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Feedback Practices in Hybrid Writing Courses: Instructor Choices About Modality and Timing

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Abstract: Despite a wealth of research on feedback practices in synchronous and asynchronous courses, little has been done to investigate such practices in hybrid writing pedagogy. How do instructors make choices about providing feedback when both instructional modes are operating in a course? A qualitative study conducted with 14 instructors who teach hybrid writing courses at a large state university reveals how they navigated a series of choices about providing feedback on student writing. This study shows that instructional modality, the use of a learning management system (LMS), and labor conditions influence the decisions instructors make about

how and when to provide feedback, especially on low-stakes work. While there is an emerging sense of thoughtful and critical decision-making around types of feedback and modality, this study finds that instructors do not yet have an integrated strategy when using an LMS to provide feedback in hybrid courses.

Keywords: feedback, hybrid, blended learning, responding to student writing, on-line writing instruction (OWI)

Increasingly, writing instructors find themselves adapting to some combination of instructional modes. While writing programs have long offered face-to-face, asynchronous online, and hybrid courses, the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 fueled more widespread use of other mode combinations to deliver course content: synchronous online, asynchronous and synchronous online, and hyflex.¹ This expansion reflects a growing trend in higher education for hybrid formats, a trend that specifically impacts the amount of labor faculty perform in order to teach a course that is offered in two instructional modes (see Adams Wooten et al., 2022). One important part of these labor considerations is how writing instructors provide feedback on student writing. Because providing feedback is a key practice in writing courses, adapting to these hybrid formats requires instructors to decide when and how they respond to student writing and which feedback modality to use when they do. For example, instructors can consider which types of learning activities allow for which types of feedback, how timely and time-consuming the feedback must be, and how a learning management system (LMS) mediates feedback and affects the perception of instructor presence and availability.

Part of the challenge of adapting feedback practices to hybrid formats stems from defining what “hybrid” means. Paull and Snart (2016) offered a definition of hybrid, or blended learning, partially in terms of interaction: Hybrid classes offer “real-time, face-to-face interaction with peers

¹ The hyflex instructional mode is the newest innovation in blended course delivery, and it is the one that gives students the most choice. The CCCC Online Writing Instruction Standing Group (2021) defined hyflex as “delivered in multiple modes and students and instructors can choose how they participate” (p. 14).

and professors” as well as “real, sustainable curricular innovation in the form of online learning” (p. 4). Recently, other scholars have refined this definition by focusing on how faculty schedule their teaching time in hybrid courses (Warnock, 2021) and when students access and interact with these courses (Martin et al., 2020).

The truth is that all of these definitions reflect hybrid pedagogy. Their common denominator is the inherent division between synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning. For college writing instructors, feedback practices in such courses are inherently divided because the course operates in different instructional modes. Hybrid courses would appear to give instructors the best of both worlds because feedback is not only dependent on “text-based communication” (Stine, 2004, pp. 60–63) but can occur across multiple spaces and in multiple modalities. However, hybrid courses also present an array of choices instructors must make to maximize the feedback mechanism for each instructional mode to support student learning.

Dividing feedback practices is not, of course, exclusive to hybrid teaching. Responding to student writing can happen in “real time” in an asynchronous course through a virtual conference and can happen asynchronously in a synchronous course when returning a commented paper through an LMS. In composition courses, however, instructors also provide feedback on writing-process work. For synchronous teaching, feedback is often delivered through verbal and even nonverbal forms of interaction; for asynchronous teaching, feedback depends heavily on text-based communication (Wolsey, 2008). Instructors of hybrid courses must design a course around the affordances of both modes by making decisions about what the purpose of verbal and written feedback is and how, when, and why to provide it in each instructional mode. These decisions also affect the amount of labor required for the instructor.

Hybrid-course design and delivery is further complicated by using an LMS to deliver content and provide feedback in both the synchronous and asynchronous sessions. The use of LMS platforms is pervasive in

higher education (Dahlstrom et al., 2014), and instructors in all disciplines appreciate LMS platforms due to their capabilities for archiving feedback. Instructors of hybrid writing courses, however, must find the right balance between providing feedback verbally and through LMS tools.

To better understand hybrid courses in our composition program, we convened a task force in Fall 2019 to gather teaching resources and collect relevant scholarship to prepare a literature review. In Spring 2020, we surveyed and interviewed instructors at our institution about their experiences teaching these courses, which at the time constituted about 10% of course offerings. One of our goals was to gather evidence about how the hybrid format affects the decisions instructors make about when to provide feedback on student work (especially writing-process work) and which feedback modality they use to deliver it (synchronous/oral or asynchronous/written). We asked instructors who were teaching hybrid college-writing courses to describe how the hybrid format—which, by its very nature, divides the pedagogical approach—influences both the intent of feedback and the logistics of providing it.

Two research questions informed the inquiry for the study:

- RQ 1: How do instructors teaching hybrid writing courses decide how to provide feedback in both the synchronous and asynchronous modes?
- RQ 2: How does the technological interface—the LMS—affect instructor decisions about how and when to provide feedback on student writing?

