

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Sarah E. Mosser for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on June 10, 2014.

Title: Modalities of Responding to Student Writing: How the Medium Shapes the Message

Abstract approved:

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With the rapid development of new computer mediated technologies, instructors have more options of the modalities of responding to student writing. Whereas traditionally, responses have been written by hand, technological developments allow responses to take very different forms. Some of these technologies, such as word processing, mimic the text-on-page techniques inherent to hand-written responses. Others, including audio feedback via voice recordings, or audio visual feedback using screencasts, move away from text-on-page and take on aural forms. I examine the promises and limitations of modalities of feedback to student writing, scrutinizing if and how different modalities can either encourage certain best practices of responding to student or possibly make adhering to such practices difficult. Furthermore, I scrutinize two underlying assumptions that complicate the current scholarship on modalities of response: digital access and literacies and second language learners.

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Modalities of Responding to Student Writing: How the Medium Shapes the Message

by
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A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the
degree of

Master of Arts

Presented June 10, 2014
Commencement June 2014

Master of Arts thesis of Sarah E. Mosser presented on
June 10, 2014

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Sarah E. Mosser, Author

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many people who deserve so much thanks for the completion of this thesis. My sincerest thanks go out to Sara Jameson, my tireless thesis advisor who probably read this thesis just about as many times as I did. So many of the ideas in this thesis were fully realized and shaped during our long discussions and meetings. Her guidance and unwavering support have assisted me tremendously through this process, and her attention to detail could not have been more valued. She is a true scholar, and I am honored to have worked with her.

I also owe a great deal of debt to Ehren Plugfelder, who is not only a member of my committee but also led a Thesis Writers Group for many of us going through this process. It was in those meetings that I was able to explore my ideas most freely and receive overwhelmingly positive support and advice that pushed me along. The entirety of Chapter 5 was realized in one of these meetings, and my thesis would be much lacking without the support and intellectual stimulus this group provided.

Thank you also to Vicki Tolar Burton, whose extensive knowledge and reading suggestions acted as a springboard to many of the ideas that I developed early on in my thinking and writing. Her time and energies acting as a committee member are much appreciated.

I am grateful to Courtney Campbell who has so graciously offered his time in acting as the Graduate School's representative on this committee.

I extend the most heartfelt thanks to all the writer's in the Thesis Writers Group. Chad Iwertz, Gail Cole, Summer Wimberly, and Jillian Clark have listened to me vent, ramble, complain, and exclaim more than anyone should ever have to. Their encouragement pushed me to stretch my mind and my writing in ways that proved invaluable to my thesis work.

Lastly, I need to thank my husband and best friend, Brent Mosser. His support and unwavering faith ultimately pushed me to succeed. It was his hard work that allowed me the time and energy for this thesis to be written, and for that, I cannot thank him enough.

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Preface

This thesis looks at responding practices for instructors and the ways in which instructors respond to student writing in higher education. It considers different ways in which teachers respond, including hand-written comments, typed endnote comments, typed margin comments, audio comments on an audio device, audio comments inserted into the typed paper, and screencasting advanced software including Camtasia, Jing etc. It considers current understandings of “best practices” of responding to student writing, and then examines how different forms of responding can encourage or discourage the use of those best practices. It also examines the student population and discusses possible student perceptions and reception to comments in each form of response.

Responding to student writing may be one of the most daunting tasks facing writing instructors. Commenting on stacks of essays each term is time consuming, and though instructors may spend more time and effort responding to student writing than on other aspects of teaching, there is little research that indicates how individual comments or commenting styles affects student writing after the student leaves the classroom. Teacher feedback provides the opportunity for response to be tailored to the individual student, and as such, is a fundamental aspect of teaching writing, and yet, there are still numerous questions and discussions on multiple aspects of responding, including modalities of response. As such, many articles in the field of responding to student writing focus on “best practices” derived from a teacher’s experience, general intuition, or anecdotal evidence. The limited quantitative studies that have been systematically conducted have reported on typical commenting styles (i.e. marginal comments vs end comments, positive remarks vs corrections, questions vs commands etc), or on the attitude of the

student when they receive comments – what the student believes to be helpful or not helpful. Studies on short-term effects of commenting have also been conducted, discovering whether students incorporate teacher suggestions and how that improves (or decreases) the quality of writing on any particular essay, and may even track the student's progress throughout a course. Though responding to student writing seems to be a site of many questions and uncertainties in the teaching process, there certainly have been a set of accepted, tried-and-true principles that carry over throughout the decades of exploring this phenomenon.

Furthermore, though many (but certainly not all) writing instructors (or instructors teaching a class that includes essay components) painstakingly go through each paper, reflecting on which comments will be most beneficial for the students, and what might be best left unsaid, there is little research on whether teachers seem to consider the effect of form, or medium, by which those comments are transmitted. Will they use auditory comments? Written or typed comments? Face-to-face conferences? How do instructors decide? Do instructors choose a modality based on what is easiest for them rather than what they think has the best effect on students? Or maybe do instructors choose based on what they received when they were students? Even in online classes, instructors have a choice between auditory, screencast, or typed responses.

The intellectual focus of responding to student papers is a widely discussed topic; there are many best practices articles and books that examine the content of the message, but the physicality of responding to student writing, the literalness of how the comments physically leave the teacher and physically reach the student is much less discussed, leaving us to speculate on how it matters. Many “best practices” articles and essays on responding to student writing (Sommers, Elbow, Straub, Breach, White, Murray) do not mention the modality of the message,

or may mention modality in passing. Sometimes, modality can just be assumed to be handwriting based on comments like “scribbled in the margins” (Sommers x) “the teacher’s red pen” (White 51), or similar remarks that can be found scattered throughout research and discussions. In the earlier research on feedback, of course, little attention was paid to modality of response simply due to technological constraints; handwritten responses were, up until just a few decades ago, one of the only reasonable forms of responses (I say “one of” because, technologically speaking, audio responses have been possible throughout the range of most of the research I am examine). In more contemporary research, this lack of attention seems to imply that form does not affect content, and that *what* is said is more important than *how* it is said, or what form that *what* takes. I would like to question that assumption. I want to consider different forms of responding to student writing and examine whether and how these forms can affect the content, the perception, or the reception and implementation of written feedback.

Key terms include responding, feedback, student writing, forms of feedback, method of feedback, best practices, formative feedback, and summative feedback. When I use “responding,” I am talking about the process of responding to student writing in general, whereas “feedback” is the physical product of the response that the students receive. I have decided to use “modality” to discuss the way in which the feedback is presented, whether it be handwritten, typed, spoken as audio only, or presented as an audiovisual form etc. Originally, I began using the word “mode” for this idea, but I came to learn that “modes” is already a loaded term in the composition field, referring to different types of essays (narrative, expository, argumentative etc). Therefore, I used “modality,” which I later discovered is being used in contemporary studies.

I also use interchangeable terms to describe the form of feedback that includes both audio as well as visual elements. This modality uses screencasting software, and sometimes is just referred to as “screencasting,” but is also called “audio visual feedback,” “veedback” (short for video feedback,” or “video feedback”). All of these terms refer to the same modality of feedback that will be further discussed and explained in Chapter 2. I chose to use the terms interchangeably as there has yet to be a consensus on a unifying term for the field, and I want to indicate that these are all terms being found in the research as of now.

In the winter of 2013, I took ENG 595, Language, Technology, and Culture, with Professor Ehren Pflugfelder, at Oregon State University. Course texts included books such as *The Digital Divide* and *The Medium is the Massage*. I had been thinking a lot about how different mediums could affect the message, how the medium affects perception, and how the medium affects what is allowed, or able, to be said and what is not. I had been wondering about reading through different mediums; for example, do we read differently when we have a print book in our hands than when we are scrolling down a computer screen? If so, how? And then how does that change the message (or how we interpret the message)? How does that change our perception of the piece, maybe its professionalism, or its length, or the competency of the writer? I furthermore wondered, and this has become an aspect that I examine in this thesis, how the medium (or in the terms of this thesis, modality) shapes and forms the message.

The next term, I began ENG 512 with Professor Lisa Ede. Responding to student writing was a major theme of the course. Though we discussed best practices in depth, I couldn’t help but wonder if the way in which the comments were written, or delivered, mattered. I began to notice that a lot of the course text regarding responding to student writing did not consider modality (though much of the text, *A Sourcebook for Responding to Student Writing*, was most

likely complied before computer-mediated responses may have been practical in the classroom). However, Chris Anson's chapter "Talking About Text: The Use of Recorded Commentary in Response to Student Writing" intrigued me. I wondered if using recorded commentary *made* him, in some "medium is the message" sort of way, comment differently than he would were he writing his comments. I wondered if the message itself changed (as opposed to maybe only the perception of the message) due to the modality.

While I was thinking about these ideas, I noticed that in one class, I was turning my papers in electronically and receiving feedback electronically. In the other class, I was submitting physical papers and receiving handwritten comments. I wondered whether I read those comments differently. I wondered what effect those two types of comments had on my perceptions of the instructors and what they were trying to communicate to me. I wondered what the instructors were more or less inclined to say, or even able to say, through the medium and the restrictions or opportunities it offers. Though there are many "best practices" of responding to student writing that I was slowly beginning to become aware of, none of them concerned themselves with the physicality of commenting on student papers.

In addition, I thought it rather strange that though all student academic composing is expected to be word-processed, there is no such expectation for teacher comments. I'm interested in the power dynamics this represents in the classroom. Mary Louise Pratt describes this phenomenon in "Arts of the Contact Zone," particularly when she discusses classroom hierarchies. Contact Zones, according to Pratt, are the proximities in which "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other," and almost inherently, they represent asymmetrical relations of power (33). We assume that the "situation [of the classroom] is governed by a single set of rules or norms that is shared by all participants" that then produces an orderly and coherent exchange

(38-39). Yet in this system, one entity holds power and exercises authority while another either submits to or questions that authority, and “legitimacy is defined from the point of view of the party in authority” (39). In the classroom, “legitimacy” is defined by the teacher- what is a legitimate utterance, exchange, action, topic, paper etc. Teachers hold the power.

In the composition classroom, a legitimate paper follows MLA format – typed, 12 pt font, Times New Romans, 1 inch margin, double spaced, page number in the top right hand corner, last name top right hand corner, and heading on the first page, top left corner. A legitimate paper consists of complete sentences and coherent, developed ideas. However, there are no such stipulations for teacher response. Teachers exercise the authority, and are not being “told” how to respond to student writing. Therefore, teacher comments can be sprawled incoherently across the page. They not only don’t have to be full sentences, but also don’t even have to be complete words (awk. frag etc.). Yet such responses are considered legitimate because they emanate from the party in power.

Typed papers formatted very specifically aid the teacher in understanding what the student is trying to say. They can physically read the paper. There is room in the margins or between lines to write comments if necessary. By contrast, what formats help students understand what the teacher is trying to say? Because the format of teacher response surely matters to the student’s comprehension, it could prove beneficial to discuss the implications, benefits, and drawbacks of utilizing different forms of response to student writing, and how such techniques can aid the student, can provide clear teaching moments for students.

Furthermore, I think this topic is practical. Teachers in all disciplines spend hours and hours responding to student writing. Why not explore which methods or ways of responding to student writing can be more beneficial to students than others? If this task of responding is taking

so much time and effort, it seems as if every teacher could be vested in making sure their students get the most out of such a great expense of time and energy. Compositionists would only benefit from constantly seeking to make it worth our while, and one way this can be done is by discussing, analyzing, and researching how students respond to different forms of feedback, what is helpful (or what is not helpful), and why.

When I first conceived of this project, I was mainly focusing on hand-written versus typed feedback. Hand-written feedback has been the overwhelming norm of feedback type that I have traditionally received, and it has only been within the past two or three years that I have received any kind of typed feedback, sometimes getting a hybrid of the two (written margin comments and typed summative comments). Only two teachers throughout my history of learning have provided fully typed comments, both utilizing the Microsoft Word “comments” feature to provide comments in the margins, and then a typed summative response at the end of the paper. Though I knew that audio responses existed, they simply did not seem prevalent enough to deserve serious attention.

However, when I began to dig into research of responding to student writing, I began to wonder if maybe my experience has been an anomaly. Articles on audio feedback date back to the 1960s and audio responding is a widely discussed topic. It seemed then, that leaving a major modality out would not be appropriate. Furthermore, considering audio feedback in this thesis allows for an approach that takes more factors into consideration. While hand-written and typed responses are both a visual form of response, solidified and accessible in print, audio feedback encompasses dynamics completely different and unique, allowing for discussions on learning styles, the transient nature of the spoken word, etc. Furthermore, audio feedback could broaden the discussion on student perception and reception of feedback. Does hearing the teacher’s voice

and tone affect how the student perceives and respond to the feedback differently than if the feedback were written?

Throughout my research, I was also introduced to responding styles and forms that I never even knew were possible, forms that very well might be the future of responding. These too seemed necessary to include in this thesis, as scholarly research is just now emerging. I learned about utilizing online tools and software that allow for a digital screen capture of the student writing as well as the teacher's audio commentary and visual mark-ups. Though this dynamic form of responding certainly has not become mainstream, there is enough discussion and research on this method to warrant consideration in this thesis. Furthermore, by diving deeper into the realms of how technology can aid in responding to student writing, discussions on the digital divide and technological literacy become more well-rounded and relevant.

There are, however, widely used and discussed methods of feedback that are not included in the scope of this thesis. Though rubrics, for example, can be incredibly valuable in assessing a paper, they do not necessarily represent personal teacher feedback in the way that is conceived as "feedback" in this thesis. Rubrics are more of an assessment tool rather than a responding method or style, and often times, rubrics accompany more in-depth teacher response. Sometimes short comments or even paragraphs might be written or typed on the bottom of the rubric, and these could fall into the category of end-comments to a paper. Additional comments to rubrics, then, would be seen as "feedback" and would be discussed as whichever modality they utilize. Furthermore, peer responses are also not being discussed in this thesis, only instructor generated

response, though peer responses through various modalities could also be a fruitful line of future research.¹

My study also does not include computer-generated response, though this is certainly an important topic that warrants investigation and scholarly attention. This thesis is limited to *teacher* feedback and *teacher* response. Though computers and digital software have been utilized in some disciplines to grade and respond to student writing, that is simply outside the scope of this thesis.

The types of courses that fall under the scope of this thesis are not merely limited to composition courses, but include research on any courses in which instructors find themselves responding to writing. Some studies that proved incredibly valuable were not focused on composition classrooms but rather examined law classes, engineering classes, and many more. Additionally, some research moved out of the “brick and mortar” classroom and considered responding to student writing in online classes. Such studies are considered in this thesis as there are still significant choices to be made when considering modality of response (though hand-written responses are much less likely and made more difficult, there are still options for text-on-page responses as well as both audio and audio visual feedback). Therefore, I tended to avoid differentiating between research for classroom only and research for online only, as the overall topic is responding to student writing, a task that can be done in multiple environments.

Furthermore, there are a number of significant and related issues that fall under the scope of this thesis. An issue that I believe must be addressed is that of the digital divide, and I discuss digital access and literacies in Chapter 1 when I look at computer-mediated feedback in general.

¹ Though this thesis only examines the modalities of instructor generated feedback, Chris Anson is currently conducting research regarding peer feedback across modalities. His research is forthcoming.

Though significant changes have been made in the last decades to ensure that computers are accessible to students, there is still a discrepancy between the haves and have-nots that may come into play with digital response tools. Furthermore, there is a general perception of a gap between “digital natives” and “digital immigrants,” or even between people from different socio-economic backgrounds whose comfort and experience in using a computer is limited and minimal. Yet the assumption that today’s students are “digital natives” and can therefore figure out any technology is itself problematic and open to critique. Digital responses, then, will be more of an obstacle to some students than others, regardless of the steps that have been taken to reduce this gap. Furthermore, some teachers might be unable to sufficiently utilize the technology necessary to compose digital responses, and the time they would need to invest into learning such skills might not be feasible.

I understand this digital gap first-hand. As an undergraduate student, I lived off campus, did not have a car, and could not afford internet access at my home. I relied on buses and friends to get to and from school every day, so it was not always possible for me to use the computer lab to submit or receive my papers. I could frequent coffee shops or cafes that I could walk to (sometimes in the pouring rain), but that would usually require the purchase of an item, which was not always possible. During that year, digital submissions and responses were an incredible burden that put me at a disadvantage based on my income. Situations like this can be taken into consideration when discussing forms of responses. I am very aware that I’m not the only student who has ever gone through this sort of hardship, and my experience may be more common than some research on modalities of response may recognize. With this in mind, I discuss digital access and digital literacies as factors that are an important aspect to the conversation of modalities of feedback.

Lastly, I think it would be simply egregious not to take second language learners into special consideration. Second language learners have unique needs that vary from native speakers, and as such, practices are not always going to be identical between the two groups. This is becoming increasingly apparent as the numbers of international, immigrant, bilingual, and refugee students continue to increase dramatically in colleges and universities across the nation. Classrooms are no longer the homogenous, monolingual space they once were, and though this change to greater diversity has been steady and predictable, teaching practices do not seem to change to reflect this reality. As such, some responding practices that might be beneficial to a native speaker, might be not helpful, and may even be detrimental, to a second language learner. While the focus of this thesis is not on second language learners specifically, any discussion of teaching practices, I believe, would be remiss not to reflect and take into consideration the multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and heterogeneous space of the contemporary classroom. I think this is merely the responsibility of any teacher, to teach to the entire class, not just the majority (even the privileged majority). I believe that any pedagogy that leaves a portion of the population out needs to be re-examined and re-evaluated. Therefore, a discussion of second-language learners and modalities of response is covered in Chapter 3.

When I first conceived of this thesis, I hoped to do an IRB study of student and teacher perceptions of different modalities of responses. In this way, I would be able to investigate first-hand questions of access and digital literacies, as well as include second language learners as well, because Oregon State University is partnered with an English Language Program (INTO OSU), whose graduates often proceed to mainstream courses at Oregon State. However, this was not feasible due to the general timing of getting such a study approved, accomplished, and then written up as a thesis. This thesis, then, relies on research and studies conducted by others, and

also includes articles and book chapters that present on “best practices” or personal findings of instructors.

Throughout this thesis, I will be looking at conversations surrounding platforms and modalities of responding to student writing, and these conversations are taking place in many different arenas and forums, from scholarly empirical research, to published articles describing an instructor’s personal experiences, to listserv emails. There is a limited, but increasingly emerging, amount of research on the topic of response modalities, many projects either focusing on one specific modality of response, or comparing two modalities of responses against each other (for example, some research compares audio to written feedback, or screencasting to written feedback etc.). My thesis will focus on the modalities most discussed in the available and accessible literature, as there are many, many ways of responding to students through the varied technological options available at our fingertips. Though these modalities may likely soon be replaced by more “cutting-edge options,” the questions at hand and the call to critically examine a form of response will remain true, and hopefully this thesis will offer useful guidelines even as the technological landscape continues to evolve and multi-media opportunities expand in ways we cannot yet conceive.

