student Email Interview Questionnaire

<i>Question 1: What can you tell me about your experience reading creative literature and your feelings about interpreting such works prior to taking this class?</i>				
Novice reader	Reads for enjoyment	Experienced reader		
<i>Question 2: Prior to reading the play in this class, you wrote a journal entry about your beliefs and worldviews relating to four thematic topics. What can you tell me about the experience of completing that assignment?</i>				
Freeing	Trouble but liked with time	New experience; preparation for reading	Challenged beliefs	Just an assignment
<i>Question 3: What is your perception of the purpose of the journal activity?</i>				
Start thinking about theme in literature	Create connections between text and personal experience			
<i>Question 4: What can you tell me about your experience writing your initial blog post?</i>				
Nervous; Overwhelmed	No difference	A helpful journey	Tone problems	Enjoyed others' thoughts
<i>Question 5: The initial blog post assignment called for you to relate your beliefs and worldviews on the four thematic topics to the play Medea. What can you tell me about that experience?</i>				
Combine point of view and text	Combine today's issues with story	Challenged the mind and what to believe as the norm	Did not appreciate assignment	Helped in analyzing text
<i>Question 6: What can you tell me about your feelings when you hit the "submit" button for that initial blog post?</i>				
Nerve racking	Confident	Relief	Just another assignment	
<i>Question 7: What can you tell me about your reaction to the first response you received from your fellow groupmates?</i>				
Emotive—joy; excitement	Eager for varying feedback	Unimpressed	Insightful and helpful	
<i>Question 8: What can you tell me about your perception of the interpretive abilities of your groupmates?</i>				
Insightful; helpful	Negative	Lack of depth		

*Question 8a: If your groupmate questioned your interpretation, what can you tell me about your reaction and how you responded?*

Ignored comments	Re-evaluation and enhancement	Expected, but no change
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*Question 8b: If your groupmate agreed with your interpretation, what can you tell me about how that affected your perception of your own interpretation?*

Boost in confidence	Not responsive	Shocked that others agreed
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*Question 9: What can you tell me about any multiple-response interactions with your groupmates in relation to your initial post?*

None

*Question 10: What can you tell me about your interactions with your groupmates in relation to their initial posts?*

Nice to read other opinions	Good at analyzing	Positive and mostly similar	Negative
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*Question 11: How would you describe your feelings about responding to your groupmates' initial posts?*

Apprehensive	Enjoyed various perspectives	Comfortable because similar content	Negative
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*Question 12: What can you tell me about your personal reflections on your own interpretations and beliefs when you were interacting with your groupmates?*

Confident	Recognized different point of view	Reflective; changed perception	Did not shift point of view
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*Question 13: What can you tell me about your perceptions of your interpretive ability after completing the blogging activity?*

More confident; better interpreting	Learned something new; fun	Provided more points of view
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