Literature Review

A wealth of research exists on feedback practices, which are a crucial part of writing-intensive courses. Sommers's (1982) landmark work, *Responding to Student Writing*, laid the foundation for much of the research that has followed in this field, both for traditional synchronous courses as well as hybrid and fully asynchronous courses. Core tenets of the literature include the consideration of instructors' increased workload when teaching writing-intensive courses (e.g., Conference on

College Composition and Communication Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2013), instructors' use of longer questions and requests rather than shorter, imperative statements when giving feedback (e.g., Ferris, 1997), and the importance of using text-specific comments in feedback rather than interchangeable ones (e.g., Boyd, 2008; Mische, 2020; Rockey & Saichaie, 2020). Scholars continue to survey courses across instructional modes to determine what types of feedback instructors are giving and how students respond to that feedback.

Scholars researching students and feedback have also considered students' perception of feedback. Research has found that regardless of instructional mode, students prefer positive, relatable, and expanding² feedback that highlights instructor presence and interaction rather than vague or interchangeable feedback (Boyd, 2008; Mische, 2020; Rockey & Saichaie, 2020; Wolsey, 2008). These preferences have been found separately in research on both synchronous and asynchronous instructional modes and in courses across the disciplines.

Research on feedback in asynchronous courses, in addition to echoing the findings of research on feedback in synchronous courses, has highlighted students' preference for comments that value instructor interaction. The ability to track student interactions in LMS platforms also has revealed the differences in how students engage with feedback on different drafts. Students are more likely to open feedback on earlier drafts versus final drafts, a distinction that continues throughout the length of the course (Lafren & Smith, 2017). These findings support previous research that has indicated students prefer timely feedback to make appropriate changes to their writing (Boyd, 2008; Dennen et al., 2007; Young, 2006). Much research on students' interaction with feedback has focused on the types of feedback instructors offer on drafts of major assignments or essays through different feedback modalities (e.g., Grigoryan, 2017) and peer and instructor audiences (e.g., Corbett & LaFrance, 2018). But there has not been much research on the smaller, low-stakes assignments and

2 Expanding feedback refers to comments that focus on what the student could add and what new directions the writing could take.

writing-process work that many instructors teaching hybrid writing courses give, such as drafts of research questions or a preliminary genre analysis (Morris et al., 2021), even though this feedback cycle is a notable aspect of hybrid or online courses (Hewett, 2015; Warnock, 2009).

Instructors teaching asynchronous and hybrid courses have, by definition, fewer opportunities to interact with students in real time (although feedback on writing allows for that interaction). Boyd (2008) studied student perceptions of their learning in online and hybrid first-year composition (FYC) courses, and her data, collected from her two-part survey, show some inconsistency in how students view such interaction. When responding to the portion of the survey with Likert-type scales, students reported their perceived interaction with their instructor in a hybrid or fully asynchronous FYC course as equal or higher than in a synchronous one. Students' short written responses to the open-ended questions of that survey, however, revealed "an ambivalence about the amount of contact they had with their instructors in online course environments" (p. 230). Both Boyd (2008) and Young (2006) argued that the unique challenge of fully asynchronous learning lies in the frequency and ease of interaction between the instructor and the students. These studies, and others across the disciplines, concentrate on synchronous and asynchronous courses; however, there is little research focused solely on the role of feedback in hybrid courses, in which both instructional modes operate together. We broach this topic in this article, but further research is needed.

Research Methods

During fall 2019, the task force designed a survey and interview protocol, approved by our institution's IRB, to research how instructors design and teach hybrid courses. The original members of the task force consisted of seven faculty members, including the associate and assistant directors of composition, full-time non-tenure-track faculty, and one graduate teaching assistant. In January 2020, we sent a Qualtrics survey via email to 17 instructors (several of whom were members of the task force) with experience

teaching hybrid writing courses. Survey questions focused on their experience with teaching writing and with teaching hybrid courses; the survey protocol also included questions about how faculty members perceive the role of technology in the classroom, and whether faculty members had access to or completed professional development focused on hybrid instruction. The last question in the survey asked instructors if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

Of the 17 instructors, 14 responded to the survey, and all respondents agreed to be interviewed. Table 1 summarizes the interview participants' hybrid teaching experience and identifies instructors who had previously taught hybrid courses at different institutions. All participants were contingent faculty with terminal degrees who ranged from novice to veteran instructors of hybrid composition courses.

Table 1

*Summary Chart of Participants' Hybrid Teaching Experience*³

Course type	Number of interview participants with experience in the course	Description of hybrid course
First-year composition (FYC) and advanced composition courses at a public university	12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One in-person session each week• The rest of the material was delivered asynchronously

³ Unless otherwise noted, all courses listed in this table took place over a 15-week semester.

Technical-communication editing course at a public university (cross listed for undergraduate and graduate students)	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-person sessions every other week for 3 hours• Students completed timed work every other week using the same “class period” as the in-person session
FYC course at a private university	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In-person sessions twice a week• A third class session was held asynchronously
FYC course at a community college	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8-week course• One in-person session each week• The rest of the material was delivered asynchronously

We designed the interview protocol to focus on how instructors described their preparation for and transition to teaching hybrid writing courses. It included questions specific to lessons learned, professional development, and feedback and student engagement practices. Using the interview protocol, we conducted semistructured interviews, recorded using Zoom, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. We conducted the interviews shortly after the university moved fully online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because this pivot had only just happened, the participants primarily described how they engaged in feedback practices for the in-person and online instructional modes of their hybrid courses. Our coding process focused on these modes rather than changes brought about due to the pivot necessitated by COVID-19.