Modalities of Responding to Student Writing: How the Medium Shapes the Message

Introduction

On October 9, 2013, a request for help was distributed to writing instructors across the nation:

What do you use for responding to students texts electronically? I'm having a hard time find the right tool that I can use on Mac or Windows and that displays the comments in the same way across platforms (including on tablets). I need some suggestions.

-Traci (Gardner).

The question of how to respond to student writing is huge. The modality of response, the form the response takes, and the medium through which the response flows, plays an extensive and integral part in the shaping and reception of the response itself in many practical ways. The issue is tied up in technology and programming platforms, student accessibility, digital literacies, digital access, language skills, instructor time, instructor training, and so much more. The topic of responding to student writing has been fundamentally and systematically addressed for decades in the field of composition studies, with numerous contributions in various fields outside of composition studies as well, including law, engineering, education, educational computing research, and more. However, with the ever-changing landscape of technology, the conversation has altered significantly over the decades, and new modalities and research is surfacing that offer exciting new paradigms of response made possible by new modalities.

Today's technological landscape allows for many possibilities in responding to student writing. Some of these options mimic the handwritten option that has been utilized for decades (and that is still largely in effect; I personally am receiving some handwritten feedback in my graduate studies courses). Options like Microsoft Word's "comment" feature allows for comments to be inserted in the margin, similar to if the instructor were writing out the comments. The text-on-page option has been digitized. Other options move beyond text-on page, including audio responses and online screencasting, or "veedback," that is, video feedback. These modalities allow the instructor to move past the linear and sometimes rote form of text-on-page to create a response that wouldn't have been possible just a few decades previous. However, with many options available, the field could revisit the discussion of responding to student feedback, examining what new modalities of response allow us to do, as well as their limits and drawbacks.

Though this thesis focuses on the scholarly articles and research concerning modalities and feedback, I want to begin with an examination of a more public and informal conversation – a greatly frustrated instructor who has tried almost everything in her toolbox to respond to student papers and has hit dead end after dead end. Maybe this instructor is alone in her sentiments, but I doubt that is the case. Most likely, there are many instructors who face the same technological obstacles and concerns. Traci's comment highlights some of the issues this thesis will examine at length, and displays the painstaking effort it sometimes takes to navigate the waters of the many modalities of responding to student writing in a sea of so many options. Traci's question was sent out

on tech-rhet listserv (an email based discussion group among members of a common field or interest), seeking advice from other instructors to relieve some of her frustrations when dealing with technology to respond to student writing:

“I used Track Changes in Word in class and students looked at me as I would look at someone trying to explain nuclear reactors with an orange and a sharpie. I tried annotating PDFs with Preview on Mac, but the comments didn't show up consistently or well when I opened them in Acrobat Reader. So I switched to annotating PDFs with the tools in Acrobat. I found when I did student conferences though that many students couldn't get to the annotations at all. They just saw some highlighted text. I then tried typing all comments in text boxes in Acrobat. That seems to show up no matter what PDF reader and platform students have, but it's tedious and I can't seem to do it properly on Mac, only on Windows (which limits where and when I can grade).

I'm frustrated greatly. How can we have been responding to students' work online for so many years and the process is still so eccentric? How is it no one (not even a publisher) has created a plug-in, add-in or stamp set for Word and for Acrobat to help streamline the process? I want to believe there's some great solution and there that I just haven't heard of, but I have searched and can't seem to find an answer. All in all, I keep finding myself thinking, "Why am I struggling with this? It would be so much easier to just write on paper." But I'm a bleeding edge

technoteacher.... There has to be a way to grade online that works.

(Gardner)

Two key frustrations Traci encounters are the ease (or in her case lack of) of responding and navigating the digital platforms of response, as well as the students' access to the response and comments themselves. She notes that sometimes, comments do not carry over from platform to platform, an issue of digital accessibility. Students use both PC and Mac computers. The software and operating system that the instructor uses to create comments changes the way other platforms or software can (or cannot) access and display the comments. Students who use Macs may experience problems when their instructor uses a PC, and vice versa. These issues will be discussed more in-depth in Chapter 1.

Though many respondents shared their own practices with Traci, there was hardly a "streamlined," or standard represented in the comments. Traci's evaluation of the process as "eccentric" despite the number of years this technology has been around seems spot-on. The number of options can be overwhelming. Yet though Traci yearns for a tried-and-true "streamlined" approach, there are great benefits to the sheer quantity of modalities, platforms, software, and methods of responding to student writing.

Each teacher, whether thoughtfully or not, has found their own method of grading and responding that works for them on some basic level, including teachers who handwrite comments. The massive response to Traci's query is encouraging: many instructors are thoughtfully and carefully choosing methods of response. The copious comments and suggestions on the listserv indicates that many instructors are critically

considering the medium they use to communicate their feedback. The top concerns appear to be ease of accessing and manipulating the response on the student's end as well. Many decisions as to the modality of feedback not only mention the ease of the selected feedback for the students to access, but also discuss problems that students may have accessing other platforms of digital response, including issues of formatting between PCs and Macs. One tool for responding to student papers that I have never considered, but that came up in the listserv, is grading on a tablet. Certainly tablets have some practical benefits over a laptop or desktop, notably portability, but I was not aware that teachers were engaging with student papers on a tablet.

Yet the demographic of the listserv is limited, and it's possible that instructors who use more traditional methods, including hand writing on hard copies of student papers, may not have participated in the conversation at all. This thesis, then, will examine many of the modalities that are mentioned in the listserv, moving beyond the casual email conversation to dig into scholarly research and studies centered on modalities of response. Many of these studies consider student preference between two different modalities of response (Lourdes, Riki and Lee, Matheison, Ice et al., Kim, Silva). Other articles discuss practical benefits to certain modalities, considering issues of time and energy in crafting the response (Sommers, Baron, Anson, Barnett, Cope et al).

While this thesis will consider aspects of computer-mediated response, as well as specifically audio responses and screencasting, it may also prove beneficial to build on previous research and understandings of responding in general, to draw from the canon of "best practices" of response that composition studies has depended on for decades. A

review of basic tenets of the “best practices” of responding to student writing could prove invaluable to the evaluation of modalities and the examination of what they can offer, and where they are limited. A brief discussion of the purposes, philosophies, and practices of responding to student writing, then, can act as a platform for later analysis and evaluation of research and practices regarding modalities of feedback. For example, auditory response is generally viewed as being able to better respond to global, rather than local, comments when compared to written feedback (Bilbro, Iluzada, Clark). However it’s only through an understanding of philosophies and practices regarding global versus local comments that such a feature of audio responses could be evaluated in any given circumstance. Likewise, an understanding of generally accepted purposes and goals of feedback can allow for modalities of feedback to be similarly better evaluated and analyzed.

Therefore, the rest of this chapter focuses on a brief literature review of some of the major understandings in the Composition field of the purposes and goals of feedback, as well as overarching tenets of the “best practices” of responding. The “best practices” that I have chosen to discuss are those championed by many of the biggest names in the discussion of responding to student feedback (Knoblauch, Brannon, White, N. Sommers), whose articles and research are included in major publications on the topic. While this will not be an exhaustive discussion on response (such a discussion has been housed in entire books), I at least aim to provide a summary of the major points of general understandings and accepted practices.

A primary purpose of writing classes in general, and therefore the end object (ideally) of response to student writing is the idea of “transfer.” Christiane Donahue, in “Transfer, Portability, Generalization: (How) Does Composition Expertise ‘Carry’?” borrows her definition of transfer from Joanne Lobato, defining it as, “the personal creation of relations of similarity ... [or] how the new situation is connected with the thinker’s trace of a previous situation” (Lobato qtd. in Donahue 146). Donahue goes on to describe transfer further, adding to the definition that the connection made “enables something learned to be used anew” (146). Transfer, then, can be seen as carrying the experiences and lessons learned in the composition classroom to all other aspects of learning, to future writing assignments in different classes that are in different fields. She goes further to remind us that, “We want students – considering most of our outcomes statements – to learn strategies, processes, values, rhetorical flexibility, and linguistic knowledge not just for topic-specific gain but expressly for broader transfer, for use in new contexts” (146). The writing classroom is not a world in itself, but a springboard for writing as a way to learn in any discipline, environment, and context.

The goal of responding to student writing, then, is not merely to improve a paper for its own sake, but to help students internalize the rhetorical moves and devices that makes a paper successful and to utilize those devices in their future writing. Edward White, in *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teachers’ Guide* acknowledges that,

Writers, (like all learners) improve when they can internalize evaluation – when they can themselves see what needs to be changed and how to make

those changes. Conversely, if the draft is truly finished (and very few are), the writer needs to see just where its excellences lie so that they can be repeated. (50)

White's focus on internalization is on improving the writer, not the text. When feedback is internalized, the writer can carry their newly acquired realizations and lessons to the next paper, the next class. The goal is to perpetuate good writing into other classrooms and fields. To make a good *writer*, not just a good paper. If transfer is the end objective, then a more immediate purpose could be "internalization" – to provide feedback that the writer is able to internalize and call up in other contexts and situations.

In her article, "Ideas in Practice: Developmental Writers' Attitudes Toward Audio and Written Feedback," S. Sipple notes that even in the best-case scenario, when comments are both read and understood/interpreted correctly, and positive revision may result from the feedback, there remains the process of internalizing the feedback to integrate into subsequent writing (22). This aspect of *internalizing* is certainly slippery. How can internalization be studied or demonstrated? How can research indicate whether or not comments have been internalized? Though the subject matter seems subjective and elusive, Sipple's point is nonetheless critical to engage with and consider when choosing a modality of response to student writing, as internalization could debatably even be the overarching goal of feedback in the first place – a phenomena that would extend beyond the individual sentence, paragraph, or paper and truly transform the writer and affect subsequent drafts.

Sipple's attention to internalization makes explicit what may be implied on the listserv: that beyond considerations of time or digital access, the most pressing consideration regarding responding to student writing is whether the feedback lends itself to internalization – a question that must take into account both form and content. For feedback to be internalized, it must not only be presented through a medium that may resonate with the student, or be easily understood and interpreted by the student, but it must also present content that affects the way students perceive of their writing, that lends itself to teach and change the student writing, allowing growth and evolution.

In this vein, the research into responding to student writing throughout multiple platforms and mediums would benefit from moving beyond mere questions of ease, accessibility, and time consumption, and consider how each medium can lend itself to support what is recognized as best practices in the field of composition studies. When I say best practices, I mean the “tried and true” principles of responding that now seem so obvious, they are almost unquestioned. Of course, each practice can be problematized, and further questions and examinations can take place in light of growing diversity and changes among the student population, as well as technology, as we will see in this thesis. These best practices are represented throughout the literature and research of responding to student writing from the past four to five decades, and they are now the basis for “responding 101” type literature. What follows is a brief overview of research into three main issues in responding: not appropriating student text, prioritizing comments (Global and Local) and not overcommenting, and being specific in comments.

It's not entirely uncommon to still note instructors refer to commenting as "correcting." Something along the lines of "I have to go home and correct a bunch of papers tonight" can still, occasionally, be heard, and the idea of responding as correcting, editing, and fixing has not yet completely died off. This problem of "appropriation" is the key to Lil Brannon and C.H. Knoblauch's landmark essay "On Students' Rights to Their Own Texts: A Model of Teacher Response." They argue that too often, teachers assume control over the writer's text, "feeling perfectly free to 'correct' [choices] any time an apprentice deviates from the teacher- reader's conception of what the text 'ought' to be doing" (118). As such, it is the teacher, not the student, who is determining the message, content, and form of the writing. Such a tactic not only robs the author of authority, but it also can diminish the student's motivation and their commitment to their ideas and incentive to write (119). That is, according to Knoblauch and Brannon, to "correct" a text is to assume control over the text, control that, they argue, belongs to the author, in this case, the student.

Knoblauch and Brannon suggest that teachers hold an "Ideal Text," to which they expect student writing to conform. Any deviations from this Ideal Text are errors, which need to be corrected. They assert that "Teaching from the vantage point of the Ideal Text is paternalistic: the teacher 'knows best,' knows what the writer should do and how it should be done, and feels protective because his or her competence is superior to that of the writer" (119). They argue, however, that such a view limits not only the authority of the student over their own message, but also compromises the teacher's ability to recognize legitimate and diverse ways of communication.

A teacher's perhaps unconscious or well intentioned tendency to appropriate student text can be harmful and damaging in many ways. Geraldine DeLuca in *Dialogue on Writing: Rethinking ESL, Basic Writing, and First-Year Composition*, reminds us that such appropriation affects the writer's confidence, their motivation to take risks, as well as their own sense of authority over the message they wish to communicate (244). She maintains that,

Although the impulse for writing may never be completely disconnected from audience, in the freshman writing class particularly, students' power to make their own choices and get away with them are often severely abbreviated by teacher's correcting pen. They know they are writing for us... Most of the time, they're trying to give us what we want. (243)

DeLuca's argument reminds us that students do not enter our classrooms as blank slates, but rather, as students who have learned to respond to writing teachers already – who are preemptively trying to write for the Ideal Text that they know the teacher envisions, and therefore, the student's message is already abbreviated, possibly already appropriated before the correcting pen ever hits the paper.

Brannon and Knoblauch describe the features and characteristics of an Ideal Text, in their essay "Responding to Texts: Facilitating Revision in the Writing Workshop."

They contend that

Generally speaking, the hobby-horse of writing teachers is prose decorum, the propriety of discourse extending from its technical features to its

formal appearances and even to its intellectual content as a display of approved ideas in conventional relationship to each other. (253)

Here, the value of meaning is minimal, hearkening to a view of rhetoric as primarily eloquence and style, the language of the elite and powerful. The rhetorical goal, or purpose, exhibited by appropriated writing with such an Ideal Text in mind, is not to view writing as the making of meaning, but rather to view writing as the dress of meaning, an attire that is more important and requires more attention than the meaning itself.

Knoblauch and Brannon further complicate this practice of appropriating students' texts so they align to an Ideal by arguing that such forms and methods of appropriation violate basic tenets of communication. They premise that "people cannot communicate unless they first strive to accommodate each other's points of view and decide on a shared basis for talk" (Responding 252). They then delineate the discrepancy between this basic aspect of communication and what too often happens in the writing classroom, arguing that

when reading student writing, teachers ignore writers' intentions and meanings in favor of their own agendas, so that what students are attempting to say has remarkable little to do with what teachers are looking for, and therefore little bearing on what they say in comments on student texts (Responding 252).

Teachers, in this paradigm, are responding to the difference between the student's text and the Ideal text, rather than responding to the student's text. Furthermore, the priorities facilitated by such a response – prose decorum, technical features, and formal appearance

– bear little to no relationship to the message that the students are attempting to communicate, a message that, presumably, is the student’s primary concern and purpose for writing.¹

Teachers can easily assume this control and authority based on the power structures of the classroom. They are the “masters;” students are the “apprentices.” However, Knoblauch and Brannon argue that effective communication cannot work in this paradigm. Instead, they assert that “communication, or dialogue, is a democratic act: both sides get to score points” (253).

So then what is the best practice, the suggested way to *not* appropriate text? Knoblauch and Brannon suggest what they call a “facilitative response.” A facilitative response, unlike appropriation, does not seek merely to “judge” writing, but

to offer perceptions of uncertainty, incompleteness, unfulfilled promises, unrealized opportunities, as motivation for more writing and therefore more learning about a subject as well as more successful communication of whatever has been learned. (Responding 257)

In “On Students' Rights to Their Own Texts: A Model of Teacher Response,” they describe this as focusing “not on the distance between text and some teacher’s personal notion of its most ideal version, but rather on the disparity between what the writer wanted to communicate and what the choices residing in the text actually causes readers

¹ Of course, arguing that aspects of writing such as prose decorum, technical features, and formal appearance have little or no relationship to the message of the text may be dated given today’s multi modal world in which technical features have a huge impact on the meaning and on the audience. However, in the context of a linear, text-on-page essay, the spirit of Knoblauch and Brannon’s point can still be appreciated.

to understand” (Students’ Rights 161). In this model, the teacher acts as a sounding-board, drawing the writer’s attention to both intention and effect, showing the effect of their rhetorical choices, and enabling writers to consider alternatives or recognize discrepancies (Students’ Rights 162).

As I will discuss further in Chapter 3, modalities of response can play an integral part in possibly perpetuating appropriation (by making such insertions and deletions easy) or hindering appropriation (by making such changes difficult). For example, it’s possible that appropriation is most facilitated by using a computer-mediated word processing software (such as Microsoft Word), where the instructor can literally delete entire passages and rewrite them, either in the margins or in the text of the paper. This of course could be done with pen and paper as well, crossing sections out and rewriting either in the margins or between lines (though practically speaking, hand-writing would be more laborious and therefore it’s possibly that lengthy additions or rewritings would be less tempting). Audio responses, however, naturally make it difficult to “rewrite” text. An instructor could, at best, describe how they would write a section differently, but that rewriting would still have to be internalized, processed, and then written by the student. While the act of speaking revisions could cross the line from coaching to appropriating, the nature of audio responses would make that more difficult than text-on-page modalities. This will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

Fixing every “mistake” is one way appropriation can happen, and prioritizing comments, then, is a leading practice to curb appropriation. Prioritizing comments is one feature that marks a facilitative response. The practice of prioritizing comments is linked

with the question of global versus local concerns. Teachers' beliefs about the nature of global or local concerns and their perceived responsibility to address local "errors" versus higher order concerns such as content and organization will determine how, and possibly how frequently, instructors will comment on student writing.

An instructor who believes it is their job to edit a paper, to fix every mistake so that the end product is "error" free, will more likely make more numerous comments, addressing each error and grammatical mistake within sight. A teacher, however, who believes that more broad and encompassing concerns, such as conception, organization, and argument, come first, will more likely (in theory) comment less on grammatical errors and focus more attention on the unfixed, still fluctuating global features of the text. Nancy Sommers, in her seminal work "Responding to Student Writing," addresses the confusion that can be caused when an instructor responds to *both* global and local concerns simultaneously. She suggests that some instructors may edit a paper as well as address global features, suggesting that the argument be better developed or that matter of organization be attended to (150). Sommers maintains that addressing both global and local concerns simultaneously can send mixed messages: one message says that the meaning is fixed, and merely needs editing. The other message asserts that the piece is unstable, not yet finished. She wonders why a teacher would demand editing when many of the sentences are going to be changed or deleted anyways (150).

This blended style of commenting is quite common and particularly confusing to second language learners. In my work as a writing tutor with international students, I see this style of commenting frequently. As I skim over teachers' comments on students'

papers, I often see questions of organization and conception, pointing out ideas that are not developed, addressing major organization concerns, or asserting that there are logical discrepancies that need to be addressed. The paper will need major revisions, and much of the text will probably not be carried over to the next draft but will be significantly altered. Yet, next to these global comments, the teacher often copy-edits the paper, marking between the lines with editing abbreviations (sometimes abbreviations such as “frag” or “T” for “tense,” and sometimes with numbers that correspond to a common error: 1=punctuation, 2=tense, 3=word choice etc.). As Sommers notes, the student receives a mixed message – one that the paper needs to be largely reconceived and the content needs to be dramatically altered, added to, and modified, and another message that supposes the text is fixed and needs to be edited. Many students, then, in their revisions, focus on grammatical editing and correcting, instead of addressing the major concerns of global content.²

Prioritizing comments allows a teacher to consider which aspect of composition should most readily be addressed in any specific stage of the writing process: How do they want their students to focus their attention, on small, mechanical errors, or on the large scope and development of the paper? The answer to this question reveals that point of focus for the teacher’s commentary.

