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Fighting for the Users: Using Action Research to Examine the Impact of Sustained Dialogue Through Effective Instructor Feedback on Student Satisfaction in an Online Undergraduate Course: A Dissertation in Practice

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FIGHTING FOR THE USERS: USING ACTION RESEARCH TO EXAMINE THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINED DIALOGUE THROUGH EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK ON STUDENT SATISFACTION IN AN ONLINE UNDERGRADUATE COURSE: A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

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Dedication

To my wife, my very patient wife, Audrey. I love you very much, and without your support I would have never even found this program, let alone graduated. You believed in me the entire way, and you never let me give up. You are my light, you are my everything, and I am excited to see what the next journey in our lives brings now that I will have my doctorate.

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Abstract

As online courses continue to gain popularity in higher education, there is a need to ensure instructors are providing effective instructional feedback. Research in the theory of transactional distance points out the impact instructor interaction has on student satisfaction in courses. One way to address this is through high amounts of dialogue, feedback in this study. Throughout my years of teaching an online undergraduate course, students have continually reported in course evaluations the existence of a miscommunication gap. However, specific details around this request have been minimal. The purpose of this qualitative, action research study was to examine the impact of sustained dialogue between instructor and students on the student's motivation to apply the feedback and the student's overall course satisfaction. Instruments used in this study included pre and post surveys, historical student evaluations, and emergent coding of student assignments. Study results indicated that when students are given the choice of five characteristics (amount, audience, message of the feedback, mode, and timing), Amount (Providing feedback on several points about the assignment) was their top choice regarding feedback. On assignments where this element of feedback was implemented, study participants enacted 71% of the feedback recommendations in future blog assignments. An increase in the mean scores related to student satisfaction on the course evaluations was also seen. Based on these results, this study concludes that providing students with a choice in their education and increasing dialogue between students and

instructors could possibly contribute to higher levels of student satisfaction in online courses.

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List of Abbreviations

DCE.....Department Course Evaluation

HLC.....Higher Learning Commission

IRB..... Institutional Review Board

LMS ..... Learning Management System

OLC..... Online Learning Consortium

PFP..... Preferred Feedback Profile

SIE..... Student Instructor Evaluation

Chapter 1

Introduction

As an online instructor at a large public university in the Midwest United States, I teach a course that provides students with an opportunity to develop higher levels of self-efficacy with web-based technologies that will be needed for success in their college studies and beyond. In this course, I typically work with undergraduate students who are in various academic years and progressing towards a variety of degrees. The overall purpose of this course covers navigating academic web resources and services, using online tools for time management and organization, developing strategies for online learning, communicating online, searching for academic content, and evaluating the credibility and usefulness of online resources. As I teach this course, I draw on my experiences as both an instructional designer and an online instructor. The skills students develop in this course are both logistical and substantive. Logistical skills include website navigation, online research and study skills, and the foundations of academic writing. More substantive skills include time management, communication and collaboration skills, and self-motivation techniques.

From the beginning of my experiences with online instruction, I have recognized the importance of connecting with my students in ways that emulate the processes for building rapport with students in traditional, face-to-face courses. To this end, one of my primary goals as an online instructor is to maintain an effective pattern of communication

with my students. Given the asynchronous nature of online courses, this communication has taken many forms over the years including responding to discussion board posts, using various modes of feedback (i.e. text, audio, video with audio), and leaving only positive feedback on their assignments. Despite these efforts, I have come to realize that there is still space for me to improve my communication practices with online students.

Over the past four years, I have taught the web-based technology course nine times. Given the popularity of this course and the large student body served by the University, I am a member of a team of no less than five instructors who also teach this course, often concurrently with my section of Learning Skills 1000 (pseudonym). This group of instructors are overseen by the Course Supervisor. While work is normally done independently, the group will collaborate asynchronously if issues or concerns arise in our courses.

Our team of instructors have recently been asked by the course supervisor to vary the mode of feedback we provide for students throughout the course (i.e., text, audio, video with audio) with the goal of better serving our learners through effective student-instructor communication. In response, I had begun implementing different modes of feedback (text, audio, and video) over the course of the class term. However, there were no guidelines to help direct this process and students did not seem to see this as sufficient based on course evaluations.

Although the directive to vary the mode of feedback we provide students was well-intended, the [course] instructors were not provided with much structure or guidance in how to manage the variety in feedback we provide to our students. Despite this well intended initiative, I have struggled to reduce the sense of miscommunication between

my students in the course and myself. The results of my course evaluations from the most recent sections of the course (at the time of this writing) indicate that students continue to feel lower levels of satisfaction with the course and my instruction. These low levels of satisfaction can indicate a miscommunication between my students and myself and a need to increase the dialogue in the course. Given my efforts to address this problem and the fact that it still remains relatively unresolved, I have decided to focus this dissertation in practice on developing more effective instructor-student communication strategies in order to help promote a learning environment of high dialogue.