Because of its utility in analyzing qualitative data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017), we chose grounded theory as our coding approach. Therefore, all interview transcripts were interrogated using no prescribed constraints (i.e., open coded). Four members of the task force worked in pairs

to normalize codes and sampling methods before meeting with the entire team to discuss their key observations, emerging themes, and a final list of codes. During our first whole-group meeting, we had more than 75 codes and subcodes, many of which overlapped. For example, *active learning* and *flipped learning* were both listed, so we combined them as one code. We also noticed that *course design* and *feedback* were codes that could include multiple subcodes. For example, *feedback* could capture *accountability*, *timely feedback*, *troubleshooting*, *virtual feedback*, and *written feedback*, so we included these themes as subcodes in the larger *feedback* category. Once the set of codes was finalized, we used coding software (NVivo), along with memoing, to analyze individual reference points and to make connections between and across interviews.

For this article, we looked at all references pertinent to *feedback*, *problem-solving*, and *technology* in the final set of codes. We focused on these three codes because the *feedback* and *technology* codes show what decisions instructors teaching hybrid courses make and the *problem-solving* code reveals how and why instructors make those decisions. Given the variety of feedback practices that can occur in hybrid courses, we use the term “feedback” broadly throughout this article to include feedback provided to students synchronously and asynchronously through LMS announcements, verbal comments, written comments, and rubrics on any writing produced in a course.

Findings

After coding the 14 interviews, we found three major themes that reveal clear distinctions instructors make when describing their feedback practices in the asynchronous and synchronous instructional modes. We observed how the divided nature of a hybrid course often encourages a binary thought process, an “either/or” mentality, among instructors when they think about feedback. That binary thinking emerges in the following themes: adaptations instructors make to their feedback according to the instructional mode, the influence of labor conditions on how and when

they provide feedback, and the impact of an LMS virtual environment on how they use feedback for guidance and shaping student behavior in the course.

Adaptations Instructors Make to Feedback for Asynchronous and Synchronous Modes

Both the asynchronous and synchronous instructional modes include opportunities for feedback on process work. Instructors must decide what type of feedback to give in each mode. In the asynchronous mode, many instructors focused their written feedback, both global and individual, on how students engaged with new course content. All composition courses at our institution require students to do inquiry-based research that begins with a research question. Participant 7 detailed the kinds of feedback they give on students' research questions: "I can say, 'Turn in your research questions, and I'll give you feedback on them.' And then they can get kind of specific feedback on their writing in a more formal way at multiple stages of the writing process." Participant 7 focused on how the asynchronous mode allows them to give formal, written feedback at an important stage in the writing process. The nature of asynchronous work creates opportunities for longer and more detailed feedback on students' individual writings. When describing feedback given in the synchronous mode, however, participants prioritized opportunities for real-time feedback because students could apply it during collaborative and active-learning activities such as peer review and think-pair-share. Participant 1 compared feedback practices for the two modes:

I'm more likely to give individualized feedback [asynchronously] on that [individual, written] work than if we were doing face-to-face classes, where I'd be more likely to put them in groups or to do think-pair-share, sort of more like in the moment and briefer, as individualized work.

Many participants, including Participant 1, discussed the benefits of giving class-wide or group-based feedback in the synchronous mode,

allowing students to learn not only from the instructor but also from their peers and the feedback given to those peers.

Participant 11 revealed a binary thought process when noting the different benefits of giving feedback in synchronous and asynchronous modes:

I would say a big thing that my face-to-face students did that the online students didn't, in the same way anyway, was a lot more like check-ins on their drafts. So, like, let's say with their major project, they had, like, an elevator-pitch activity where they had to sort of pitch their topic to a person and be able to articulate it and get feedback from their group about what they were doing.

As with Participant 1, Participant 11 explained that the synchronous (in this instance, face-to-face) mode allows for briefer, oral feedback from both the instructor and peers, something that is much more challenging to incorporate into the asynchronous mode. These findings show that participants maximize the affordance of each instructional mode when giving feedback on process work but stop short of thinking about how to blend the two.

Although the synchronous component of a course offers opportunities for engagement, Paull and Snart (2016) described a potential cause for instructor concern: "Many students initially believe that the [hybrid] course meets only once a week for seventy-five minutes and that's it, so they are drawn to it" (p. 179). Many participants mentioned students who did not grasp that hybrid courses use *two* instructional modes. Participant 1 explained why they give more feedback on work done in the asynchronous mode:

I tend to give more and more quickly, I mean timely, feedback on individual pieces of writing, than I would in a fully face-to-face class. And that's for mostly the small stakes assignments. There's just more of it, and that's because I'm trying to make sure that they're taking the hybrid [asynchronous] component seriously and that they can tell that I'm engaging with what they're doing.