²² Many times, however, an instructor might want to point out a grammatical error as a pattern for the student to pay attention to in later drafts. This, I would say, is different than line-by-line editing. Focusing on one grammar point at a time could be a reasonable way to mediate the tension between feeling the need to teach grammatical competency (whether to fulfill class objectives or simply to prepare the student for other writing in which grammatical accuracy is necessary, such as for other classes, or as job preparation) and the recognition that content and organization are still “higher order” concerns that most affect the message the student is conveying.

The problem of responding to mechanical errors before the global is also addressed by Edward White, in *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide*. White asks the critical question: “What is the point of marking careless mechanical errors on drafts that will be revised or that are not designed for a demanding audience?” (52). Instead, he maintains that comments on early drafts would best be reserved, “primarily [for] the conception and organization of the paper,” and goes on to contend that, “Premature editing is the enemy of revision; some writers pay so much attention to spelling and punctuation that they neglect to attend to what they are saying” (54). In the same vein, some teachers pay so much attention to spelling and punctuation that they neglect to attend to what is actually being said.

Furthermore, neglecting to prioritize comments, and simply marking every slight error within sight leads to overcommenting, a practice that easily overwhelms students, leaving them ill-motivated to revise at all, and too often, unsure of where to focus the revisions. Nancy Sommers portrays the consequences of overcommenting when she warns that, “Research on responding confirms that overcommenting does more harm than good” (4). She explains that overcommenting quickly leads to overwhelmed and discouraged students, and exhausted teachers (4). Prioritizing comments both gives the student clear direction for realistic and manageable subsequent revisions as well as relieves the teacher of the pressure to “fix” every mistake.

One of the most frustrating teacher comments on a student paper I have ever read is the margin note, “This doesn’t make sense.” I was working with a second language learner on his master’s thesis, a long and complicated piece that intertwined several very

difficult theories and analyzed a lengthy legal situation in light of these theories. So when he got his paper back with “This doesn’t make sense” written at least a dozen times in the margins, he had no idea what to do. The vagueness of the comment left him wondering, “what doesn’t make sense?” Was it the language he used? Did the sentence linguistically or grammatically not make sense? Did his use of a theory not make sense? Maybe he wasn’t applying a theory correctly, or maybe he was using a poor interpretation of a theory. Was it his analysis of the legal situation that was faulty? When the “sense” in writing can be both linguistic and conceptual, saying “this doesn’t make sense” gives the writer little direction for improvement and more often than not leads to a sense of frustration and defeat. Constructive comments are specific. Nancy Sommers maintains that,

Most teachers have a series of commands – *Be specific! Develop more!* – that they place in the margins of student drafts. Although we need some form of shorthand, these comments don’t show a student *why* a paragraph would be strengthened with specific evidence or *how* to analyze evidence to develop claims. (18)

Sommers pushes for comments to focus on the *how* and *why* instead of just the *what*. Comments, Sommers contends, are meant to teach a lesson (19); they are a small moment of the most personalized, individualized teaching we are able to offer in the composition classroom. Comments that are vague, according to Sommers, respond to the *writing*. The student text is vague. The paragraph needs more development. Specific comments, on the other hand, respond to the *writer*. They teach why the text is vague and

how the writer can address the issue. They demonstrate why the paragraph needs more development and provide guidance for revision.

Furthermore, even positive comments could use elaboration, as White reminds us, and he links specific comments with internalization. He contends that “Even vague positive comments (‘Nice work,’ ‘I enjoyed reading this’) frustrate students, who want to know what the teacher found ‘nice’ and what made reading enjoyable” (50). The writer needs to understand what specifically worked well in order to make use of such devices in future papers. For internalization to occur, the student probably needs more than a series of “good” in the margin, or the occasional “nice.” Though these comments are positive reinforcements, they do not teach what is good, or why it is effective.

Specific comments will, inevitably, take more time in the already tedious and cumbersome project of responding. Certainly writing “awk” or “nice” in the margins is faster than explaining how a sentence construction is confusing, or why a piece of evidence was particularly compelling. Time and efficiency are real and practical concerns for teachers, who look for legitimate and necessary shortcuts to make their workload manageable. Yet these longer, more specific comments remind us also to prioritize. A handful of specific, useful comments that teach manageable and clear lessons, can be more valuable, more prone to internalization, as well as more accessible in the revision process, than a hundred vague and unclear comments or markings.

Each of the above best practices for responding to student writing contributes to our discussion and evaluation of modalities of response. In her book, *Responding to Student Writers*, Nancy Sommers provides an example of a teacher writing comments in

the margin of a first year student's paper. Though the teacher may have been well-intentioned, Sommers maintains that the comments come across as "paternalistic" and that they "cast [the student] as a wayward student writer" (3). Sommers concludes that, "It wouldn't matter if these comments were written in red or blue ink, scribbled in pen or typed via Word's comment function; they send [the student] a message that he needs to fix, patch, and correct what his teacher marked" (3). It very well might be true that, despite the modality, comments that do not follow best practices, comments that appropriate, condescend, patronize, or are generally vague and unclear, will probably not be the most effective. They will probably not contribute to the goal of internalization, transfer, and ultimately, would be less likely to create a better *writer*.

Yet in this thesis, I want to look at how the modality *does* contribute to the message in how it shapes the message to begin with. Though Sommers has a valid point, she addresses modality only in passing. She doesn't consider here (though it certainly is not the point she is trying to make in the section, and she briefly discussing modalities as options for varying the style of comments later in the book), that maybe the modality might shape how the teacher comments, that maybe the comments would not have been the same across different modalities. For example, maybe a teacher writing by hand may be more prone to vague, unclear comments than a teacher writing or speaking. On the other hand, maybe a teacher speaking, using audio or screencasting technologies, may be more prone to overcomment, overwhelming the student instead of focusing on a few specific and prioritized points. Maybe the teacher who made short, vague, patronizing

comments in blue ink, scribbled³ across the page, would have been more likely to type more specific and helpful comments had they been working in Word and could type more comments more quickly with less fatigue. Maybe hand written comments are more conducive to vagueness in that sometimes teachers resort to short-hand or abbreviations (frag. awk etc.) to save time. Maybe Word comments, on the other hand, can lead to overcommenting and a lack of prioritizing comments because everything could be marked quickly and with little effort. Maybe audio comments are more likely to focus on global concerns instead of editing issues. Maybe audio comments convey paralinguistic features (tone of voice, intonation) that could easily be interpreted as disappointment, anger, or condescension.

Whether the medium is the message or not, this thesis is built on the premise that the medium at least shapes the message – that we speak differently than we write, and even when we write, that we type differently than we write by hand, or, as Sommers words it, “scribble in the margins” (Sommers *Responding x*)⁴. Modalities may neither require nor prohibit, yet each medium facilitates certain communicative principles, and restricts others.

Yet this thesis is rather multi-faceted. I examine modalities of feedback and scholarship that perpetuates certain modalities, but at the heart of this endeavor, I am concerned about privilege. Every time I approach research that purports any sort of “best

³ When I use “scribble” specifically, I am not necessarily referring to all hand-written comments. Hand-written comments are not problematic in the same way that “scribbled,” or illegible, comments could be. Not all, or not even most, hand-written comments are illegible or scribbled, by any use of the word. Some are, and it’s these comments that I do, at times, want to draw attention to and question.

⁴ Certainly not all teachers “scribble” when they write by hand.

practice,” any sort of one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, I am always asking the same questions: who will be privileged by this approach? What “student” does this author imagine? Who is disadvantaged by this approach? Who is left out of the “imagined” student body?

As I spent my summer reading the great bodies of research on both responding to student writing as well as the modalities this feedback can take, two student populations who could possibly be disadvantaged by uncritical adherence to specific practices or modalities emerged: students without digital access or limited digital literacies, and second language learners. Both groups seemed to be left out of basic assumptions that much of the research did not address: 1) the assumption that students “nowadays” are digital natives. That is, they grew up surrounded by digital technology. They have access to many forms of digital technologies and are comfortable navigating in the digital world. And 2) that second language learners in mainstream classrooms have the same needs and skills, or at the very least, that the specific needs of second language learners, even if they are unique and differ from those of native speakers, do not need to be addressed in mainstream research on modalities or response.

With these tensions in mind, my main goals, then, are as follows. 1) To examine the different modalities of response that are currently available to instructors and are represented in scholarly research. I discuss the advantages and drawbacks to the modalities in light of current understandings of best practices of responding to student writing, as well as practical concerns including time and the availability of software or other necessary technologies. My second goal is 2) to scrutinize the assumption of the

“digital native” and examine issues of digital access and literacy in higher education. I then work to bring this conversation into dialogue with research on modalities of feedback to student writing. And third, 3) to support the claim that second language learners have unique needs and skills in the composition classroom, and to put forth research on responding to second language writing, highlighting differences between second language learners and native speakers. Again, I bring this discussion into dialogue with modalities of response, examining how certain modalities might be better suited for some students rather than others based on their linguistic skills and cultural backgrounds.

To examine modalities of response, I group the modalities two different ways, each allowing me to examine a different aspect of the discussion. The first grouping is computer-mediated responses as a whole, “versus,” not to imply any sort of competition, traditional, hand-written responses, as shown in Figure 1.

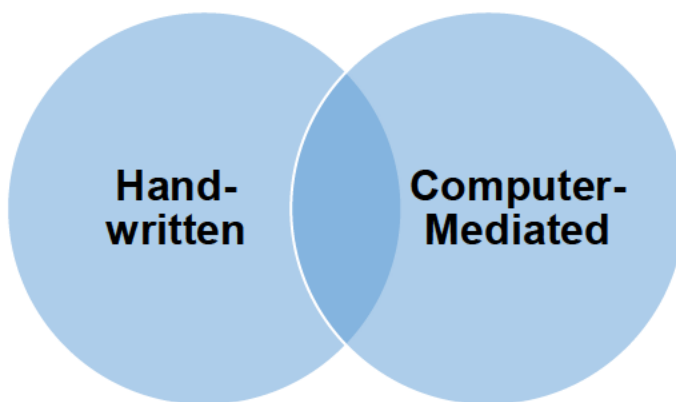


Figure 1: First Grouping of Modalities: Handwritten and Computer-Mediated Responses

The computer-mediated responses I explore include typed, audio, and audio visual responses, shown here in Figure 2.

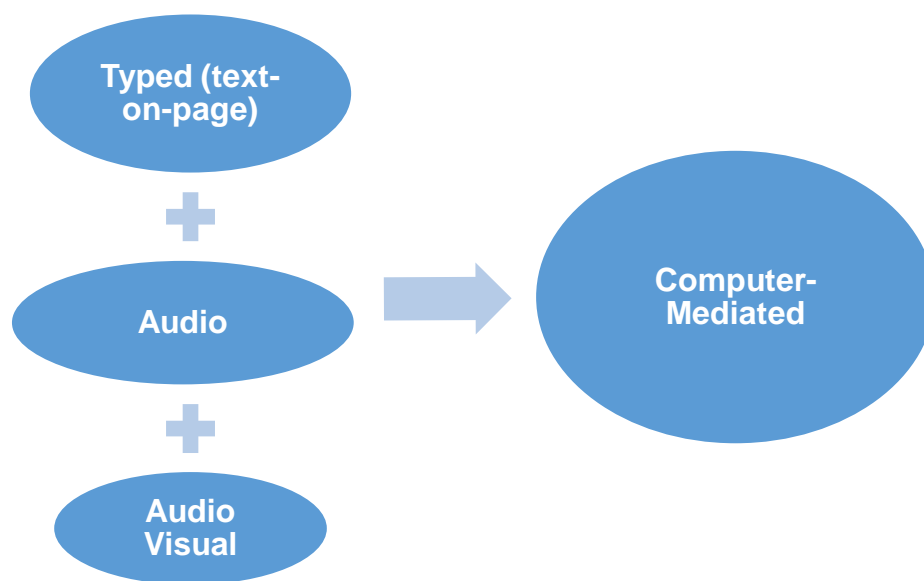


Figure 2: Modalities Included in “Computer-Mediated”

While computers may have been integrated into the composition classroom, according to Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe, in their 2000 article, “Studying Literacy in Digital Contexts,” (188) (though certainly not *all* composition classroom spaces), there remains the question of computers for digital response, which, is certainly far from “ubiquitous,” leaving us to question, if computers are at least popular in composition classrooms and among rhetoric and composition faculty, why aren’t they widely being used to provide feedback to student writing? And, more fundamentally, should computers be used to provide any feedback to student writing?

Though there seems to be a lack of empirical data regarding how teachers respond to student writing, many “best practices” articles on computer-mediated feedback seem to be acting in a persuasive manner, that is, they seek to explain the benefits of computer-

mediated feedback to an audience who, we can infer, is currently ignoring such options, resisting, or (maybe) ignorant of such options.⁵ Jeffrey Sommers, for example, suggests that computer-mediated technology can assist him in communicating with his students, and Thomas Krucli outlines how he uses computer-mediated feedback to provide more detailed, comprehensive, and personalized feedback with less time and energy than handwritten responses. Yet I do not intend to argue that computer-mediated feedback is “better” and *should* be adopted. As Geraldine Richards points out, instructors are already “resource rich but time poor,” and she concludes that integrating computer technology, and in our case, utilizing computer-mediated feedback, may not be reasonable nor beneficial for every teacher of composition. Nor may it be beneficial for every student, either. Grouping modalities as hand-written on one hand, and computer-mediated on the other, also brings forth a discussion of digital privileges, namely, digital access and literacy, which will be examined at length in Chapter 1.

The second way of grouping modalities, however, exposes many of the rich benefits and resources of some computer-mediated modalities that can work to increase the internalization of feedback as well as possibly the transfer of learning. The second way I group modalities, laid out in Chapter 2, is text-on-page “versus” aural, that is feedback that doesn’t rely on the written word but the spoken word.

⁵ This is not necessarily my view. I believe that many instructors have consciously chosen handwritten responses.

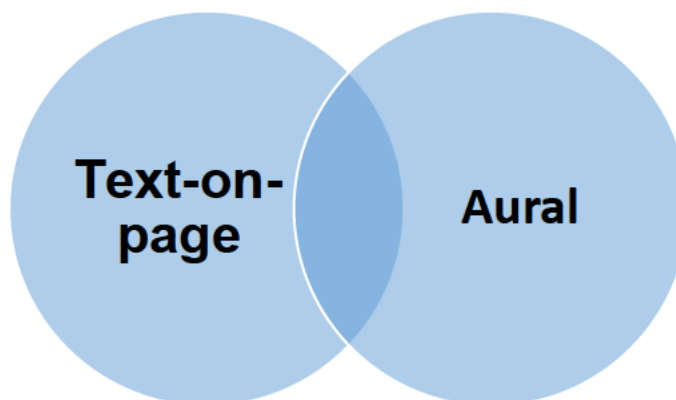


Figure 3: Second Grouping of Modalities: Text-on-Page and Aural Responses

This second grouping of modalities between text-on-page and aural responses (shown in Figure 3) allows the focus to move away from a strict concern regarding technologies in the classroom, and discusses the possibilities that feedback can take when it shifts away from the linear, sometimes restrictive text-on-page medium. Aural feedback includes both audio as well as audio visual feedback. A central theme that seems to emanate from each discussion on aural feedback is that the modality changes the way in which instructors respond. On one level, instructors tended to be more conversational – that is, the way they talked was markedly different from the way they wrote. The feedback tended to be more informal and personal – using the student’s name and basic greetings. Furthermore, inherent in any sort of aural response, are paralinguistic cues that are absent from writing, most notably, intonation and pitch. Such cues alter the students’ interpretation of the message. What could be read as mean-spirited or a snide remark, might be heard as a friendly aside based on the tone. However, such paralinguistic cues, while able to convey encouragement and general feelings of warmth or kinship, can also convey some less desirable attitudes, including disappointment,

anger, and condescension, to name a few. Even fatigue could be interpreted as a personal slight – being tired of the student or bored of their work. Despite such a drawback, almost all of the research indicated that the majority of students preferred audio feedback and found the feedback more personable as well as understandable. Chapter 2 provides a full discussion on the benefits, drawbacks, messages, and tensions in these modalities.

Yet the question remains: who could these methods privilege, and who could they disadvantage? One specific group that I think needs to be considered when assessing the merits of modalities is second language learners. Chapter 3 discusses, at length, the “myth of linguistic homogeneity” that is, the idea that today’s higher education classroom is a monolingual, monocultural space in which students read, write, and speak Standard American English. Chapter 3 discusses the implications of scholarship that does not take the diversity of the 21st century North American classroom into account, arguing that such scholarship leaves out a significant portion of the student population who have complex needs and skill sets that may differ from their native-speaking peers.

The effectiveness and ease with which second language (L2) students could understand and utilize text or aural elements of response would be highly dependent on their second language reading or listening skills. Some students may find written responses frustrating and confusing because of weak reading skills, or possibly unfamiliar abbreviations that instructors sometimes use. Others may find aural responses difficult due to weak listening skills or the instructor’s rate of speech.

Moreover, cultural ways of speaking and writing embedded in feedback may be confusing or detrimental to students from different cultural backgrounds. Rhetorical

questions that are so common in American speech may be interpreted as real yes/no questions (such as “can you give an example here), leading the student to possibly answer “no,” or assume that the instructor doesn’t know, is incompetent, or insecure. Likewise, the “confused teacher” tactic (saying things like “I’m confused here when... or I got lost here when) could similarly lead students, with different cultural understandings of the roles of teachers, to think that their teacher is incompetent. A full discussion of how feedback and modalities may differ between native speakers and nonnative speakers will take place in Chapter 3.

Chapter 1: Computer-Mediated Feedback

This chapter examines modality of feedback in general terms, examining handwritten feedback and computer-mediated feedback as a whole (which includes typed comments, audio comments, and screencasting). Though much of the discussion around feedback modalities focuses exclusively on a few “new” technologies that could be integrated into a teacher’s practices, including audio responses as well as online web-video responses, some instructors are still at the point of assessing whether computer-mediated responses in general are worth investing their time (and possibly money) in, as opposed to the traditional hand-written responses. In my own experience, traditional hand-written responses make up the largest portion of the responses I have received and still receive as a university student, despite the growing trend toward digital responses. Though data that reveals how many instructors respond with hand written comments versus computer-mediated comments has not been disseminated, in my own observations and experience, hand written comments may still be the predominant mode of response.