This participant explained that they gave more feedback to help students see both the importance of the asynchronous mode and the fact that their instructor was present in that mode as well. Students often remain confused about the hybrid course format (Paull & Snart, 2016), and instructors may compensate by giving more individual feedback on the work that students complete asynchronously in order to draw them into that part of the course. After detailing why they gave so much written feedback, Participant 1 explained the scheduling constraints of that feedback:

In a face-to-face class, I think you can catch them up real quick, it's harder to do that. So in a hybrid course, students do the activity on Thursday, and then Friday morning I give them immediate, timely feedback. And so in that way, my prep's different as well.

When choosing which feedback modality to use, Participant 1 explained that while feedback can be given in real time in the synchronous mode, they had to plan their weekly schedule around the feedback given in the asynchronous mode to ensure that same timeliness.

Giving “immediate, timely feedback,” however, increases instructor workload. Synchronous feedback, as Participant 1 noted, can be immediate without preparation time, while written feedback on a full-length assignment can take up to 40 minutes (Sommers, 1982). Although most research on feedback focuses on these full-length assignments, we can make a similar calculation for the low-stakes work that forms the foundation of hybrid writing courses. The simplest of low-stakes work may take only 5 minutes for instructors to respond to, but 5 minutes multiplied by 80 students (the number of students the participants in our study primarily teach each semester) amounts to 400 minutes just for one low-stakes assignment. Although the use of an LMS can decrease this time further by allowing the option to use the same saved comments on multiple assignments, the most time-consuming feedback mode is still individual, written feedback.

The Effect of Labor Conditions on Instructor Feedback Practices

The labor conditions of instructors teaching writing-intensive courses are already challenging, as professional organizations, including the National Council of Teachers of English (Conference on College Composition and Communication Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2013), and notable scholars (e.g., Kahn et al., 2017; McClure et al., 2017) have pointed out. With the dual instructional modes of hybrid courses, instructors must choose how to invest their time and how to balance the distinct needs and requirements of each portion of the course. Instructors' decisions about how to prioritize their feedback and time reflect not only their teaching styles but also an understanding that, like many contingent instructors, they are not able to do everything: They need to balance their time in order to survive.

Although participants felt the workload burden differently, many mentioned needing to make certain decisions with labor conditions in mind. For example, Participants 1 and 5 detailed their reasoning for investing more time in asynchronous feedback:

I can put my energy more into individualized feedback when I don't have to have that performative teaching component that you do in a fully face-to-face class. So I have more time and more energy to give them individualized feedback. (Participant 1)

I decided to invest more in the online feedback because I wasn't burdened with doing it twice a week. I still had a face-to-face class, and it was still a participation grade. And the online one, I might have felt like that's where I was really going to invest a lot of time in giving written feedback. (Participant 5)

Even though they each gave a slightly different reason for focusing time and energy on feedback given in the asynchronous mode, both Participant 1 and Participant 5 found the synchronous mode more tiring or challenging to schedule; teaching a hybrid course with less synchronous class time allowed them to devote more time and energy to

asynchronous feedback. The dual nature of hybrid courses requires that instructors choose not only how to give feedback in each mode but also how to balance that feedback within the scope of their overall labor conditions, which choices further reinforce the binary thinking about feedback practices.

In talking about the dual nature of hybrid courses, participants often mentioned repeating information multiple times to help students grasp material, keep track of due dates, or transfer knowledge across sessions and weeks. Researchers have found that students do not often access written feedback when they can see their grade separately (Laflen & Smith, 2017). Because asynchronous written feedback is important for students' success as writers, instructors are likely to have to repeat the same feedback multiple times, which further increases their workload. Participant 13 described this reality in their interview:

I'd give them feedback like, "We need to narrow this research question, and here's some ideas . . ." And then they'd submit their next piece, and it was like they still ha[d] the same research question. I'm like, "Did you read my feedback on the last thing?" Even though I said in that weekly announcement like, "Hey, you all need to read the feedback on these. Here's the link." Then it keeps following them, and I'm going to get drafts now. [Comments to students] were like, "Well, your research question is too big, which I've told you in five different assignments leading up to this, but you're not reading [the feedback]."

Participant 13 detailed two types of feedback: (a) individual, written feedback given during the writing process so that students could make adjustments based on that feedback and (b) class-wide reminders about that feedback through the announcement feature on the LMS. All of the correspondence that this participant described centered on the student's research question, but the repeating cycle of feedback happened at multiple points throughout the writing process, which further increased the instructor's workload.

The need to repeat information in different formats increases the workload of instructors already burdened with teaching more writing students than is generally recommended: Full-time instructors in our program teach four courses of 19–22 students each semester, a total of 76–88. Professional organizations’ recommendations limit instructors to no more than 60 students per term (Association of Departments of English, 2020; Conference on College Composition and Communication Committee for Best Practices in Online Writing Instruction, 2013). Instructors on a teaching-only contract, as the participants in our study were, are additionally required to devote a significant amount of time to interacting with students, even outside of office hours (Doe et al., 2011). For writing courses, these interactions often include more individual feedback and repetition not already included in the synchronous or asynchronous components of the course.

The Influence of an LMS on Instructor Feedback Practices

All the participants in this study used the Blackboard LMS while teaching their hybrid composition courses at our institution. Given the similarities in the basic functions of most platforms (Black et al., 2007), participant observations about how the LMS shaped their feedback choices generally spoke to how these platforms present opportunities and challenges for the types of feedback faculty provide and for the ways students and faculty interact with each other through the LMS.

Participants showed the same thoughtfulness in using the LMS for feedback as they did in choosing how and when to provide feedback, but their choices consistently reflected binary thinking about the synchronous and asynchronous portions of the course. While instructors used the LMS to provide instructional content, access assignments and low-stakes activities, and archive student work, they rarely used the LMS to deliver feedback during the synchronous portion of the course. In other words, feedback given via the LMS is not blended; most LMS feedback is provided via text asynchronously. Participant 9 clearly described this binary

thinking when defining the elements of a hybrid course: “It feels like an online course that has a face-to-face component as opposed to the opposite, for better or worse.”

Another pattern that emerged in these interviews reflects how instructors differentiated between the two instructional modes and treated only one of them as “hybrid.” For example, one participant used the term “hybrid” to refer to the asynchronous portion of the course:

So, other considerations that I make for the hybrid [asynchronous portion]. Well, again, I feel like you lose a lot arguably of kairos in the hybrid part, so that dynamic conversation that happens back and forth. And you can fix something quickly in the face-to-face environment. (Participant 8)

Still others referred to the “hybrid” class as the synchronous one, such as in the following excerpt from Participant 14: “Because when I’m with them in the hybrid [synchronous portion], then I can show certain things . . . So with the hybrid, the class time, we don’t have to work with as much technology.” Referring to either the asynchronous or synchronous class sessions as “hybrid” shows a novice grasp of hybrid pedagogy that influences how instructors prioritize and deliver feedback. When Participants 1 and 8 referred to the asynchronous portion of the class as “hybrid,” they created a rhetorical barrier to thinking about a pedagogy consisting of two instructional modes. Instructors who identified “hybrid” as the synchronous portion of the course do the same. In each case, the participants prioritized or dismissed the feedback affordances on one instructional mode rather than considering the potential in both. A divided approach like this prompts some instructors to place greater value on oral feedback delivered in the synchronous class, in other words, feedback that requires little to no use of the LMS. This is not a surprise. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) found that the hybrid format’s inclusion of regular, real-time, synchronous interaction, which for our participants occurred in face-to-face sessions, results in greater instructor and learner satisfaction. Participants in our study echoed these findings in their own preferences for face-to-face feedback, another indication of their binary

thinking about their practices: “I feel like the feedback component of hybrid is much more successful than the online because they can get feedback from me in the face-to-face [class]” (Participant 14); “I don’t think I can emulate the face-to-face feedback in the written feedback. I think they do have different goals” (Participant 2); and “So some students really thrive with that face-to-face feedback, and others need the written feedback. I have found in all the courses that I teach that students need more oral feedback” (Participant 14). Embedded in these preferences, however, is the time saved by providing oral feedback to all students at once rather than writing it as global or individual feedback with an LMS tool. Participants repeatedly alluded to the affordance inherent in synchronous class sessions of providing immediate feedback without the use of the LMS:

And what can I do in class that would give them that kind of immediate feedback and sometimes save me time, right, so that I could be strategic about—now this is something I don’t have to respond in writing to everyone, too. I can give them my feedback just in time, in the moment, in class. (Participant 10)

So [using synchronous class time for oral feedback] is one big thing. And then just any sort of class work that you do, you can give feedback right in the moment. You’re not then creating a discussion board. You’re just sort of giving the whole class feedback. (Participant 11)

Both Participants 10 and 11 use the synchronous portion of the hybrid course for global feedback, especially when it becomes clear many students need the same guidance. This “one big thing,” as Participant 11 characterized it, helps save time by disseminating the feedback all at once rather than creating a discussion board that would require more customized individualized feedback. Yet these comments suggest the instructors did not consider how global feedback provided through the LMS can also be timely and effective, a practice others provide through the LMS announcement tool.

Most participants found synchronous class sessions made it much easier to direct students to feedback located in the LMS, thus increasing the likelihood that students would read it. As Winstone et al. (2020) explained, the LMS interface drives student behavior in finding, reading, and applying feedback because of “push notifications” that a grade is available. Feedback, such as comments and rubrics, requires students to take an additional action within the LMS to access and read. Though this is true in all instructional modes using an LMS, this interface unwittingly shifts feedback emphasis to the synchronous class session in a hybrid course, in which a “conversation” about grades and response to the writing can take place. Participant 14 described the LMS as something that conditions, or “trains,” students to prioritize grades over the feedback, a problem remedied in the synchronous class meeting:

They have been trained not to really read the end of rubrics and things like that, the long comment. They're really looking for the grade more than anything else. And with the hybrid, I feel like I can guide them more to “this feedback is important” because I'm not just telling them a number or a grade. Rather, we are having a conversation about how their work is progressing.

Participant 14 echoed what Stine (2004) saw as a key benefit of hybrid courses: “The benefit that comes from having my online students in my physical classroom as well . . . is that I can . . . deal with new or remaining problems and give the students a chance to explore their issues in more depth” (p. 61). The implication here, as with Participant 14, is that this feedback does not occur, or does not occur as effectively, in the asynchronous portion of the course. This type of binary thinking about feedback inhibits blending and emphasizes division.