In this chapter, I group all computer-mediated feedback in one category in order to discuss digital literacies and digital access in general terms. Though I don’t intend to “compare,” per se, hand-written responses to all computer-mediated responses, hand-written responses do act as the “traditional,” non-computerized modality of response that informs a discussion on computer-mediated feedback. The next chapter will specifically focus on research regarding specific modalities of computer-mediated feedback, namely audio and screencasting feedback. Between these two groupings (hand-written and computer mediated as one group, and then audio and audiovisual as another), the

modality that gets most overlooked is typed commenting. In this chapter, typed commenting is grouped with all computer-mediated feedback, even though the scholarly research I examine often labels typed commenting (whether explicitly and overtly stated or implicitly and assumed when *not* differentiated) as “text-on-page” and does not differentiate between typed and hand-written comments (Mathieson, Ice et. al., Thompson and Lee,). The idea seems to be that written feedback, regardless of medium and form, still shares much in common, a linear progression of written symbols, often written in the margin of the page (many commenting tools offered by software such as Word or Adobe mimic the margin commenting style that is typical of physical hand-written responses). Written feedback, either typed or hand written, can then be easily juxtaposed to entirely different media-rich modalities, including audio responses or screen casting videos.

Another possible reason for the lack of differentiation between hand-written and typed responses may be the time frame in which the research is taking place. The 80s and 90s produced a flurry of research and discussion around responding to student writing, and it was during this time that many of what compositionists now consider to be “common sense” best practices were established. At that time, a discussion of modality didn’t yet make much sense, as technology wasn’t yet widely available to realistically produce feedback in mediums other than handwritten, though discussions of audio feedback via cassettes began quite early. Yet it really wasn’t until responding took dramatically new forms of modalities that the topic of best practices with modalities was revisited, a time where typed feedback is just popular enough not to be considered

“cutting edge,” and yet still old enough to now be perceived as “traditional,” possibly due to the widespread use of personal desktop or laptop computers, or possibly due to the text-on-page linear format (with the assumption that there is nothing “new” about that regardless of the medium it assumes).

The goal of this chapter, then, is to examine computer-mediated modalities of response in general, against the backdrop of traditional, hand-written responses.⁶ I begin by examining the computer technology and its perceived role in the humanities, reviewing scholarly works on computer technology in general, and then moving more specifically to computer-mediated modalities of responding to student writing. Next, I move to question some of the existing narratives and research that makes assumptions regarding the universality of computer access and literacy – specifically the myth of the “digital native” – to show why such questions are imperative to developing informed choices regarding modalities of response to student writing.

Though the “technology” discussed in scholarly research regarding modalities of response is all digitized, Dennis Baron, in his 1999 essay, “From Pencils to Pixels” discusses the technology of the computer and word processing, not in terms of the “new or novel,” but recognizing that it is only the next step in a line of evolving technology, a line that stretches as far back as the written word. He reminds us that writing itself is a technology, and that each step has been met with suspicion and resistance. He

⁶ Though not integral to the discussion of technology as it’s being framed here, I would just like to note that “technology” does not merely refer to digital technologies. Writing itself, being an invention that is not “natural” to humanity, is considered a technology. I therefore am not trying to juxtapose “technology” with “nature,” but rather, I am discussing traditional technologies that have been used to respond to student writing (pencil/pen on paper) with more contemporary, computer-mediated technologies.

particularly addresses the attitude that humanists have traditionally had in regards to technological advances in literacy, noting that humanists are traditionally seen as, clinging to traditional technologies in a world of rapidly evolving technological advances:

Humanists have long been considered out of the technology loop. They use technology, to be sure, but they are not generally seen as pushing the envelope. Most people think of writers as rejecting technological innovations like the computer and the information superhighway, preferring instead to bang away at manual typewriters when they are not busy whittling new points on their no. 2 quill pens. (Baron 18)

Baron troubles the understanding of computers as a “new” form of technology that is not to be trusted by recounting the history of the pencil, a writing device that began as a tool for carpenters and was itself originally distrusted by writers. He contends that “old technologies” become “automatic and invisible” (18). That is, they become second nature, the way in which things are done. For example, today, the pencil is hardly considered a technology, much less the alphabet and the act of writing; they are natural, normal parts of everyday life for literate cultures. When old technologies become automatic, new technologies are sometimes resisted. However, if these new technologies mirror “the old ways,” the familiar, they are much more likely to be accepted and utilized, becoming “automatic” and “invisible” (17).

Microsoft Word’s comment features and Adobe’s sticky notes seem to fit nicely into this paradigm. Both comment functions form little bubbles in the margins of what

appears, on the screen, to be a physical page. Though the medium is completely different, the “look” of the comments is not radically new. The body of the student’s paper still takes up the main part of the page, and the teacher’s comments are pushed to the side, up and down the margins. In this way, the computer modality of responding to student writing mimics the older form, making it familiar to instructors of writing as well as students.

This feature, then, is being slowly and gradually accepted by teachers of writing, with some relying on the tried-and-true pen and paper method, while others jump ahead into even newer and more exciting technological advances. Though I don’t know if I would say that Word’s comment feature has become “mainstream” in that it is currently not as popular as pen-and-paper responses, it certainly appears to be gaining ground. Baron’s prediction appears to be quite possible. It could be very likely that this feature becomes a “norm,” becomes both invisible and automatic, while the next step meets suspicion and resistance by some.⁷

Baron’s suggestion that humanists traditionally resist new technologies, clinging to pen and paper, might be met with skepticism. After all, this thesis has already

⁷ Certainly Baron is speaking in general terms, attempting to indicate a pattern rather than prescribe the behavior of individuals. Not everyone “resists” new technologies. Everett Rogers, in his book *Diffusion of Innovations*, outlines four general categories of the population with regards to adopting a given innovation: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. The groupings are distributed on a bell curve. In these terms (though Baron is not using Roger’s theory), Baron might be implying that humanists, more often than not, tend to be either late adopters or laggards. In Chapter 2, I note that composition studies as a whole have been latecomers to the discussion on screencasting, a topic pioneered by computer science and library science. Though Baron doesn’t offer a lot of evidence, it seems that a cursory glance at instructors still utilizing pen and paper commenting might support his hypothesis.

examined a listserv discussion of participants who seem quite excited about using computer-mediated feedback, and the majority of the remainder of this literature review will focus on articles (found via online databases) that highly recommend the use of some fairly new technologies, including Camtasia and Jing, internet screen casting video tools. Yet it's also possible that these are the exceptions, not the rule. It's possible that the only people participating in these discussions are those interested in computer-mediated assessment to begin with⁸, and that we simply are not hearing from a silent majority who may prefer the traditional pen and paper method. This discrepancy, between the amount of conversation and research versus the utilization in the classroom, is an area that fruitful research could focus. Maybe the discussion needs to take a step backwards, before jumping into the numerous options of computer-mediated modalities, and examine who is even using computer-mediated modalities, and why, and then *also* look at who isn't using these modalities, and why. The latter, at least in what I have found, has been overlooked in the discussion, and there seems to be no research on how many instructors are interested in computer-mediated feedback, and how many are perfectly content sticking with pen and paper, and simply have no interest in changing.⁹

⁸ In Roger's terms, maybe we are hearing from the "early adapters," probably not even the "early majority" at this point.

⁹ It might be noted, that using Roger's theory, eventually most everyone will adopt the technology. For some cases (cars, computers in general), this might be the case (with a few exceptions). However, it's possible that not every instructor will adopt video feedback, or audio feedback, or *maybe* even typed feedback. Until we are more aware of why instructors are choosing the modalities they utilize, we might not be able to predict which modalities will or will not be adopted at all in the future, much less follow Roger's pattern.

On some level, computers and composition seem almost completely integrated.

Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe, in their 2000 article, “Studying Literacy in Digital Contexts” maintain that,

In a twenty-first century world shaped increasingly by digital environments for creating and communicating meaning by electronic work-places, homes, and online businesses, and by computer networks that extend across linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical borders, it has become rare to find a writing program or a composition classroom that does not incorporate computers or rhetoric and composition faculty who do not recognize some level of responsibility for preparing students to read, write, and communicate effectively in digital environments.... In fact, digital environments are so ubiquitous as communication spaces in our world that they are, arguably, an integral part of composition studies. (188)

While computers may have indeed been fully integrated into the composition classroom (though certainly not *all* composition classroom spaces), there remains the question of computers for digital response, which, as I’ve mentioned, is certainly far from “ubiquitous,” leaving us to question, if computers are at least popular in composition classrooms and among rhetoric and composition faculty, why aren’t they widely being used to provide feedback to student writing? And, are computers suitable to provide feedback to student writing? This chapter does not necessarily seek to answer those questions but instead focuses on the conversation surrounding computer-mediated feedback. Though there seems to be a lack of empirical data regarding how teachers

respond to student writing, many “best practices” articles on computer-mediated feedback seem to be acting in a persuasive manner, that is, they seek to explain the benefits of computer-mediated feedback to an audience who, we can infer, is currently ignoring such options, resisting, or (maybe) ignorant of such options. I am not saying that computer-mediated feedback is so superior to handwritten that it ought to be adopted, and I will later discuss reasons why widespread adoption of computer mediated-feedback could, in fact, have negative consequences for a portion of the student population.

In favor of computer-mediated feedback, many “best practices” articles explain the latest computer-mediated technologies that are available, and sometimes offer advice or guidelines on how, or why, to use such technology in responding to student writing. The articles are, presumably, addressed to an audience in which there may be members who are generally skeptical (or ignorant) of computer-mediated technologies in the composition classroom, and who may need extra guidance or persuasion to give up the pen and pencil and take to the screen (or the recording device, or the screen-capture).¹⁰ For example, Jeffrey Sommers, in his 1989 article, “Response in the Electronic Medium,” also gives valuable insight into the use of computer-mediated responses in general in the composition classroom. He maintains that though computers themselves have nothing new to tell students – that is, he is not an advocate for programs that read and assess papers – he does believe that computers can assist him in communicating with his students (187). He concludes that computers that act as a medium of response can be a

¹⁰ Though I do think that many such articles are acting as a form of persuasion, I don’t think this necessarily implies that computer-mediated feedback is “better” (or “worse”) than pen and paper, although some authors might think so and indeed be trying to persuade the audience of such.

powerful and helpful tool (207). His article seems to be directed towards those who may not recognize the use of computers in the composition classroom, who may feel as though computers have nothing to offer, or who may fear digital platforms that replace face-to-face communication.¹¹

A decade later, Geraldine Richards, in her article 2000 “Why Use Computer Technology?” seems to pick up Sommer’s conversation and begins to address some of the reasons why computer-mediated feedback in general would be beneficial for students, as opposed to strictly hand written comments. Richards is not advocating for any specific modality, but aims to discuss the benefits of computer-mediated feedback in general and sets some criteria for instructors to consider when they are questioning whether computer-mediated feedback is best for instructors and their students.

Richards sets out to examine the multiple uses of computer technology in the composition classroom, and sets forth three criteria for deciding whether to use such technology asking: will this technology enhance the conversation of the classroom, will it validate the work of the classroom, will it validate the individual, and is it worth the time and effort? Though she asserts that nothing could totally replace face-to-face

¹¹ Though Sommers’ article was written 25 years ago (1989), and it might be easy to dismiss the relevance for contemporary readers, there are still plenty of instructors who choose not to, for whatever reason, include computers in the composition classroom. As I stated previously, hand-written responses still seem to be the popular modality for responding to student writing. Ten years later, Richards’ article, also advocating for technology in the classroom, seems to imply that even at that point, computers still had not been widely adopted. Though computers in the classroom are much more common today, in 2014, there are certainly some late adopters and “laggards” who have not yet adopted the technology, and maybe never will. As this thesis will discuss, there may be many valid reasons to refrain from using computers as a modality of response, including issues of digital access and literacy, learning curves for both instructors and students, technical issues of software platforms, or physical constraints including eye fatigue etc.

communication, she does recognize that computer technology in the classroom can be employed as a tool to enrich learning (38). However, she maintains that each teacher needs to decide for themselves if the time and effort it will take them to learn how to utilize the technology effectively will be worth the benefits of using that technology. Richards recognizes that teachers are already “resource rich but time poor” and concludes that maybe integrating computer technology is not reasonable nor beneficial for every teacher of composition (41).

To add to the conversation, Thomas Krucli, in 2013 “Making Assessment Matter: Using the Computer to Create Interactive Feedback,” discusses ways that he can use computer-mediated feedback to accomplish Jeffrey Sommers’ goal – to communicate with his students in a way that is both effective and efficient. Krucli essentially writes a “best methods” article, sharing general how-to and advice when using computer-mediated feedback. Examples include the ability to hyper-link students to instructional web pages that may address an issue that is repeated throughout their paper (48). He reports that he can also save time by utilizing a data-base of commonly used comments that he can paste onto the page and then modify to address the specific context, and in doing so, he claims that he can cover much more ground in much less time compared to hand written comments, and students have more responsibility to follow the link, learn the concepts, and make changes to the paper (48). He reports that students who received this kind of feedback scored on average ten percentage points higher on their papers than students who only received traditional hand written comments (51). Though not every instructor will use the similar forms of computer-mediated feedback, or the same

programs within a similar modality, Krucli's principle is to improve the instructor's grading efficiency as well as the overall quality of the feedback, both of which, he maintains, can be accomplished using even basic computer-mediated modalities of feedback.

As Krucli focuses on more concrete, practical tasks that can be accomplished by using specific forms of computer-mediated feedback, Scott Warnock, in his 2009 "Response, Give Lots of Feedback Without Burning Out," brings the conversation to a more meta-level, claiming that, "Technologies of response can help you rethink the way you provide feedback to your students about their writing" (121). He not only recognizes major differences in modalities of response, but also notes the challenge of reading in a new modality, assuring teachers that, "If you have never done any electronic commenting, you'll have a slightly bumpy transition, if for no other reason than you might find it hard to read all of the work electronically" (124).¹² Throughout the rest of the chapter, he explains, in almost a "how-to" sort of tone, different computer-mediated modalities of feedback available to the online writing instructor, ranging from typed comments (explaining macros¹³ to save keystrokes and time), to rubric software, to voice comments and audio visual comments.

¹² Though Warnock doesn't expound on differences between reading physical papers and reading on-screen, his statement prompted me to consider practical difficulties of reading and responding on screen, including issues of eye-sight and eye fatigue.

¹³ According to Warnock, macros are "shorthand commands that reproduce computer keystrokes" (125).

Though much of the research regarding computer mediated feedback is generally positive and discusses practical classroom benefits, Beth L Hewett and Christa Ehmann discuss how “best practices” can go awry in the digital environment. They claim that,

Our experience suggests that novice online instructors often want to write more to students than is necessary – in some cases resulting in responses that are twice the length of the students’ own drafts. Online instructors have said that they do this partly because of the ease of typing responses to students (versus writing by hand) and partly because they fear students will not learn enough if they write shorter responses. (75)

Though Hewett and Ehmann suggest it might be *easier* to overcomment using computer-mediated technologies for feedback, they certainly don’t claim that it is unavoidable, and delineate a series of helpful steps to avoid the temptation to overcomment, including reading the entire piece before commenting; constructing the response in overarching or global comments; making clear, straightforward comments, etc. (76-80). An underlying principle demonstrated by Hewett and Ehmann’s warning and suggested steps could be that though different modalities facilitate different approaches to response, it would be beneficial to consider and implement best practices across different modalities.

Yet realistically, there are so many more factors to consider than just efficiency, quality (quality being defined by Krucli may be as quantity as well as the specificity that is allowed through this quantity), and even best practices. For a well-rounded discussion on computer-mediated feedback, larger issues, including discussions on student perception of computer mediated feedback, as well as issues of computer access and

technological literacies, are necessary to truly evaluate both the helpfulness and practicality (maybe even the ethics, in some contexts) of computer mediated feedback. This thesis, which examines technology ranging from pencil and paper to advanced screencapture technology, includes a discussion the many facets of digital technology in today's classrooms¹⁴. This thesis will next address the issue of the "digital divide" as it pertains to race and class, and also includes a discussion of what Mark Prensky refers to as "digital natives" and "digital immigrants," the generational gap that we are experiencing as technology develops exponentially.

Though not specifically written to address the composition classroom, Mark Prensky's 2011 essay "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," speaks to the issues of differing technological literacies in the classroom that affects who is comfortable using computers, and what different individuals may be able to accomplish on a given technological platform. Prensky writes about the division between "digital natives" (i.e. many of today's students) vs digital immigrants (i.e. many of today's teachers). Mainly, digital natives grew up surrounded by digital technology, whereas digital immigrants integrated this technology later in their lives and as such, may still have an "accent" (5). Today's students, according to Prensky, fundamentally think and process differently than

¹⁴ Although I am looking at feedback both in the physical classroom space as well as the online classroom, discussions of digital access, I believe, pertain most to the physical classroom. It might be a fair assumption to infer that students enrolled in an online classroom have the access (and hopefully the literacy) to navigate such an environment. Some online programs do have reminders to students enrolling in online classes about what is assumed and required for their equipment and skill set.

their digital immigrant predecessors, and therefore, teachers have to tailor their methods to meet the needs and learning styles of these new learners.¹⁵

Prensky describes the life of the digital native as being constantly inundated with new digital technologies:

Today's students – K through college—represent the first generations to grow up with this new technology. They have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, video games, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age.

(4)

The effects of such an environment, he maintains, are that, “today's students *think and process information fundamentally differently* from their predecessors,” even citing evidence from Dr. Bruce D. Perry of the Baylor College of Medicine that “Different kinds of experiences lead to different brain structures” (5).

According to Prensky, many of today's instructors did not grow up immersed in the digital world,¹⁶ and some these professors find that handwriting comments is the most natural way of reading documents and providing feedback. Yet Prensky argues that digital immigrants have to learn to communicate in the language and style of their

¹⁵ Though not explicitly stated, it's probably assumed that by “today's students,” Prensky is making a general sweep of the generation K-College *age*, not necessarily everyone who is currently in college. Realistically, there is a wide range of generations represented in colleges and universities alike, and not everyone will fit into this paradigm. I will discuss this more later.

¹⁶ Of course, this will change within the next decade, as more of today's “young” students assume professorships themselves.

students instead of assuming that the same methods that worked for them when they were students will work for their students now (6).

Though Prensky's "line" between the digital natives and digital immigrants is certainly blurred, and there are many "digital immigrants" who have successfully adapted to, and are able to effectively utilize, latest technologies, his principle can broadly be examined. Prensky's assertion that professors must adapt to the learning preferences of students, and not the other way around, could be beneficial in the classroom. Instructors who care about the effectiveness of their techniques might do well to consider how to best communicate with their students, who may think and process information differently, or maybe in less determined terms, who may be accustomed to different ways of communicating.¹⁷ Instructors, says Prensky, need to value the medium through which their students are functioning and comfortable, and consider using it where possible. For example, though cursive may be the norm of a bygone age, many students now may have difficulty reading such writing, and such handwritten comments therefore may be ineffective. Yet Geraldine Richard's point still can be used as a useful guide because for some teachers, maybe the time and effort it would take to learn how to effectively utilize computer-mediated feedback is not realistic in their teaching situation, and this too must be taken into consideration.

Prensky's account, however, can be highly problematic when instructors make assumptions regarding students' computer literacies and abilities based solely on their generation. Prensky very quickly and very confidently defines digital natives as an entire

¹⁷ This is not to tell instructors to "dumb down" their comments or implement *all* of the communication strategies of teenagers and young twenty-somethings.

generation, not necessarily some, most, or the “privileged” members of that generation. That is, when he says “today’s students,” he seems to imply a notion of ubiquity – that all members of this generation are “digital natives,” that they all grew up with the same technologies, access, literacies, and privileges. It’s this assumption, or “myth,” as Eszter Hargittai and Siva Vaidhyanathan call it, that can lead to practices and methods that exclude a large part of the population that does not fit into Prensky’s paradigm.

Eszter Hargittai, a sociologist at Northwestern University, studied the online skills of millennials, and reports that “The findings paint a picture not of an army of app-building, HTML typing twenty-somethings, but of a stratified landscape in which some, mostly privileged, young people, use their skills constructively, while others lack even basic internet knowledge” (Hargittai qtd. in O’Neil). Hargittai goes on to maintain that,

It is problematic that there are so many assumptions about how just because a young person grew up with digital media, which in fact many have, that they are automatically savvy That is simply not the case. There are increasing amounts of empirical evidence to suggest the contrary. (Hargittai qtd. in O’Neil)

Siva Vaidhyanathan, cultural historian and media scholar at the University of Virginia, refers to such assumptions as the “myth” of digital natives. He claims that assumptions that young people understand digital technologies and are “tech-savvy” are “absolutely untrue” (Vaidhyanathan qtd. in O’Neil). He points to those perpetuating the myth and warns of its consequences, contending that the myth

is in the direct interest of education-technology companies and Silicon Valley itself. If we all decide that young people have some sort of savantlike talent with digital technology, then we're easily led to policies and buying decisions and pedagogical decisions that pander to Silicon Valley" (Vaidhyanathan qtd. in O'Neil).

Furthermore, Hargittai points out the societal inequalities that are only perpetuated by the myth of the digital native. She argues that

"It is incredibly important for educational institutions to recognize that students aren't universally savvy and address this.... If nothing else, [they] need to do this because the less privileged students know a lot less than the more privileged ones, and by not addressing this, the institutions are perpetuating inequalities across their students" (Hargittai qtd. in O'Neil).

In light of Hargittai's and Vaidhyanathan's claims, assumptions regarding students' digital literacies may be problematic in the writing classroom (or any classroom) as well as in research that supports digital modalities of response without considering those who may not be prepared for such technological literacies. When discussing the modality of response to student writing then, an examination of student literacy and access ought to be a primary consideration. Pedagogies that assume digital access and literacy will inevitably leave out a portion of the student population who may not fit into the assumed paradigm, and too often this population is the under privileged members of society.

It is no understatement to say that we are at a crucial and interesting technological stage. While technology is growing more rapidly than possibly ever before, there are still many students who have not grown up with access to the technologies advocated by some of the research on modalities of feedback (this can range from Word comments, to screencasting technologies). Furthermore, there are still those who lack even basic internet access at home and who would experience difficulties receiving feedback that is returned online (as opposed to the traditional method of handing papers back in class).

Though this digital divide might seem to some as a small problem that affects very few, when I was an undergraduate, my limited internet access proved cumbersome and placed me at an academic disadvantage as compared to my peers. Unable to afford internet access at my home, I found that I could not always rely on the school's library, as it often closed about the time that I was able to begin my homework (because like many other students, I worked multiple jobs and would typically get home after 10 pm to begin my homework). Furthermore, even when libraries are open late, students relying on bus transportation, students with children at home, or students who work full-time may not be able to work in the library in the evening or on weekends.

Thus, despite the assumption that digital feedback, when "sent," is received instantly, when feedback is returned digitally, some students may have trouble accessing that feedback in a timely manner. According to the Pew Research Center, as of May 2013, 27% of American adults did not have internet access at home (Zickuhr and Smith). While this number is increasingly decreasing, right now it is still pertinent to be taken into consideration when studying the modalities of feedback. Research that assumes all

students will be able to access online feedback in a quick and convenient manner is currently leaving some students out of its imagined paradigm.

Furthermore, internet access at home is strongly correlated to race and ethnicity, as well as household income. According to the Pew Research Center, as of May 2013, 74% percent of the white (non-Hispanic) population had access to internet broadband at home, compared to 64% of blacks and only 53% of Hispanics. Moreover, the same study indicates that only 34% of households whose income is less than \$30,000 have broadband internet access at home (Home Broadband 2013). These statistics are too revealing to be ignored. Research on modalities of response that advocate for internet based responses would be enriched by considering those who would be placed at a disadvantage were such responses utilized. As 21st century scholars, we would do best to continually seek pedagogies that resist marginalization of underprivileged groups in our society, and modalities of responses is a site where such considerations could be taking place.

Another interesting site of speculation regarding modalities of response and technology is research that examines the devices on which students use to access feedback and use the feedback to revise their writing. Previously, the dominant platform for feedback and revision was simply the desktop (or laptop) computer. But today, more options are available that could change the way feedback is received, perceived, and utilized. How many students access feedback on a traditional desktop (or laptop) computer compared to a tablet or smartphone? Does the platform change the feedback experience? How well (or not) do particular feedback modalities carry across differing

platforms? For example, how easy and accessible would audio feedback be on a smartphone or tablet? Screencasting? Typed responses?

The Home Broadband 2013 study by the Pew Research Center indicates that although home broadband access is not prevalent among Hispanics, many in this population do own a smartphone and can at least have limited internet access at home on this device, with 75% of Hispanics having either broadband or a smartphone, compared to 80% of whites. Smartphones also decrease the gap in internet access by income too, though not as drastically, with 67% of households that make less than \$30,000 per year having either broadband or a smartphone, compared to 95% of households whose income is over \$75,000 per year (Home Internet Access). This indicates that a number of households that may not have broadband access can use smartphones to access the internet at home. Do students in these households rely on their smartphone to access teacher feedback? How might this change their reading experience?

A final technological consideration that instructors face when utilizing technological feedback is the software that the feedback is transmitted through and the compatibility of differing operating systems. For example, comments in Microsoft Word may experience formatting changes when opened on a Mac, or in programs including Open Office (a free word processing software). Again, such discrepancies can place students at a disadvantage who are unable to quickly and conveniently access feedback. The issue can also be related to income, given that students may not be able to afford Microsoft Word (currently being marketed at \$85, and compatible with Windows 7 and 8 only). Moreover, feedback in newer software might not be compatible with their older

versions, possibly corrupting the file or altering formatting in ways that might be unusable to the student. Many of these issues might have simple solutions, such as making a pdf of a file that could be read on multiple platforms. Yet instructors engaging in computer-mediated feedback might not always be aware of these issues, or whom they most affect.

With these questions of access and skill in mind, Chapter 3 reviews some of the recent literature and research on audio feedback and screencasting, two increasingly popular computer-mediated modalities of response. Though issues of digital literacies and access are often not discussed in these articles (with exceptions), it could prove helpful to examine assumptions that may arise from the texts regarding the myth of the digital native, or the assumption that students will have convenient internet access. Such assumptions, as discussed in this chapter, could be problematic and leave out a significant portion of the population, sometimes along racial or class lines. This is not to argue that computer-mediated technologies should be thrown out the window, but rather, that there may be more factors to consider that some scholarship may not take into account.

Chapter 2: Audio and Audio Visual Feedback

In light of the overarching purpose of responding to student writing, as well as the generally accepted best practices, this chapter examines the scholarly research regarding audio and video feedback. Though I originally intended this literature review to address written and typed feedback, I found that the available and accessible scholarship did not focus on these modalities. This could be due to the general timing of many of the discussions taking place regarding feedback in general. Much of the first literature on responding to student writing that is generally still considered useful and applicable stretches from the 1970s to 1980s, before computer-mediated technologies (included audio and video feedback) would have been much conceived or widely considered. More recent studies, however, from the late 90s to the present, seem to focus on “newer” technologies, such as audio or video, and typed margin comments may have fallen in a gray area, too advanced for the earliest research, and too old for the latest wave of attention to responding. Another possibility that I discussed in Chapter 2 is the possibility that there may not be much of a perceived distinction between handwritten comments and typed comments, as they are often both considered text-on-paper commenting that gets lumped together when compared to audio or visual.

Whatever the reason, very little research or scholarly attention has been paid specifically to handwritten or typed comments aside from comparing them to other modalities. The scholarship for text-on-paper modalities focuses on best practices in general – not appropriating text, being specific, prioritizing global over local, and not overcommenting – without discussing modality because feedback was inherently text-on-

page.¹⁸ This chapter, then, only addresses text-on-paper comments in light of the research on audio and video feedback.

I have broken this chapter into two major sections, discussing audio feedback and video (or screencasting) feedback separately. Each section provides some background overview of relevant and seminal research, followed by a brief analysis and questions to reiterate or emphasize important aspects.

Audio Feedback

A fairly large body of research has been devoted to studying audio feedback and its potential usefulness in the writing classroom as a form of response. Audio feedback can take a number of different forms that each allow for different rhetorical strategies. For example, much of the earlier research on audio feedback (Anson), recommends using cassette tapes that students turn in with their physical papers. The instructor then records comments and hands back the cassette with the paper. The nature of this feedback, then, is global in nature, and though the teacher most likely expects the student to listen to the comments with paper in hand, that is not guaranteed to happen. However, newer forms of audio feedback can mimic the cassette-tape like feedback, including podcasts or software such as Garageband or Audacity. These would be independent files, attached to an email or uploaded to a class website (like Blackboard, Moodle, etc.). Sara Bauer, in her article “When I Stopped Writing on Their Papers: Accommodating the Needs of Student Writers with Audio Comments” even suggests using a smartphone to record comments and

¹⁸ Though early research on audio feedback began in the 1960s (Warnock, “Responding”), the vast majority of research and scholarship on response and feedback seems to assume text-on-page responses.

attaching the file as an MP3 in an email that included the student's draft and a few notes that outlined the recording (64).

Another form of contemporary audio response, however, could be audio clips inserted into a Word Document. Using online tools, audio files can be hyperlinked in the margins of a paper. These tool would allow the feedback to have a sort of "immediacy" that a completely separate file would not allow, being in the margin next to the site that the teacher is addressing. In this form, multiple short segments could be included, instead of one overarching file. Both are included in the term "audio response," though much of the research (Anson, Bilbro, Barnett, Kim, Sipple) indicates separate files being used rather than embedded clips in their respective methodologies or descriptions.

Numerous studies have sought to quantify the benefits of audio feedback, but the results of the research are varied and inconclusive. Some claim that audio feedback correlates to a small improvement in students' grades (Pearce & Ackley; Hurst; Denehy; Bilbro, Iluzada, & Clark), but other studies find no significant difference in the grades of students who received audio feedback and those who received written feedback (Kirshner, Moore). Many studies cite that audio feedback is often perceived as more personal than written feedback (Anson, Barnett, Bauer, Clark, Kirschener, Kim, Bilbro, Iluzada, and Clark, J.Sommers, Sipple), and though this is often seen in a positive light, some scholars remind us of negative repercussions that could arise from feedback that is seen as more personal (Barnett, Kim). Likewise, several instructors claim that providing audio feedback helps them feel more personally engaged with the students and their writing, as opposed to written comments (Anson, Carney, Hunt, J. Sommers).

Though some instructors report that audio commenting saves them time (Clark, Hunt), others reported that this modality took more time and effort than written comments (Bauer), especially if the upload time for each student is time consuming and is factored in. Yet Jeffrey Sommers argues that even if audio comments take longer, more information can be conveyed, and therefore they are more time-efficient than written comments (Sommers, “Response Rethought”). Sommers notes that instructors can expand their responses more easily and quickly than when writing or typing responses, and therefore, such responses make better use of time. This modality could, however, involve a learning curve on both the student and instructor end, and this time would need to be taken into account.

In addition to considering how audio saves time, studies also look at how audio focuses instructors’ attention. Some studies and instructors have indicated that audio responses tend to focus on global, higher order concerns rather than written comments (Anson, Bilbro et. al.) Jeffrey Bilbro, Christina Iluzada, and David Eugene Clark, in their study, “Responding Effectively to Composition Students: Comparing Perceptions of Written and Audio Feedback” report that “Written feedback tends to provide clearer information about local issues in their writing, while audio comments give students more information about global concerns” (Bilbro et al 66). Numerous other scholars, however, report that even when examining a local concern (such as grammar), they can give a much more detailed response in audio feedback compared to written (Sommers, Clark, Logan, Yarbrow and Angevine).

Along with focusing on higher order concerns, research suggests that audio comments allow for a social dimension that is not only more personal, but places a heightened sense of responsibility on the student (Anson, Barnett, Sipple). Chris Anson states that his use of audio commentary helps him to achieve a “social dimension... that had been less present in [his] short, often corrective written remarks,” thus making his commentary more personal and less abrasive. Furthermore, the purpose of his comments changed from “what had been correcting and judging... to coaching and advising” (23). This role as coach and advisor, according to Jeffrey Sommers in his article “Space, Time, and Movies of the Mind”, heightens student awareness of the reader:

Students thus not only engage in an act of “reading” their reader’s response but also engage in a dialogue with that reader, with their own texts, with themselves. They may still end up with a draft that has scribbles all over it, but the scribbles are in their own handwriting, the product of their own interpretation of what they have heard. (185)

The transitory nature of the spoken word, and the requirement that the spoken word be interpreted and then converted to the written word in the revision process, may require higher order thinking and may shift more responsibility toward the student in the revision process.

In his 1999 essay, “Talking About Text: The Use of Recorded Commentary in Response to Student Writing,” Anson shares the benefits he has experienced with this mode of feedback and discusses the ways in which using a voice recording to respond to student writing dramatically changes the content and style of his response. He compares

voice recording to traditional hand-written comments, noting that his recordings are much more casual (166). He maintains that he will be more likely to frame the remarks with personal greetings and compliments (such as, “Great title!”), which he would be less likely to include in written comments. (166). He furthermore remarks that the voice recording made him more aware of the social dimension of the communication that was taking place, something that is easily masked by the written word (166-167). Moreover, he found himself free to elaborate in ways that would be too cumbersome and time consuming in writing (167). Because of the content and style change, he found that his purpose for responding changed likewise: he shifted from judging and correcting to advising and coaching (166).

Anson’s article is effectively a “best methods” article, recommending a modality based on his personal experience and observations rather than an empirical study. Another such essay, “Form Ever Follows Function: Using Technology to Improve Feedback on Student Writing,” by Daniel L. Barnett, reports on similar benefits of audio feedback. Barnett claims that “voice comments allow the professor to provide extensive feedback quickly and efficiently” (767). Barnett also provides a way for voice comments to address more local concerns if necessary, suggesting that professors can number comments on the hard copies of the assignment and then record corresponding comments. This can allow more flexibility than limiting audio responses to holistic feedback. He praises the media-rich aspect of audio feedback, comparing it to a conversation similar to live conferencing that allows for a more immediate response and a more in-depth explanation, which tends to be more extensive than written comments.

Barnett also notes that audio feedback gives students ownership of the revision process in that they are not merely writing what the professor is telling them to write, but they are forced to grapple with the comments, made to understand why the professor is reacting a certain way and then required to identify the underlying issues that caused the reaction. Taking an idea from a voice comment and integrating it into one's writing, according to Barnett, "requires more analytical understanding by the student than a simple insertion of a suggested change" (768).

Finally, Barnett pragmatically concludes that voice comments may be physically more practical for some professors. Given today's technology, the professor is not required to sit behind a desk – comments can be made on anything from a recording device to a smart phone – and is free to walk around or work in many settings where a laptop may not be as feasible. Furthermore, instructors who struggle with carpal tunnel, arthritis, or other physical problems that may prevent writing or typing are able to record audio comments without physical pain or hindrances.

While Barnett and Anson have primarily focused on issues pertaining to instructors-- time, effort, and learning curve – Susan Sipple, in her pilot study "Ideas in Practice: Developmental Writers' Attitudes toward Audio and Written Feedback" examines the reception and perceptions of audio feedback among developmental writers, a group that may have different needs than those represented in other research. Yet like many other researchers and instructors, Sipple reports that the developmental students found audio feedback to increase self-confidence and motivation to write, internalize feedback, offer more details, reduce their misinterpretation of feedback, strengthen their

perceived bond with the professor, and be more innovative than handwritten comments (24).

According to her study, only 21% of students preferred handwritten responses over audio responses, and through questionnaires and interviews, Sipple determined that one reason for the preference of handwritten comments is confusion regarding the instructor's purpose in editing. Sipple reports that

The majority of those who stated that they preferred handwritten feedback also reported that the writing problems that this method helped them to find and fix with more ease were mistakes in *spelling and punctuation*.

Their repeated note that written feedback made it easier to see spelling and punctuation errors suggests that these respondents viewed the purpose of instructor commentary as guiding them towards well-edited essays rather than prompting them towards substantial content revision. (28)

Sipple specifically focuses on the increased motivation that audio responses facilitate as being especially important to a developmental writer. She observes that, "audio comments can provide a way to boost self-esteem by offering more 'space' to comment on their genuine strengths as writers (28) and goes on to argue that this boost in confidence manifests into an increased motivation to revise.

Yet in "Online Technologies for Teaching Writing: Students React to Teacher Response in Voice and Written Modalities," Loel Kim exposes the potential drawbacks to audio response when she compares audio responses to written (typed) responses. Her study took into account how students constructed the identity of the teacher behind the

response, constructions that affected the persuasiveness and therefore the effectiveness of the message of the feedback. Kim explains the core of her study and how she evaluated student's reaction to teacher responses, clarifying that,

In light of the important changes to the communicative settings in which teachers communicate with students online, a meaningful way to investigate effective online teacher response to writing is to think of such response in terms of persuasion (O'Keefe, 1990) – that is, in terms of how well the teacher can deliver a message the student understands, agrees with, and ultimately accepts. Especially if we view teaching and learning processes as at once social and cognitive... we need to consider how students understand teachers' comments as persuasive or compelling – cognitively, socially, affectively – which is to say, how in effect they invent the teacher behind them as persuasive or compelling. (Kim 305-306).

A persuasive message, in these terms, is one that is shaped in a way likely to be accepted by the student. This includes not only pragmatic issues, like the readability of the message or whether the content is delivered in a way that can be understood, but also includes affective factors – How does the teacher *sound* to the student? How does the student perceive the teacher's attitude? Does the teacher come across as affirmative and helpful, as knowledgeable and competent, or does the teacher appear to be abrasive, dismissive, condescending, and maybe even incompetent? Such perceptions could have a strong effect on the persuasiveness of the message, and, therefore, determine how likely

the student is to regard the feedback as persuasive – that is, useful for productive and meaningful revision.