Binary thinking about feedback through the instructional mode lens also showed up in how instructors viewed synchronous class meetings as a way to “fix” a problem that arose from LMS use in the asynchronous portion of the course. In this case, oral feedback becomes a remedy for any shortfall in students' LMS use in the asynchronous portion of the

course. Participant 8, an instructor who was relatively new to the LMS and to hybrid teaching, explained why feedback as correction occurred more frequently in the synchronous portion of his hybrid course:

In the face-to-face environment, you just have so much more, for whatever reason, power in terms of fixing things immediately and quickly and I guess trying to halt bad behaviors, whether it be actual bad behaviors or just bad sort of habits in writing and those kinds of things. So I would say [in] the face-to-face portion of a lot of my hybrid courses, [the feedback is] almost double what it would be in a regular face-to-face course because you're trying to fix what was maybe not necessarily kosher in the online part but also in the face-to-face part. And it's all taking place in the face-to-face part.

In this example, Participant 8 used the two instructional modes as a means to address errors in the course, or instructions that lacked clarity, by leveraging the affordances of synchronous and asynchronous modes. Oral feedback in the synchronous portion of the course takes on greater utility for instructors because it is immediate, saves time, and provides a safety net for any glitches that might arise from using the LMS tools.

When choosing LMS tools for feedback, instructors relied mostly on the platform's basic features. For example, many instructors use the LMS discussion forum to facilitate collaborative asynchronous learning by mimicking synchronous class discussion, and other instructors use the forum to facilitate peer feedback on steps of the writing process in either synchronous or asynchronous class sessions. Important here is that instructors have a choice in how to utilize the discussion forum because they teach in two instructional modes. Participant 1 stated:

So the number one way in which I have them engage with each other in the hybrid [asynchronous] part of the course is with using discussion boards . . . For the 101 [FYC] students, I do praise one thing they did, suggest one thing for improvement, yeah, "Start, Stop, Continue."

Others use discussion board rubrics, in which feedback merges with grading and accountability. In teaching a hybrid editing course, Participant 2 used discussion boards for both collaborative work and attendance in the asynchronous portion of the class:

I took attendance for every online class . . . what I would do is I required that when they are assigned to participate in a discussion board post, they had to participate, and there was a certain requirement on how they participate . . . You can't just say, "This is what I think." And the second week of class, half of the students didn't get points for that because they didn't follow the instruction. But fortunately, all but one of them learned that lesson and then they started doing what they were supposed to be doing in the—sorry, not the second time. I was lenient the second time in our second week of class, and I warned them not to do it again. The fourth week of class, half of them did it again and so they failed for that class and then all but one of them learned the lesson moving forward [and] did really spectacularly, and that one time that they all failed did not have an impact on their grade by the end. But that's a much [tougher] approach to grading than I ever take with anything, but again, it was really important to me.

This feedback approach focuses not just on the content of the discussion board posts but also on how and when students post to reinforce why particular types of participation matter. Participant 2's observation that his approach to grading discussion board posts is somewhat harsher than in other aspects of the course signals an approach that is something more than providing feedback to guide and instruct; the instructor is also shaping student behavior so that discussions are effective. As Baglione and Nastanski (2007) concluded from their study, "Faculty participation, setting standards, and using the technologically inherent advantages of the asynchronous environment are crucial to the success of online discussions" (p. 141). Grading discussion board posts serves as a class management tool as well as a vehicle for providing feedback on student work.

Some instructors either grade or comment on discussions through individual and global feedback provided through LMS tools. Participant

12 remarked, “I didn’t use to grade discussion boards because there were so few in face-to-face [classes]. Now they’re all, obviously, graded, and points are assigned. That’s one change I had to make with a change in technology.” Instructors sometimes supplement individually delivered student feedback with global feedback that is often shared with students via an announcement tool. Not only does this tool help maintain a steady tempo of communication with students, it also provides opportunities for instructors to share a summary of their feedback at one time in an announcement that is visible on the LMS and sent to students via email. Instructor use of announcements reflects an adaptation of classroom pedagogy that “migrates” to the digital platform of an LMS:

The other way in which I give feedback is, as I told you, in announcements . . . announcements is probably the number one way in which I adapt the existing course to meet student needs and to address [them]. And it’s where a lot of my in-the-moment teaching happens in an all-online class and definitely in the hybrid component of a hybrid class. (Participant 1)

Threaded throughout the participants’ comments in this study, however, is how few of them viewed feedback as an integrated practice in a hybrid course rather than one determined by the instructional mode. Participant 7 echoed the binary thinking others implied through their description of their feedback practices: “The other thing that changes is the Blackboard tools that I use. I use different Blackboard tools for the online portion and for the face-to-face portion.” This binary thinking about using LMS tools often derives from seeing the hybrid course as alternating between synchronous and asynchronous modes rather than an actual blend of the two.

Discussion

This selective study, created to investigate instructors’ experiences designing and implementing hybrid courses, revealed multiple patterns in

how these instructors conceived of and gave feedback to their students. The findings illuminate the roles of the instructional mode and the LMS in determining the difference between feedback given asynchronously and feedback given synchronously or in person. These findings align with research into feedback practices of both asynchronous and synchronous courses and also illuminate what unique choices instructors teaching hybrid courses face and what they must consider when making those choices.