Much of the research has focused almost exclusively on the positive aspects of the added social dimension inherent in audio responses. Anson maintains that hearing the instructor's voice can forge ties between the classroom teacher and the student because he "was literally *talking* to each student, [he] felt a social dimension to my commentary that had been less present in [his] short, often corrective written remarks" (Talking 166). Jeff Sommers¹⁹, in his article "Response Rethought... Again: Exploring Recorded Comments and the Teacher-Student Bond," provides insight from one of his undergraduate students who suggests that her perceived relationship with the instructor was strengthened due to audio comments:

When listening to the tapes, I get a sense of being the professor's equal ... on the tapes he spoke to me as if to a fellow writer. That can be an automatic ego boost—or at least somewhat of a confidence builder—for a student listening to the tapes. Along with this, the professor communicated in a more personal way on the tapes than he did in class. I would assume this is a natural outcome of being able to speak so freely to one person concerning her work, unlike in a classroom setting. (Sommers, J. Response)

Likewise, Sipple quoted a student who had similar feelings: "I can connect better with [instructors] when they're talking to me, rather than just writing something on a piece of

¹⁹ The discrepancy between "Jeffrey Sommers" and "Jeff Sommers" reflects the author's name as written on the respective articles.

paper” (28). Sipple’s students believed audio feedback created stronger student-professor bond “because they revealed the professor’s personality and emotions in ways that handwritten comments did not” (26). She quoted one student who said that “audio comments made me feel like I had a much more personal and human relationship with my professor” (28).

While such a potentially positive bond could enhance the persuasiveness of the feedback, in Kim’s framework, Kim warns of possible negative consequences of an intrinsic social dimension that carries paralinguistic cues (pitch and intonation etc.). The results of Kim’s study, which surveyed 39 first-year undergraduate students after they reviewed both written and audio feedback, were surprising, given numerous studies with much more positive results. The students each read two essays (not their own) and then read/listened to feedback for each of the essays. They then assessed the feedback for overall quality as well as components of persuasiveness: competence, trustworthiness, and likability, as well as positive and negative tone.

Though Kim hypothesized that students would overwhelmingly prefer audio feedback, this was not the case. Of the 39 students, only 18 (46 %) preferred the audio feedback, while 16 (41%) preferred the written, and 5 (13 %) were unsure (318). Kim’s discussion of student responses to the survey explains these results. According to Kim, many students reported that through the audio response, they could “hear” inflections in the teacher’s voice that could be positive, but sometimes, were negative (323).

In the same way that audio responses can be more dynamic in that they are able to convey positive information that can be transmitted through communication cues such as

tone of voice, these same benefits of a media-rich modality can also convey negative information in the same way. Kim maintains that “media-rich studies have focused almost entirely on the contribution nonverbal cues make to improving communication, ignoring the potential for negative messages to slip through as well” (324). Kim reports that students claimed that the added paralinguistic features (tone and pitch of voice) that are intrinsic in audio responses actually caused them to form negative impressions of the teacher and the teacher’s attitude towards the paper. Students responded that they could hear disappointment, possible sarcasm, and even impatience (“wanting to get out of there”) (325). Although students who preferred audio comments found them encouraging or “personal,” students who preferred the written modality claimed that they could hear a negative, or apathetic, attitude in the teacher’s comments (325).

Some questions that could still be addressed in research on audio responses include attention to formative or summative responses, as well as responding to rough versus final drafts. For example, if audio responses are typically geared towards global concerns, are local concerns simply not to be addressed? Or perhaps audio comments are better utilized at a certain stage of the writing process? Furthermore, it ought to be noted that many (though not all) of the studies compared audio responses to handwritten commentary (Anson; Pearce & Ackley; Hurst; Denehy; Sipple; Yarbrow & Angevine; Bauer). If these studies were done comparing audio comments to typed comments, and more specifically, typed comments that did not linger necessarily on local concerns and surface errors, but typed responses that utilize the “best practices” composition specialists have laid out over the decades, would the results be the same? Sipple’s study in

particular raised some questions as to the content of the feedback that was provided in the written modality. She explains, as quoted above, that students who preferred written comments over audio comments did so because they claimed it was easier to find and fix spelling and grammar errors (28). However, one could wonder why spelling and grammar errors were even addressed in the written feedback, as opposed to the higher order concerns that were discussed in the audio feedbacks. Sipple's evaluation makes it seem like the written feedback and audio feedback were not addressing the same concerns. It would be helpful to know the kinds of comments that were made via the written feedback and the audio feedbacks that were being compared, so that a holistic evaluation could be made. If the written comments were mostly addressing spelling and grammar errors, or if the comments did not adhere to known best practices in other ways (maybe if they were vague or were not prioritized), then the results of Sipple's study could reflect a discontent with poor feedback practices more than a discontent with the written modality itself.

Furthermore, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2, not all students have equal internet access, which would most likely be acting as the medium for sending and receiving audio feedback (supposing that not many teachers use cassette tapes any longer). Research that takes this discrepancy into consideration is difficult to find, and more alarmingly, some studies seem to just assume the "myth" that students have both the access and the literacy to receive audio files. For example, Jeffrey Bilbro et. al. in their study "Responding Effectively to Composition Students: Comparing Student Perceptions of Written and Audio Feedback" claim that "The ubiquity of personal computing devices makes offering audio feedback to these students more practical than ever" (49). The "imagined"

classroom, in Bilbro et al.'s study, is one of privilege, where students have easy access to the internet and computing devices. Yet as discussed in Chapter 2, the reality is that not all students have internet access at home (according to the Pew Research Center, 27% of adults do not have internet access at home and internet access at home is heavily correlated to race and income).

Moreover, accessing audio files in a public or school library could prove specifically difficult. While accessing typed feedback returned via the internet might be cumbersome enough, accessing audio files may prove more difficult, in that the library or school computer must have speakers, or the student must have access to headphones. Even if the computer did have speakers, it may not be appropriate for the student to play an audio file in some settings, such as at a public library, as it may disturb other patrons or be against the rules. While audio files may have many practical benefits, there are also some concerns that, if ignored, could serve to perpetuate societal inequalities.

Throughout my undergraduate and graduate education, I have never personally received audio feedback. Though there is a decent amount of research dating back to the late 90s regarding audio feedback, it seems, at least anecdotally, not to have caught on. Throughout my education, the vast majority of my feedback has been hand written, with typed comments only occurring in online classes, and then the first year of my graduate studies, and then exclusively handwritten again my second year.²⁰ Though there are a handful of best practices articles discussing the many benefits of audio responses, and studies reporting that the majority of students prefer audio responses, I would be

²⁰ This refers to classroom writing. I have received video feedback from my thesis advisor during my second year of graduate school.

interested in understanding why the practice has not yet gained more widespread popularity. Instead, more attention seems to go to video response or screen capture.

Audio Visual Feedback

Screencasting is a digital technology that involves both audio as well as visual elements. A screencast is the visual display of the computer screen's output; that is, it's basically a recording of what is seen on the computer screen, and often contains an audio narration recording as well. In terms of responding to student writing, the screencast would presumably display the student's paper – and would record comments as the instructor moves the cursor over the page, highlights certain passages, and discusses the paper. Mary Silva Lourdes, in her essay, "Camtasia in the Classroom: Student Attitudes and Preferences for Video Commentary or Microsoft Word Comments during the Revision Process," explains how an instructor would use screencasting to provide feedback to student writing:

As the instructor reads an essay on her computer and provides feedback, the program records all screen movements and processes. A single word, sentence, or paragraph could be highlighted while the instructor offers oral or typed feedback. To address large units of text, an instructor could reorganize, edit, or delete text, and then open multiple documents or windows to reference the prompt, rubric, library Web site, Wikipedia, or YouTube, which provides another degree of audio and visual feedback. (2)

Outside of the classroom, screencasts are often used in instructional tutorials, maybe demonstrating how to use new features of software, showing users how a task is

accomplished in a given program (I once attended a webinar that utilized a screencast to show how to file a complicated application for a job, as well as answering frequently asked questions in the narration). Such a screencast tutorial would be both made and watched on a computer screen (or possibly a tablet).

Screencasts are created online, and there are a number of free software programs that an instructor could utilize. While some of these software are operating system specific (that is, they are designed for use only on Windows or Macs), such as CamStudio and Copernicus, others, such as Jing, are compatible with all operating systems. In addition to free programs, more sophisticated software such as Camtasia, Adobe Captivate, HyperCam, and ScreenMimic are available to purchase and install.

Screencasting is a fairly new technology. A proposal suggesting the development of screencasting software was presented in the Proceedings of the 1994 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work (Prakash, Shim). Following the proposal, scholarly work on the topic is virtually non-existent until 2005. Early studies are primarily in the fields of computer science as well as library science, and it was not until more recently that educators and researchers recognized the potential of screencasting for online education or for providing feedback to student writing (Mathieson). Silva, writing in 2012, reports that, “research in the use of screen-capture software in classroom instruction is scant” and that “much of the research on this topic has been conducted in the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia” (2). Screencasting is more widely being recognized in its potential to provide video lectures or instructions in online education classes, but scholarship specifically focusing on using screencasts to provide feedback to

student writing is now emerging. Much of the research is highly optimistic that screencasting can improve learning in the composition classroom (Anson; Evans; Mathieson; Thompson and Lee), and Silva maintains that, “Thus far, instructor response to the use of screen-capture software and student response to video tutorials and feedback have been positive (2).

Like audio feedback, research on screencasting praises the more personal and conversational aspect of the video, as opposed to the static and often impersonal text-on page responses (Anson, Mathieson, Silva, Thompson and Lee). Riki Thompson and Meredith J. Lee, in their “best practices” based article “Talking Students through Screencasting: Experimentations with Video Feedback to Improve Student Learning” point out that writing removes many of the personal markers of speech, and sometimes “reads more like chicken scratch than a clear message” (2) (possibly implying that they are using handwritten comments instead of typed comments as the basis of comparison). Screencasting, or veedback, as they call it, however,

Can be used to perform the ‘confused reader’ instead of the ‘finger-wagging critical teacher.’ A margin comment that says ‘this is awkward’ is different than hearing it read aloud from a real reader. The audio portion of veedback allows for communication that is conversational. In other words, teachers can speak the student’s language with veedback in ways that are absent in written comments. (Thompson and Lee 13)

Reinforcing Thompson and Lee's findings, Kathleen Mathieson, in her study "Exploring Student Perceptions of Audiovisual Feedback via Screencasting in Online Courses" reported that her students' comments on audiovisual feedback were similar:

Student's favoring text-plus-audiovisual feedback liked hearing the instructor's voice and seeing the activities captured on the instructor's screen, such as pointing, highlighting, and showing supplemental materials (e.g. lecture slides). Students felt that the audiovisual component made the feedback more engaging, comprehensible, and effective and that hearing the instructor's voice made the feedback feel more 'personal' and 'real.' Several reported feeling more 'connected' to the instructor. (149)

While Kim's study on audio responses indicated that, at times, the added paralinguistic features of audio response can sometimes be more harmful than helpful if the student can detect negative voice inflections, Chris Anson's forthcoming article on screen-capture responses, "She Really Took the Time: Student's Opinions of Screen-Capture Response to their Writing in Online Courses" indicates that students are more likely to interpret screen-capture feedback as being positive (15), as opposed to written feedback, where paralinguistic cues are absent and students can instead project or imagine negative characteristics that are not intrinsically present in the text (reading comments as mean spirited or condescending that may not have been intended that way).

In Anson's study, students were asked to rate the characteristics of how they felt about their teacher's commentary in both the written and screen-capture modes. The rating was done on a five-point agreement scale with terms including "supportive,"

“uncaring,” “friendly,” “discouraging,” etc., that were first created in opposing pairs and then randomized (Anson, “She” 15). Anson reports that, “across all sections... students reported significantly stronger positive affect and weaker negative affect from the screen-capture responses than the written responses” (15). This finding could indicate that though negative messages may be carried through audio aspects of feedback, they may also be more likely to be imagined or projected into text-only feedback, whereas audio elements can also convey positive messages and paralinguistic features that students could be less likely to project onto written feedback.

Like audio feedback, Anson’s study found that students felt more connected to the instructor as a result of audio-visual feedback. One student in his forthcoming study, Kristen, reported that, her teacher’s response was “more personal... even just little things like the fact that she would use [Kristen’s] name in the screen capture, whereas she may not have in the written comments kind of makes it more personal” (18). Another student in Anson’s study, Madison, also mentioned the effect of using a student’s name in the feedback, saying, “Anytime you say someone’s name, it just makes it that much more personal. Even if you don’t really know that person, if you can say their name, it means a lot more” (15). Such a minor conversational and personal strategy takes so little time and effort, and yet can greatly add to the reception and perception of the feedback as a whole, contributing to the students’ affect as they read, making the feedback more personal and in that way, possibly more persuasive and more likely to be positively received. Though it is possible to use the student’s name in a written modality, doing so is probably less natural than it is in a spoken medium.

In his concluding remarks, however, Anson reminds us that “the effectiveness of the method [screencasting] as a whole” may be due to the fact that the modality was “used by only two teachers who are ordinarily supportive and friendly” (20). It seems to be no stretch of the imagination to assume that not every writing teacher is, in fact, supportive and friendly all the time, and therefore, may not naturally use the language and intonation that carries positive messages of caring, support, helpfulness, etc. Kim’s study then, warning of the possibility that negative paralinguistic aspects could greatly affect the confidence and motivation of the student, ought to still be taken into account with screencasting feedback. Teachers who are not able to mitigate negative sounding responses may not receive the same positive results that Anson’s study has found.

Moving on to the question of priorities in response, many studies note that video feedback, like audio feedback often tends to focus on global, rather than local, issues (M. Silva; Thompson and Lee). Thompson and Lee note that, often, writing comments leads to the temptation to line edit, focus on surface errors, and mark every element or mistake in a student’s draft, providing a much too directive and appropriating system of responding to student writing (even though such responses are not considered best practices of feedback) (2).

Video commentary, on the other hand, encourages a more holistic and prioritized response to the text and allows for authentic feedback that more reflects the response of an audience engaging in the student’s text. That is, the “confused reader” persona that Thompson and Lee maintain the instructor can play, can highlight aspects of the essay that are confusing or not effective, and talk through why they feel that way, and what a

more convincing rhetorical approach could be. Intrinsic in screencasting is the ability to *show* as well as tell. Instructors, therefore, can explain both visually and audibly the lesson they are attempting to communicate. While this may allow for line-by-line edits, or focus on lower-order concerns, it seems to encourage a more substantial focus on higher-order concerns. Moreover, Lee and Thompson note that the five minute time limit of using the Jing software (one of the few free software that works for all operating systems, and thus a more popular choice) forces attention on higher order concerns, as that is most likely all there will be time to discuss (6). The time limit built in to this particular software, then, could also guard against overcommenting, and therefore, make it less likely for the student to feel overwhelmed and discouraged in the revision process.

Mary Lourdes Silva surveyed the students in her study to describe parts of the video that taught them something about writing. She claims that she was aware that some students may have preferred video feedback simply due to the novelty, and she wants to understand if the modality of the commentary illuminated components of the writing process, or if students perceived fundamental differences in the way they use feedback to revise their essays between Word comments and screencasting feedback. According to Silva, students who preferred the video comments were more likely to discuss (in the survey) the rhetorical and global issues of their writing, whereas students who preferred Word comments emphasized the ease of locating errors or trouble spots during the revision process, describing revision in more mechanical terms than their peers who preferred audio/visual (10).

Similar to what Anson found, Thompson and Lee also argue that a video response is better received by students because it is not perceived as personal criticism. They contend that, “Video feedback allows instructors to model a reader response, with the addition of cues that have the potential to help students take in feedback as part of an ongoing conversation about their work instead of personal criticism” (5), and then go on to assert that,

By talking to students and reading their work aloud, instructors can engage students on an interpersonal level that is absent in written comments. It’s about hearing the reader perform a response of full interest, confusion, and a desire to connect with the ideas of the writer... Feedback offers students an opportunity to get out of their heads and hear the emotional response that is more clearly conveyed through spoken words rather than writing.
(5-6)

Ultimately, Thompson and Lee argue that video feedback provides a way in which responding to student writing becomes dynamic and human in ways that writing margin notes or even end notes never can reach.

Of course, this argument of video feedback can also apply to a strictly audio response. The tone of voice, the features of speech that Thompson and Lee argue make video feedback responses more “human” and “personal” can be captured without the aid of video. And yet video responses allow these comments to contain an “immediacy” that is often praised in marginal notations of written feedback (N. Sommers, Ferris). That is, the student can see and hear the comments in the same window, on the same screen, right

alongside the specific place in their paper that is being discussed. Students merely listening to audio feedback and attempting to locate the places in the paper (if they even have their paper with them), may experience a split-attention effect because their attention is split between listening to the words and flipping through the paper (Silva 13). Researchers note that screencasting essentially allows the best of both worlds; the instructor can point to an immediate point in the text, allowing for the immediacy of marginal comments, and then provide an audio commentary that brings a more personal, human, communication element to the feedback process (Silva; Thompson and Lee).

Yet Thompson and Lee also note potential drawbacks that instructors engaging with screencasting technology may encounter. They report that, “Logistically, screencasting has its challenges, such as those we encountered – additional time at the computer and a quiet place to record videos,” (10) and furthermore that “keeping to the five-minute time limit was also a challenge, but the time limit also helped us to focus on the major issues in students’ writing rather than on minor problems” (10). Both authors agree that after getting accustomed to the software, the process began to take less time, and solutions like noise cancelling headphones allows the instructors to work even in areas that have background noise. Furthermore, Thompson and Lee were specifically working with Jing, a software that has a five-minute cap on videos. Other software allows for longer videos, but most of these must be purchased. Silva, for example, employed Camtasia for her study, a software that, in 2012, cost \$299 (Silva 5).

Not everyone agrees that screencasting saves time, however. Mathieson warned that screencasting feedback can take a substantial amount of time compared with text-

only feedback. She maintains that she spent an average of 23.9 minutes per assignment when providing audiovisual feedback, versus only an average of 11.9 minutes per assignment when providing text-only feedback. She summarizes her concern, holding that, “An important caveat regarding text-plus-audiovisual feedback is that it may require substantial instructor time; in this study, providing text-plus audiovisual feedback took twice as long as providing text-only feedback (151). Some reasons for the substantial difference in time could be that a screencast would have to be at least somewhat prepared. An instructor who aims to prioritize their feedback and present a coherent message may need to read the entire paper first and add written comments in order to create an outline for the screencast. This may be specifically important in a screencast, as opposed to audio-only feedback, in that the instructor would need to plan which parts of the paper to display in the screencast, what they want to highlight, or what instructional or supplemental materials they may want to include in the video. Though such thorough feedback might prove invaluable to many students, some instructors may find that they simply do not have the time to engage in such extensive and time consuming feedback.

Not only can screencasting technologies be time consuming on the teacher’s end, but at times, they can be inaccessible, and therefore, completely useless, to some students facing technological difficulties. Thompson and Lee reported that two of the nineteen students reported that they were unable to access the screencasts. One student said, “Jing feedback videos and [Dropbox] comments still do not work on my end, I have talked with tech guys and they can’t figure it out. I can’t find out how I did and ways to improve my writing;” (12) while another student wrote, “I like the videos but they were really hard to

get them to work. Sometimes it was hard to open the videos” (12). Likewise, although Silva asserted that all of her students had access to the Internet on campus, she reported that several students had trouble navigating within the software she implemented (8).