When considering feedback practices, participants perceive and use time differently between the asynchronous and synchronous instructional modes. In the asynchronous mode, instructors talk about giving timely feedback on students' writing-process work and being aware of the time it takes them to give that feedback: Speed and workload are their main concerns. While instructors give less individual feedback in the synchronous mode, their responses reveal a higher valuation on the time spent meeting synchronously. Instructors discussed relying on the 75 minutes of synchronous class time for whole-class feedback, including "preparation for the assignment" and "answering questions" (Participant 6). Participants also mentioned using synchronous time for check-ins and being able to see students' faces to get to know them better. Having a closer relationship with students allows instructors to give the more personalized feedback that students prefer and to turn feedback into a dialogue (Plana-Erta et al., 2016). Of course, spending time to build this rapport also means spending energy.

Instructors seem to have a disparity in energy levels between instructional modes. Some participants, including those whose previous experience included designing and/or teaching asynchronous courses, discussed the energy drain of "the performative teaching component" in hybrid courses (Participant 1). Others who had previously taught primarily synchronous courses complained about the heavy amount of time they devoted to individual, written feedback in hybrid courses. There is more to unpack in the terminology differences ("energy" when discussing

synchronous and “time” when discussing asynchronous modes) that instructors use when talking about the two instructional modes of the hybrid course, but these preliminary findings start to draw a clear boundary between the decisions that instructors make in giving feedback in the synchronous and asynchronous portions of a hybrid course.

When discussing the written, asynchronous feedback that they give students, all participants focused on low-stakes assignments rather than full rough drafts and final drafts of major writing assignments. In our composition program, these low-stakes assignments can include reading journals, writing-process work, discussion boards, outlines, quizzes, and more. There are many ways to interpret this unilateral choice. The first interpretation is that instructors put more time and energy into feedback on low-stakes student work in hybrid classes, which aligns with Laflen and Smith’s (2017) recommendation: “Instructors might devote more of their feedback to earlier, nongraded or pass-fail steps in the writing process, as students may be more likely to heed feedback that still has the chance to impact their grade on that assignment” (p. 50).

Instructors may also choose to prioritize feedback on students’ low-stakes writing because it gives them an opportunity to show their engagement and presence in the course. On the one hand, having the synchronous portion of a hybrid course to engage live with the students gives instructors teaching these courses an automatic presence. On the other hand, instructor presence in a fully asynchronous course relies, at least in part, on the students’ engagement with written feedback or discussion facilitation (see Gedik et al., 2013; Gerbic, 2011; Martin et al., 2018; Rasheed et al., 2020). Many instructors have expressed concern about the difficulty of getting students to take the asynchronous component of hybrid courses seriously. As Participant 1 said, “I do it [giving individualized feedback] right after they post it, because I want, again, them to feel like I’m paying attention.” Immediate written feedback allows instructors to show their presence and to help students understand the purpose and importance of work done in a specific instructional mode.

One benefit of the emphasis that instructors place on low-stakes written work is that its frequency can help students adjust to their instructor's feedback and fully comprehend it. Rockey and Saichaie (2020) conducted one of the few studies focused on smaller writing assignments. They reviewed weekly writing assignments in a general education content course (not composition or writing focused) and found that over the course of the semester, the amount of feedback from the instructor decreased, but students still perceived they were receiving a lot of feedback at the end of the semester and were more certain about the meaning of the feedback they received. As students become accustomed to instructor feedback in a hybrid course, the feedback can also serve as a bridge between the synchronous and asynchronous portions, as Participant 4 explained:

Doing smaller assignments to kind of bridge between face-to-face and the online portions. Those kinds of things are less focused on evaluation, more on guidance. Like, "Hey, here's what I see happening in your writing or with this project or how your topic's narrowing. Here's how we can move forward with that."

Frequent commenting on low-stakes work bridges the gap between the synchronous and asynchronous portions and also works to establish a dialogue between instructor and student. Plana-Erta et al. (2016) posited, "Feedback needs to constitute a dialogue between the person who facilitates it and the one who receives it. It must explicitly promote self-regulation and a proactive attitude on the part of the student towards it" (p. 198). The ways in which instructors situate and scaffold feedback across the synchronous and asynchronous components of the course create this dialogue, which is a key difference between a hybrid course and either a fully asynchronous or fully synchronous one.

Instructor Choice of LMS Tools for Giving Feedback

This study shows that the choice of feedback modality is often influenced by how instructors prioritize the utility of oral feedback and use LMS tools to provide feedback on low-stakes work. Participants focused

primarily on LMS tools that enabled them to provide feedback on writing-process work rather than the tools that facilitate grading major assignments, such as the in-line grading feature of Blackboard and the gradebook itself. Participants explained that choosing the appropriate LMS tool for feedback, and structuring the tempo for delivering it, played a greater role when commenting on weekly low-stakes writing tasks.

In terms of how an LMS influences feedback practices, our findings show that instructors depend heavily on commonly used LMS tools to provide feedback on student work, but they use the synchronous class meetings to deliver what they view as the most timely and effective feedback, feedback that requires little LMS intervention at all. Unsurprisingly, instructors did not use more advanced features of the LMS to create asynchronous learning environments and provide feedback (Dahlstrom et al., 2014). Lacking in participant comments is an awareness that they “stepped into a new role of [the] designer” of an online learning environment (Salisbury, 2018, p. 5), an awareness that would directly shape feedback practices in the asynchronous portion of the hybrid course.

Instructors saw the LMS itself as a barrier to making feedback to students easily accessible, yet they also saw it as the most effective way to respond to students individually. Thus, even when it comes to the use of technology, the hybrid format still divides instructor perceptions of when and how to provide feedback in ways that fully asynchronous modes do not.

A cascade of decisions faces instructors as they determine how they will use LMS tools: For example, they need to decide which tool they should use for each instructional mode and how they can ensure students engage with LMS-mediated feedback. Using an LMS as a repository for student work, especially small-stakes process work, means that student engagement with the LMS must be required and guided (Lafien & Smith, 2017).

The LMS interface makes feedback available to students at any time once it is posted, making it more efficient for instructors to provide

feedback through in-line grading, rubrics, and gradebooks. Yet that same interface can shape how students access feedback. As Winstone et al. (2020) explained in their study of how undergraduates access and use feedback in an LMS, the emphasis is on the grade: “Many researchers have written about students’ grade focus, but this issue may be more pronounced within a LMS where the grade can be seen without even opening the feedback file” (p. 7). The affordance of the hybrid course, however, is that instructors can direct students to this feedback and even ask them to engage with it in one of the synchronous class sessions. Many of the participants in this study used this approach.

A key pattern that emerges from this study is instructors’ use of LMS tools to enhance synchronous class feedback. Instructors repeatedly expressed the value of having a synchronous class with its affordance for oral feedback to address any shortcomings in the LMS, despite its effectiveness at providing individualized feedback. A persistent binary thinking about feedback practices in the two instructional modes frequently results in prioritizing one (synchronous) over the other (asynchronous). In other words, the pedagogical strategy is always divided by instructional mode rather than a blending of the two.

Conclusion

Most participants in this study taught courses in which the weekly hours were evenly split between synchronous and asynchronous teaching, but that model has become far more flexible at our institution with the rise of synchronous online classes and hybrid pedagogy resulting from the sudden shift to virtual teaching because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The divisions that emerged so clearly in this study may be due to the strict schedule required of these participants by the program(s) in which they teach, programs that often vary in the types of hybrid courses they offer. Future research about feedback practices, especially feedback for low-stakes writing activities, in hybrid instructional modes is needed.

This study, with only 14 participants, was limited by its scope and design. For example, due to the small sample size localized to our institution, the study was not designed to capture demographic data (e.g., highest degree earned, gender, age) or descriptions of specific courses taught. Several participants discussed many years of prior hybrid teaching experience, but others had almost no previous experience at all. Only a few participants had any professional development to prepare them to design and teach hybrid composition courses. The heterogeneous nature of the participants provided a breadth of insights but not as much depth from experienced practitioners. All the participants, however, were instructors dealing with contingent labor conditions as graduate students, adjuncts, or full-time nontenure-track faculty. Their high teaching loads and lack of professional development opportunities likely influence how they conceive of feedback and the time they have to deliver it.

The instructors interviewed in this study described feedback processes that emphasize reciprocation: They were constantly moving back and forth between oral and digital feedback depending upon what they felt the instructional mode best afforded and the time they had to respond to students both globally and individually. Based on the interviews, we found that labor conditions, student dynamics, and comfort with technology lead instructors to make feedback decisions, but that they are not considering the divided nature of the hybrid instructional mode. Instructors seem to cobble together their synchronous class practices with their asynchronous ones, emphasizing their binary thinking.

Further research is needed on the integration of not only instructional material but also feedback in the asynchronous and synchronous portions of hybrid writing courses. In tandem with that needed research should be more studies about how *students* view the feedback they receive in hybrid writing courses. Understanding how students receive and apply feedback in divided instructional modes can better inform instructor decisions about when and how to provide it. To facilitate applications of these findings, future studies could focus on the level of the composition course

(first-year writing, upper-level writing, etc.), the level of writing experience students are expected to have (courses covering writing across the curriculum or writing in the disciplines, etc.) and the ways instructors and students view feedback in those specific courses.

The participants in this study repeatedly showed how deeply entrenched binary thinking about feedback practices is and how driven it is by whether to use LMS tools or verbal feedback. Lacking is a synthesis of how these instructional modes could yield a new approach that is truly blended by content, time, and place. In the past, research about hybrid courses usually appeared in studies about specific instructional modes. Though hybrid pedagogy has gained more attention from scholars, there is still no theoretical framework for it that synthesizes the two modes rather than treating them separately. The same is true for feedback practices in writing courses.

A next step toward resolving this binary thinking may be to envision hybrid “spaces” less as synchronous and asynchronous modes and more as “environments” (Justice, 2018) that influence the writing that takes place in them for both students and instructors. In this sense, place matters as much as content and time, which may help instructors think more synthetically about feedback as a network of practices that are threaded throughout a course.

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