Moreover, Thompson and Lee indicated that an institutions’ server might only support a limited storage capacity that is not compatible with multiple screencast files (6). While some internet sites may provide storage, they may not be able to be set at “private” so that others cannot access the student’s private feedback. Additionally, some files may be too large to be attached to an email, and, depending on the uploading speed at either the instructor’s institution or home (often uploading speed varies by how much the institution is willing to pay the internet provider, or what internet speeds are available to the instructors at their homes), files may take a great deal of time to be uploaded to the computer in order to be uploaded to sites like Moodle or Blackboard. Distributing the videos in an easy and efficient manner, then, may prove cumbersome and add to the time it takes in the overall responding process.

Overall, screen capture technologies offer exciting and novel ways of responding to student writing that could prove to have many benefits. However, preliminary studies are only now just emerging, and because, as Chris Anson notes in his forthcoming study, many students have never received this type of feedback, their overwhelmingly positive remarks may reflect the “novelty” of the modality more than the actual helpfulness of the feedback (20). Furthermore, though many of the studies have focused on student preferences, very little is known about how screencasting can aid in the internalization of the feedback that leads to successful revision and transfer. Though it may be easy to

anecdotally speculate that audio-visual feedback, in that it can utilize both written and visual elements, as well as provide personal and detailed commentary, is more conducive to successful revision and transfer, there is, as of now, little-to-no empirical evidence that supports such a speculation.

Moreover, with screencasting as well as audio feedback, the concern that students will have difficulties accessing and utilizing the technology is serious. Though Thompson and Lee briefly mention that two students had trouble accessing the feedback they provided, they did not expand on the consequences of such difficulties. Despite the majority of the class apparently receiving detailed and possibly great feedback on their writing, at least one student in their study was not able to access *any* feedback and therefore was left without any instruction on how to improve his/her writing for future drafts, much less future papers and future classes. If a teacher's goal is to provide feedback that is accessible and helpful to *all* the students in their class, and if teachers are committed to teaching *each* student and not leaving any student out, then having even one student who cannot access feedback is an important issue. Pedagogies and methods that intrinsically privilege some students (those with internet access, devices, and literacy) at the expense of others (those with limited access or limited literacy) should only be implemented with extreme caution.

My own experience with screencasting is limited, and the feedback I received is probably not typical of what would be received in a composition classroom. An advisor was kind enough to review my CV and a cover letter, and used a Jing screencast to provide comments. The first difficulty that I found was that it was a little inconvenient to

view the video. Whereas with text comments, I could have pulled them up in a public place to skim over at least quickly, I found that I had to be in a more private environment before I could listen to the video comments (I typically don't carry headphones). This proved inconvenient, as I had to wait all day until I was at home before being able to review the comments (I would have been able to look at the text comments much earlier, and then would have had more time to brainstorm revisions etc.). Had I not had internet at home, it would have been difficult to find a public computer that has speakers in a place remote enough to listen to audio files without disrupting others.

Furthermore, the comments on the CV were often very detailed (format, indentations, technical concerns etc.), and I found it difficult to remember every little thing she pointed out. I had to take notes on the video, but then was less able to concentrate on the next item while I was still writing down the first. Feedback on numerous small details probably would have been much more helpful if they had been written down. To me, this indicates that, as much of the research indicates, screen capture and audio feedback is probably best suited for global concerns and prioritized, higher order commentary than it is on grammar and formatting issues. This is normally seen as positive, but depending on the context and needs of the student, can have negative aspects as well.

I did, however, find the commentary very helpful when specifically discussing the cover letter (as opposed to the CV). Because she was able to explain why something ought to be expanded or developed, or why I could mention this instead of that, I felt that I was more likely to take her suggestions than I would had I not understood her

reasoning. It seems like much of her explanations were probably not what would normally be included in written feedback, as they were much lengthier and much more detailed than would be practical to include in marginal comments. It was easier for me, as someone who tends to lose focus with only audio input, to have the paper on the screen in front of me and to see her highlighting the areas she was specifically referring to. Even if I had the paper in front of me while listening to audio comments, it would have taken more time to locate the place she wanted to discuss, and in the process of skimming the paper (especially if it were a more lengthy paper) to locate the paragraph or section, I could imagine I would not completely get all of the commentary as I sift through the paper.

After reviewing the literature surrounding audio and screen-capture feedbacks, as well as my own brief experiences with screen-captures, I personally remain unconvinced that these modalities will equally benefit everyone in the composition classroom. Some of my reservations have already been discussed regarding digital access and literacies. I am not convinced that these modalities will be able include everyone. I am not convinced that they won't, in some ways, simply perpetuate the privileges of already privileged groups at the expense of those already disadvantaged. In the next chapter, I will discuss another consideration I believe ought to be taken into account in the conversation regarding modalities of response: second language learning. As I explain further in the next chapter, instructional paradigms and methods should teach to *all* students in a class. Therefore, due to the growing number of both international students as well as resident bilinguals now enrolled in mainstream composition courses, best practices could be

revisited to consider how second language learners (that I argue should be considered part of the “mainstream” population) are affected by written, audio, or screencasting feedbacks.

Chapter 3: Responding to Second Language Writing

So far this thesis has looked at best practices for responding to student writing in Chapter 1 and studies and research regarding different modalities of feedback, including print and digital, typed and audiovisual, in Chapters 2 and 3. However, the practices described in these chapters seem to imagine what Paul Kei Matsuda refers to as a homogeneous, monolingual classroom. That is, they assume that all students speak, understand, read, and write Standard English. They don't explicitly take linguistic or cultural differences into account. However, we know that college classrooms can be highly diverse linguistically and culturally.

Therefore, this chapter addresses the reality of a multicultural classroom in the hopes that future research on modality of feedback will reflect that reality. I review scholarship that addresses the unique needs of second language learner when it comes to feedback, though this scholarship often falls outside of composition studies and is considered part of the discipline of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). I provide a brief history of second language learning in the mainstream composition classroom and follow with a literature review specific to responding to second language learners, discussing both best practices as well as modalities of response.

Scholarship that "assumes" linguistic homogeneity (often simply by omitting considerations for multilingual and multicultural students), envisions and studies a classroom that is primarily conceived as a monolingual space in which native speakers of English are the assumed student population. Such practices for teaching college

composition, developed from native speaker/L1 (first language) pedagogies, do not always benefit or apply to the growing linguistically diverse student population that is now represented in American higher education. With over 800,000 international students currently enrolled in U.S. higher education, (not including resident immigrants or resident bilinguals) (International Students: Enrollment Trends), and a steady rate of growth over the past decades, composition pedagogy needs updating to take into account the entire student population and avoid leaving students out of the pedagogical paradigm due to their different needs and abilities. In order to do that, research on what practices are most effective for second language students is needed and overdue. Scholarship that does not recognize linguistic and cultural differences could lead to gatekeeping techniques that even the most well-intentioned instructor could unwittingly utilize in responding to student writing.

Second language writing refers to the writing done by students whose first language, or home language, is not English. This can be a difficult population to define, as there are many different kinds of second language learners. However, the purpose of this chapter is not to delineate each specific group of learners, though the composition field could benefit from studies that examine responding to student writing in more narrow terms, such as international students (elective bilinguals) versus first generation bilinguals (often circumstantial bilinguals) versus second generation immigrants, etc. Nor will this chapter look at all second language learners. Instead, this chapter is concerned with a sub set of second language learners referred to as “functional bilinguals.” Functional bilingualism is the stage at which “an individual can interact effectively with

native speakers of the second language in order to carry out a broad range of communicative activities” (Valdés 48). These are students who have met the language requirements of their given institution and are enrolled in mainstream classes. They can read the textbooks and assignments, understand the lectures (linguistically) and class discussion, write their papers, and speak up in conferences and workshop. This contrasts with incipient bilingualism, which refers to the earlier stages of language acquisition in which the speaker has not yet gained sufficient control of the language to engage in meaningful communicative exchanges with native speakers. These students are usually placed in ESL classes or language intensive programs and are not the focus of this thesis.

I begin by addressing, at length, what Paul Kei Matsuda, professor of English and Director of Second Language Writing at Arizona State University and a leading voice in the field of Composition as well as TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages), refers to as the “disciplinary division of labor” with an overview of when, how, and why composition studies and TESOL have essentially divided the student population. After that, I discuss the problems of this division as they relate to research on the modalities of response to student writing and then examine research regarding feedback in the field of TESOL, drawing conclusions that pertain to modality of feedback in mainstream writing classrooms. Finally I explore the general lack of explicit research and studies regarding modality of feedback for second language learners, and I make suggestions for further research on the topic.

Disciplinary Division of Labor: L1 Pedagogies Applied to L2 Learners

Throughout his work, Paul Matsuda firmly asserts that composition studies, as a whole, needs to reconsider the implications of instructional practices that assume linguistic homogeneity. That is, Matsuda's primary concern is that the structures, theories, practices, and pedagogies of composition courses throughout United States' higher education are overwhelmingly based in practices designed only with the native English speaker in mind. Matsuda claims that "The first-year composition classroom is no longer the kind of monolingual space it once was" (Introduction 1). He goes on to explain that the American college classroom of the 19th century, was, at least on the surface, relatively linguistically homogenous. But when many colleges and universities began opening their doors to a wider population of students in the 1970s, "the demographics in higher education began to reflect the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of the larger society" (Introduction 1). As a result, classrooms have become a place of linguistic diversity, whether as a result of multiple dialects or multiple languages. This trend has increased in the past half-century. Matsuda argues that the "myth of homogeneity" is no longer appropriate or responsible and that this ideology needs to be challenged and changed to reflect the diversity of U.S. society and the growing number of international students on U.S. college campuses. In *Second Language Writing in the Composition Classroom*, Matsuda, Michelle Cox, Jay Jordan, and Christina Ortmeier- Hooper write that,

Second-language students in first-year composition continue to encounter curricula, assignments, and assessment practices that are not designed with

their needs and abilities in mind, and even the most conscientious of composition teachers often have not been given access to the background or resources to make their instructional practices more compatible with their students. (2)

They explain that “despite the growing presence of second language writers [in the classroom] and the increased awareness of second language writing issues in academia, many conscientious teachers feel underprepared to work with [these students]” (2).

Matsuda et al. cite numerous reasons for this discomfort, including the lack of availability of graduate level composition courses on second language writing, or the lack of inclusion of this area in professional preparation opportunities in general, as well as the disciplinary division of labor separating ESL degree programs from rhetoric composition instruction that makes teachers feel that it is not their job or their place to become experts in L2 composition (2). Further, some composition classes are taught by instructors not trained primarily in rhetoric and composition but in creative writing or literature. These instructors might have even less prior training in adapting curriculum for second language students.

With these discomforts in mind, I want to provide a brief history of why composition studies and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) have historically operated in different fields, each with separate scholarship that seldom crosses disciplinary lines. This account helps shed light on why mainstream classrooms

typically may not be fully designed and equipped to reach the specific needs of many second language learners.

Historical Perspective of Second Language Writing

In his essay “Second Language Writing in the Twentieth Century,” Matsuda shows that existing historical accounts of second language writing usually see the 1960s as the beginning of the field of ESL studies. Not only do these accounts, which begin appearing in the 1990s, place the origin of the field in the 60s, but they also, as Matsuda argues, “tend to position second language writing as a subfield of second language studies” (20). Matsuda’s project, however, is to argue for an interdisciplinary perspective and show how the lines between L1 and L2 studies were drawn. He argues that “our theoretical and pedagogical practices are always historically situated” and that it is in understanding this history that we can apply or modify our theories and pedagogies in light of new or changing circumstances or theoretical insights (20).

Matsuda explains that the emergence of teaching English as a second language in the United States stemmed from pre-WWII angst at the potential for a totalitarianism threat to emerge in Latin America countries. Teaching English to speakers of those countries became a matter of national security. The early second language pedagogy privileged speaking over writing, and Matsuda explains that, “the intellectual leaders of early applied linguistics... argued that phonetics should be the basis of both theoretical and practical studies of language” (21). He reports that the neglect of second language writing was most conspicuous from the 1940s to the 1960s, the time in which the first English Language Institute (ELI) was founded by Charles C. Fries in 1941 (21-22).

Though the ELI, following the then current model of applied linguistics, did not concern itself with teaching second language writing (Fries assumed that writing would naturally follow when a student learned the structure and sounds of a language) (22), a growing number of international students from beyond Latin America began flowing into higher education in the United States. This influx of students required college composition courses to develop instruction in second language writing (22). Matsuda explains that as the numbers of international students multiplied between the 1940s and the 1950s, writing programs began to create special sections of freshman English courses, sometimes remedial and sometimes equivalent to those offered to native- English speakers (23).

L2 writing instruction became, in this time, a significant issue at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), which was established in 1949 as the primary forum for teaching and composition professionals (23). ESL panels and workshops were featured and attended by compositionists across the field. But in the late 1950s, L2 writing concerns began to shift from composition studies to second language studies when the field of teaching ESL grew and developed specialists and professionals through teacher preparation programs. Such specialists argued that once ESL training was available, L2 students should only be taught by trained specialists. Matsuda explains that “as a result, many composition specialists of the time lost interest in ESL,” (23) and by the mid-1960s, the CCCC discouraged members of the ESL workshop not to meet there again, as attendance in such presentations was so small. In 1966 TESOL (Teachings to Speakers of Other Languages), an organization to serve the needs and interests of L2

specialists, was founded.²¹ Writing issues were divided into L1 and L2 lines, and what Matsuda calls the “disciplinary division of labor” was firmly established (23).

With this disciplinary divide in mind, Guadalupe Valdés, in her article “Bilingual Minorities and Language Issues in Writing: Toward Professionwide Responses to a New Challenge,” argues that pedagogical approaches imagined and designed for native speakers do not always meet the needs and situations of second language learners. She asserts that

Teaching the new population of this country, especially students who come from non-English-speaking backgrounds, will involve much more than ‘celebrating’ cultural differences. Addressing the needs of these students will demand carefully planned pedagogical solutions based on an understanding of their unique characteristics. (37)

She then goes on to delineate the placement and context of “functional bilinguals,” that is, a student whose first or home language is not English but who has developed a sufficient command and control of the language to be placed into mainstream classes. She argues that, upon completion of an ESL program,²² the learners move straight into mainstream classrooms where they are expected to compete with their native-speaking peers. These mainstream classrooms often have “little accommodation made” for the second language learner, she says, and the “pedagogical paradigms are inadequate in that they fail to account for complexities of bilingualism,” which results in

²¹ TESOL as an organization is not only concerned with L2 writing, but focuses on many facets of language teaching, including speaking, listening, and reading.

²² Or when a student passes the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). A passing score is often set by specific departments within universities and varies.

“a view of the nature of writing and the teaching of composition that can be potentially harmful for a large segment of the population of this country” (40). In the case of this thesis, maybe there are views of responding to student writing, or some practices regarding modalities of responses that may not be beneficial, and may in fact be harmful to second language learners.

Mainstream, then, needs to be re-imagined. By arguing that second language learners should be seen as mainstream writers when they enter the composition classroom, neither Matsuda nor Valdés is minimizing the differences between native speakers and nonnative speakers. Mainstream is only problematic when it is imagined as homogenous. Instead, the mainstream writing classroom could be better imagined as the heterogeneous space it already is in order to accommodate cultural and linguistic diversity. Teaching *all* students in the mainstream classroom means adjusting practices to meet the needs of individuals. Pedagogies that don’t take significant linguistic and cultural issues into account are less effective in a classroom that is both linguistically and culturally diverse.

From a historical perspective of second language writing and a brief review of research on responding to second language writing, it is clear that current “best practices” of responding to student writing are designed for a monolingual, homogenous classroom. That position needs to be reconstructed to meet the various and diverse needs of second language learners. Though a push for such a reconstruction has already begun, in the

work of Matsuda, Valdés, and many others,²³ alternative practices and awareness of different response principles are only rarely reflected in the mainstream conversation regarding both the content and patterns of response as well as the modalities of response.

The need for teacher awareness of response principles for non-native speakers is a key findings of a study conducted that examines teacher practices and attitudes towards responding to second language writing in mainstream composition classrooms. Dana Ferris, Jeffrey Brown, Hsiang Liu, and Maria Eugenia Arnaudo Stine, in their 2011 study “Responding to L2 Students in College Writing Classes: Teacher Perspectives” found that many mainstream instructors with second language learners in their classrooms perceive no difference in the way they respond to L1 and L2 writing (218). Some respondents indicated that they respond the same, but when the student’s papers were analyzed, Ferris et. al. found that these teachers focus almost exclusively on language and grammar components rather than on content, organization, or other global issues (220). Some respondents reported that they send their L2 students to outside support such as writing centers or intensive English programs on campus, but they do not tailor their teaching or responding styles to accommodate their L2 students (218). A few teachers

²³ In 2009, CCCC issued a statement regarding second language writers: “CCCC Statement on Second-Language Writing and Writers.” This document outlines the CCCC’s recognition of “the growing number of second-language writers in institutions across North America” and outlines an appropriate and necessary response to such growth. The statement “urges,” for example, that writing teachers and writing program administrators “Recognize and take responsibility for the regular presence of second-language writers in writing classes, to understand their characteristics, and to develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs” (CCCC Statement 11). Such a document is a foundational step in addressing the needs of second language writers, and responses to the statement are beginning to emerge throughout writing programs and classes.

recognized that they respond differently when they know a student is working in a second language, but many of those teachers, again, focused almost exclusively on linguistic, not content, concerns (220).

Yet when Ferris et al. examined the attitudes behind teacher response practices, some of the results were quite troubling. Ferris et al. report that,

Some [instructors] firmly believed that [second language learners] ‘do not belong’ in their classes and expressed resentment of the perceived extra burdens L2 writers might bring. In an interview, one teacher said that, on the first day of class, she encourages L2 writers to drop her course by writing ‘in bold letters: **‘This is not an ESL class’** at the top’ of her syllabus. She added that if such students ‘insist on staying’ in the class, then they receive the same instruction as the monolingual English speakers and are held to the same standards. (220)

Another teacher claimed that they “understand that the needs of an ESL student differ from native speakers [...] but the ESL department is mainly responsible for those skills” (221). Ferris et. al. bring to light that in some instances, the disciplinary divide creates not only a gap in knowledge or awareness, but a gap in perceived responsibility. Some instructors feel it is simply not their job to accommodate second language learners in a mainstream classroom.

These findings are troubling. Many well-intentioned instructors may simply not be aware of the linguistic differences in their classroom, or more probably, the attention that such differences require. Other instructors think it is simply not their responsibility to

accommodate the needs of the learners in their classrooms. One source of this gap in practice could be linked to a gap in scholarship. The divide is more often than not seen in the silence; it's found by what and who is not talked about. Though there are plenty of studies on responding to student writing, the vast majority of those are designed for the mainstream classroom (as opposed to an ESL specific classroom) and do not typically specifically discuss second language learners. In not focusing on ESL issues, the implication may be that these L2 students are no different than other students, an implication that Valdés adamantly opposes for reasons I will discuss at length later in this chapter.

Now I will look at research on responding to student writing conducted by scholars in the TESOL field, who have found that perhaps many of the basic tenets of "best practices" for responding to student writing may not, in fact, benefit many second language learners, and therefore practices could be adjusted when responding to second language writing.

Current Perspectives of Responding to Second Language Writing

Although Nancy Sommers and others suggest focusing response on global rather than local issues during formative feedback (N. Sommers 18), L2 researchers are questioning whether such a division (between global and local) is necessary or optimal for L2 learners (Ferris et. al. 208). Ann Raimes, in her essay, "Errors: Windows into the Mind" focuses on second language learners to find an appropriate response to their frequent linguistic errors. Raimes insists that teachers cannot ignore grammar errors in favor of content and simply hope that errors will disappear (57). She maintains that such

an approach is not fair to students who will soon have to compete with native speakers in advanced courses, graduate school, or the job market (57). She provides strategies to address errors, including: letting students know and understand the system the teacher uses to mark errors (281); relating the comments on the papers to the task that is assigned (282); establishing priorities, often by focusing first on “global errors” that impede understanding (282); pointing to grammatical strengths as well as weaknesses (283); and introducing proofreading strategies (284). Responding to L2 grammar errors may be an important part of learners’ language learning process. However, this is not to say that all errors might be addressed all the time. Valdés explains that some errors may be “fossilized,” and that repeated instruction may not be able to fix this error.

Grammar instruction is typically not the focus of first year composition classrooms because it is assumed that such instruction normally takes place before the student reaches the college or university level (international students typically have to pass a standardized test to ensure that they are prepared for coursework in mainstream classes). However, as Valdés explains, the vast majority of second language learners will continue to display notable linguistic differences, even when they may technically be “fluent” in the second language (51). Valdés points out that the overwhelming majority of second language learners are realistically *never* going to sound, or write, like native speakers (50). This may be due to a variety of reasons, including fossilization. Fossilization occurs, she explains, when a speaker continues to make, and will continue to make most likely for the duration of their lives, a repeated error. Formal teaching and direct grammar instruction very rarely can undo or “fix” a fossilized linguistic pattern

(51). Therefore, teachers who continuously mark this mistake are only penalizing the student for an unavoidable linguistic occurrence that is part of the nature of learning a second language.²⁴

Another distinguishing feature of second language writing is an inevitable lack of mastery over English idioms (including prepositional idioms). Valdés recognizes that

²⁴ An overwhelming consensus concerning the “best practices” of responding to second language grammar is that expectations need to be realistic and not penalize students for not being native speakers. Practices that don’t consider the context and research of second language learners, however well-intentioned, end up functioning merely as gatekeeping methods, holding students back and penalizing those who aren’t native speakers of English. Gatekeeping is too often consequence of many first-year writing courses in the university, as discussed by many scholars including Lynn Bloom, Donald Daiker, and Victor Villanueva, to name a few. As articulated by these scholars, the composition classroom can either act as a “gateway” to academic success, or as a “gatekeeper,” preventing access to higher academia, often based on language proficiency. cite

The tension between gateway and gatekeeping is also addressed by Robert E. Land Jr and Catherine Whitley, in their article “Evaluating Second Language Essays in Regular Composition Classes: Toward a Pluralistic U.S. Rhetoric.” Land and Whitley acknowledge the tension between the attempts to facilitate language growth in a way that allows for second language students to succeed in school and the workplace versus unrealistic expectations of fluency that act as academic gatekeeping. They discuss this tension, maintaining that

Our nominal goal of helping students avoid linguistic disenfranchisement seems, at first glance, both pragmatic and responsible. However, the prevalent methods of evaluating and writing- especially in classes where ESL students compete directly with native speakers and where instructors have little or no training in teaching second language learners suggest that we don’t wish ESL students to attain only a ‘facility’ with written English; instead, we expect them to become entirely fluent in English, a goal different in nature and implication from our purported one. (330)

With the best intentions, compositionists understand a very real pressure that students, and particularly our second language learners, will have to face when they leave the classroom and venture out into the “real world,” and instructors feel the need to prepare them for that harsh reality. However, many times that preparation simply begins to function as a form of gate-keeping – not allowing students to pass through based on their linguistic differences.

functional bilinguals may always display “foreign” or nonnative like features (51). Simply, their writing doesn’t *sound* like what a native speaker expects. They don’t phrase things in ways that native speakers are accustomed to hearing. Similar to errors due to fossilization, these idiomatic errors, Valdés argues will never be fixed by additional instruction and formal grammar training. Moreover, many of these features are not necessarily errors. A sentence can be grammatically and syntactically correct, but still not “sound” right to a native speaker in ways that nonnative speakers might never be able to “hear.” Penalizing this voice does not benefit the student and does not teach the student anything of substance, anything that could improve their future writing. It only functions as a gatekeeping method that prevents students from succeeding.

Best practices for responding to second language writing are also addressed by Dana R. Ferris and John S. Hedgcock, in their book, *Teaching ESL Composition*. Here, Ferris and Hedgcock discuss best practices that delve into the claim that both local errors as well as global features can be addressed in feedback. Though Ferris and Hedgcock’s book is designed for an ESL specific classroom, the chapter “Teacher Response to Student Writing: Issues in Oral and Written Feedback” can apply to any classroom where L2 writing is taking place. Three basic tenets that Ferris and Hedgcock present are that 1) feedback should be provided at intermediate stages of the writing process, 2) feedback should focus on a range of issues (as opposed to solely “language,” solely “ideas,” or solely “organization”), and 3) feedback should pay attention to “the formal characteristics of their feedback (scope, pragmatic form, and so on) so that students can both understand

and use it effectively (189). Paying attention to the pragmatic form of feedback includes paying attention to the modality of response.

Ferris and Hedgcock discuss mechanisms of feedback, formative or summative responses, etc. and aspects of responding to L2 writing that differ from traditional best practices, for responding to L1, or mainstream, writing. Two areas where Ferris and Hedgcock highlight a difference of approach between responding to Native Speakers (NS) and Non Native Speakers (NNS) are in questions/statements and content/form. While traditional best practices encourage feedback that uses questions instead of commands to lessen the risk of appropriation (Knoblauch and Brannon, Sommers, White etc.), Ferris and Hedgcock suggest that this strategy might be confusing or detrimental for second language writers. Whereas native speakers can easily recognize indirect questions as a politely phrased request, for example, nonnative speakers might misinterpret questions as real yes/no questions due to cultural understandings of the possible functions of questions, and may wonder if the teacher is incompetent or insecure. Ferris and Hedgcock use the “Can you give an example here” question as their own example, maintaining that,

Whereas NS [Native Speaker] writers can easily recognize an indirect comment such as “Can you give an example here?” as a politely phrased teacher request rather than a ‘real’ question (akin to “Can you shut the door?”), students less experienced with English pragmatic phenomena or North American teachers’ desire to assume a nonappropriative stance may either misinterpret the question as

a real yes/no question (possibly answering “no”!) or wonder if the teacher’s wishy-washiness is a sign of incompetence or insecurity (199).

Consequently, the writer may lose respect for the teacher and ignore the question.

Furthermore, in cultures where more responsibility is placed on the reader to understand what the author is saying, rather than the author explicitly spelling out every nuance, a teacher who says (or writes) something along the lines of “I don’t understand...” or “I am confused when...” could lose credibility from some students. Though a teacher could take the time to explain how rhetorical questions work in American society, or the intentions behind a teacher professing to not understand aspects of student writing, Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, Dorothy S. Messerschmitt, and Stephanie Vandrick explain why this strategy could possibly create a confusing and frustrating situation:

When one teaches language, one also introduces others to the dominant culture(s) of that language; thus it is important to convey cultural information without implying that one language or culture is somehow superior to another. Of course students do not have to adopt the culture(s) of the language they are learning, but it is often difficult to separate the two, and may create a confusing and even painful situation for students. (6)

Asking a student to rewire the way they perceive teacher-student relationships, in the case of the “confused teacher” tactic, to simply throw away their previous notions of how a teacher will respond to writing, may be difficult and confusing for the student. This is not to say that a teacher needs to model every behavior expected of instructors in the culture

of each individual student in their class. Rather, instructors could be aware of the messages they may unwittingly send students by not being aware of the student's cultural expectations. An instructor may lose credibility or may be frustrated receiving a copy of a draft without the revisions the instructor "asked for" if the instructor does not phrase responses in a way the student has been taught to understand and respect.

Modality of Feedback and L2 Learners

Though studies that specifically focused on modalities of response for second language learners are difficult to locate, by assessing the information from Chapter 2 regarding the uses and features of certain modalities, paired with an understanding of best practices in responding to second language writing, a number of observations can be made, and questions can be posed for further research. In this section, I will attempt to draw a few conclusions of my own as well as pose some questions that I believe remain largely unanswered.

For example, audio and screencasting responses are largely praised for the ease with which they accommodate commenting on global concerns as opposed to line-by-line editing (which, practically speaking, would actually be rather cumbersome and unnatural in an audio medium) (J. Sommers, Anson, Barnett). The nature of audio commenting makes it easier to discuss holistic concerns, and as the paper is not necessarily being "marked," every error will inevitably not be addressed, which may not be the case with text-on-page responses. However, given Raimes', Ferris', and Hedgcock's discussion of local versus global issues in second language writing, it seems as though largely ignoring

grammatical concepts may not prove beneficial to the second language learner, who, in other classes or in the job market, will have to compete with native peers and will in most instances be judged by the standards of Standard American English. Given this assumption, it might not prove beneficial to ignore all local errors, specifically local errors that impede meaning. While audio responses may still accommodate such a discussion (keeping in mind that the paper still does not need to be line-by-line edited, as doing so may still discourage the learner or enforce gatekeeping techniques designed to penalize students who do not sound like native speakers). In this way, audio (or audio visual) discussions for the second language learners might be slightly different than those for the native speaker.

The effectiveness and ease with which L2 students could understand and utilize audio elements of response would be highly dependent on their second language aural skills. Ferris and Hedgcock remind us that, “Some students may find oral responses frustrating and confusing because of weak aural skills” (195). To better understand who this student population might be, Joy Reid, in her article “‘Eye’ Learners and ‘Ear’ Learners: Identifying the Language Needs of International Student and U.S. Resident Writers” makes distinctions between the language learning process and needs of different groups of second language learners that can have huge implications for modalities of response. Reid divides second language learners into two general groups (understanding that there are always exceptions and that broad generalizations cannot contain each individual student): 1) U.S. resident students for whom English is a second language, or whose home language is not English, but who may have spent a number of years in the

United States, and 2) international students who have come from non-English speaking countries to study at postsecondary institutions in the U.S. These two groups have, generally speaking, learned and experienced English in different ways and therefore have different linguistic skills and proficiencies, which could lend themselves to either being advantaged or disadvantaged by certain modalities of feedback.

Reid explains that U.S. resident L2 students are the students who are often the children of immigrants or refugees (82). They are usually fluent in their first language, but may not be fully literate in that language (83). These students can usually be thought of as “ear” learners. They typically grew up (or have spent many years) in the American school system, and have learned English at a young language by ear. They often understand pop culture references, have opinions on current controversies and issues, and are familiar with class structures and expectations (83). However, she maintains that “their reading skills may be hampered by limited understanding of the structures of the English language, and/or lack of literacy, and/or lack of reading experience” (83). For many of these students, audio or audio visual feedback might be ideal. The conversational tone of the feedback might be more familiar than the often rigid academic language employed in writing. Furthermore, their listening skills are most likely much stronger than their reading skills, and such feedback would cater to their strengths as a learner.

International student writers, however, typically have very different skills and strengths than resident bilinguals. According to Reid, international student writers are students who have chosen to attend college or university in the U.S. They grew up and

were educated in their home country, learning English in the school system, mostly taught by NNS themselves. They are literate and fluent in their first language, and have learned English mostly through their “eyes,” that is, studying vocabulary, grammar worksheets, verb forms, language rules etc. According to Reid,

These students know, understand, and can explain English grammar...

Often their reading skills are substantial. Usually, however, their listening and oral skills are hampered by lack of experience, nonnative English-speaking teachers, and the culture shock that comes from being immersed in a foreign culture, the language of which sounds like so much “noise,” so different from their studied English language. (85).

For international student writers, especially those in their first year at the U.S., audio or audio visual feedback may, in general, be more difficult. They may have trouble understanding the teacher’s accent, understanding idioms typical in conversational speech, or the rate of the speech may be too fast for complete comprehension. These students might struggle with audio or audio visual responses and may be much more successful with written responses. Written responses would more often take advantage of their strengths.

Though not every individual learner will fit into a neat category that will allow broad generalizations to be drawn, it is generally understood that L2 learners bring unique abilities and needs to the composition classrooms. L1 practices of responding to student writing don’t entirely transfer and neatly correspond to practices that would be beneficial for L2 students. Responses and feedback, both in content and modality, that

may benefit the typical L1 learner, might be detrimental or generally difficult for the L2 learner to utilize, much less internalize and use in future learning. As we have seen, then, this chapter has attempted to identify ways in which response practice might differ between the groups, but more research is needed to give a full understanding of response practices for the many second language learners in mainstream composition classrooms. These suggestions will be discussed in my conclusion with other considerations for future research in modalities of response in general.

Conclusion

Responding to student writing is a complex issue, with many facets and tensions. Recent scholarship on modalities of response disseminate new and exciting forms that responses can take, forms that allow for responses to be delivered and shaped in ways that move beyond the linear, sometimes rote text-on-page. However, these new technologies come with tensions and possible conflicts of their own. It could be easy to grab ahold of the latest technology and use it incessantly and without question, to celebrate its many benefits without critically examining the tensions that surround technology in the classroom. It could also, however, be easy to reject technology for merely the sake the traditional, the tried-and-true-what-has-always-worked methods, clinging to traditional practice without critically examining those assumptions and implications as well.

This thesis, then, attempts to find a middle ground. It seeks to be attentive to the many exciting possibilities opened up through different modalities and responses. It seeks to draw attention to how modalities of responses can actively work to promote internalization and transfer of feedback and to foster best practices of responding. Audio and audiovisual responses, as discussed in Chapter 2, have the great potential of drawing attention to global aspects of composition, and to explain, in a (possibly) more comprehensive way, the effects of rhetorical choices on the reader. These modalities allow for a personal connection to be established that is often missing from more traditional ink on paper responses.

However, in the midst of this excitement, possible points of tensions emerge. This thesis has discussed two of those tensions, digital access and literacy and second language learners, and there could be more that may be brought to light as this discussion more fully emerges. By bringing attention to discrepancies and inequalities in digital accesses and literacies, as well as shedding light on the unique needs of second language learners, this thesis does not seek to assert that new modalities of responses should not be explored or utilized in the classroom. Rather, it seeks to explore underlying assumptions – the assumption that the current generation of students have both access and fluency in digital technologies, as well as the assumption that the classroom is a monolingual space – and in light of those assumptions, expose issues that should be taken into consideration when discussing modalities of response.

As the discussion on modalities of response continues to emerge, new technologies will continue to develop, offering modalities of responses that we may not be able to conceive of today. With new emerging options for response, it could benefit compositionists to continue to examine how these might enable them to better serve students to help them improve their writing, but must be mindful of new points of tension that will surface with these new technologies. Sometimes, this requires stepping back and identifying basic assumptions that are embedded into the technologies or practices that utilize such technologies in the classroom. For this thesis, those assumptions included 1) the assumption that everyone has sufficient digital access and literacy and 2) that the needs of multilingual learners are the same as the needs of native speakers. Many times,

these assumptions go unspoken, and if they are not addressed, can be detrimental to students, often students already facing disadvantages.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further research into modalities of responses can better shed light on lingering questions as the discussion unfolds. One question that seems to be at the foundation of an examination of modalities is finding out how teachers are currently responding to student writing, and how such methods, practices, and modalities are chosen. Though anecdotally, it seems that hand-written responses are still the norm, there may not be accessible data available to support this claim. How do instructors in higher education respond to student writing? Are response practices and modalities the same throughout the various disciplines and fields? What information and factors determine how an instructor decides to respond to student writing? The last question seems especially significant. Are many instructors still responding to student writing with pen and paper simply because that is how it's always been done? Are they aware of other methods and comfortable with the technologies those methods would require? Or are they conscientiously determining their response styles based on knowledge of digital accesses or literacies in their classroom (or other important factors that could make written responses the most practical, maybe physical constraints such as eyesight, carpal tunnel, etc.)?

This thesis has suggested that the modality of responses generally affects the content of the response. Some studies have indicated that audio responses tend to be more general and conversational in nature, but further research could qualitatively indicate the

effect of the modality on the content of the message. What elements of writing are focused on or ignored due to the affordances or limitations of a specific modality?²⁵

Furthermore, many studies presented in this thesis focused primarily on student perception and preference of response modalities. More quantitative analysis could be done to indicate how (or whether) students are able to successfully implement feedback across different modalities. Though difficult for many practical reasons, empirical studies could focus longitudinally, to assess how feedback in different modalities contributes to the transfer of learning. Longitudinal studies that follow students for a longer period of time than the length of one class could give us a better idea of the internalization and subsequent transfer of feedback.

Finally, research can be expanded to consider a more diverse student population. It would be interesting to know if there were correlations to feedback modality preferences based on gender, age, ethnicity, learning styles, or other factors. Though Sipple's study addresses developmental writers, more studies focusing on this specific group could bolster our knowledge on this specific group and their feedback needs and preferences. Another group that, as I maintained in this thesis, could use more specific attention is second language learners. Research that looks at second language learning, both at the functional and incipient levels, could provide insights to how best serve this student population. This research could narrow in on difference subsets of the second

²⁵ If grammar, for example, is generally being ignored in audio or audio visual feedback, is this generally positive, or could there be detrimental consequences?

language learner population, including international students, resident bilinguals, generation 1.5,²⁶ etc.

As providing feedback to student writing is an essential and time consuming task of the instructor, answers to these questions can help teachers gauge the effectiveness of their feedback, getting the most from their time and effort. There may not be a “one-size-fits-all” approach that solves all of our responding problems and frustrations. None of the modalities discussed will likely end up being an “easy” button that magically makes responding to student writing perfect. Each modality will come with its own constraints and could be problematic for different portions of the student population. It’s likely that no modality is objectively better than another, and more likely that a specific modality could better serve specific purposes or goals in responding, or be better suited for some students more than others. Given this information, it’s up to instructors as well as Writing Program Administrators to understand the options they have for responding to student writing, examine the tensions surrounding these modalities, and make decisions that are both practical for the instructors and the department, as well as beneficial for promoting student learning and success.²⁷

²⁶ Students who were born in the U.S. from immigrant parents, whose first language is not English.

²⁷ Decisions regarding modality of feedback are not always in the hands of the instructors. Some programs may have certain requirements for feedback, or some schools may not provide access to specific technologies. Writing Program Administrators, therefore, may play a key role in the modalities available to instructors, as well as insuring the necessary technologies, training, and assistance required to utilize such technologies.

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