Problem of Practice

Instructors of online courses without an effective strategy for supporting instructor-student (and student-student) dialogue tend to have students who perceive higher levels of psychological or cognitive distance between themselves and the course (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016, Moore, 1973, 2013). More specifically, low levels of instructor-student dialogue have been shown to reduce the motivation for online learners to apply feedback provided by the instructor (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). Instructor feedback, one form of effective instructional dialogue, is a critical aspect of online learning (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). Courses that do not include effective strategies for providing effective instructional feedback have been shown to be less educative than courses that do provide effective instructional feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). When students feel that instructor feedback was not useful or effective, they express higher levels of dissatisfaction with the course and thus lower motivation to apply feedback to subsequent assignments which can negatively affect learning outcomes (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016; Moore, 2013).

In the following section, I will discuss the impact of a lack of effective instructor-student dialogue on student learning and motivation in online courses. For this discussion, effective instructor-student dialogue is framed as an outcome of providing effective instructional feedback that supports student learning and serves to motivate students to implement the instructor feedback in their subsequent course assignments. To this end, the following discussion of the problem of practice will focus on how a lack of effective instructional feedback has a negative impact on student motivation and achievement in online learning environments. This negative impact seems to explain the problem of practice by suggesting that a lack of effective instructional feedback has reduced the level and nature of effective instructor-student dialogue.

The group of instructors who facilitate the Learning Skills 1000 course were recently directed to vary their modes of feedback (i.e., text, audio, video with audio) throughout the course session; however, this has not seemed to satisfy the needs of the students who have enrolled in the most recent sections of the course. This dissatisfaction has aligned with current research, which notes the mode of feedback, in many cases, has little to no effect on student satisfaction (Borup, West, Thomas, & Graham, 2014; York & Richardson, 2012). York and Richardson (2012) state that while the mode in which feedback is given is a factor, there is no definitive method of presenting the feedback that is considered superior to others. Hattie (2015) performed a meta-analysis of approximately 1,200 articles on the topic of student performance and found that the quality of the feedback had a more significant impact on learners than the quantity of the feedback.

Similar to face-to-face classrooms, online students rely on effective instructor feedback to improve their work and achieve the learning objectives of the course (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016, Moore, 1973, 2013). When students perceive the instructor feedback to be of high quality, it can have a direct impact on a student's motivation to apply the feedback and their overall course satisfaction (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016). In a 2016 study, Gibbs & Taylor (2016) examined achievement levels of students who had been given individualized feedback. In this study, students were divided into two groups. One group received individualized feedback while the other was given an answer key to weekly assignments. The researchers discovered that while there was no difference between the two groups in terms of achievement or assessment in the course, the levels of satisfaction with their perception of the understanding of the content, the interest of the instructor, and overall course satisfaction were higher in the group that received the individualized feedback (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016). Similarly, additional studies in this area show that negative feedback on assessments resulted in lower student motivation among online learners (Moore, 2013).

It is clear from my review of the literature that the research regarding effective instructional feedback in online courses demonstrates that a lack of effective instructional dialogue, the use of generic instructor feedback, or the provision of negative instructor feedback all have negative consequences for students and instructors in online courses. Based on these findings and my own experiences as an online instructor, I have determined that this problem of practice is both locally important and has been identified as a persistent problem in online learning. In the next section, I provide a brief summary of my review of the literature that focused on the possible solutions for addressing this

important problem of practice. A more thorough description of the literature related to the problem and the possible solutions is provided in chapter 2.

Theoretical Framework

The field of distance education is a dynamic one that continues to expand at an ever-increasing pace (Lederman, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a, 2017b). From its roots in mail correspondence courses to current online iterations that include professionally developed text, audio, and video elements, this method of instruction has solidified a place in the field of education especially in postsecondary institutions (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Kentnor, 2015; Lederman, 2018). As online learning has proliferated, researchers and institutions from a variety of fields have identified the role of instructor-student dialogue as a key requirement of effective online instruction (Hattie, 2008, 2015; Moore, 1973, 2013). As evidence of this importance, a large number of nationally recognized rubrics for evaluating online instruction, including the Quality Matters Higher Education rubric (Quality Matters, 2019), the Online Learning Consortium's Quality Course Teaching & Instructional Practice (Online Learning Consortium, 2019), and the Open SUNY Course Quality Review (Open SUNY, 2019), have included the provision of meaningful student feedback as a primary component of their reviews. Underpinning this effort to elevate the importance of instructor feedback, Moore's theory of transactional distance (1973) is one framework that highlights and explains why instructor feedback plays such a crucial role in distance education (Moore, 2013). In this way, Moore's theory provides a tentative explanation for why my students have felt less satisfaction with my course despite my efforts to provide a variety of feedback. In this section, I will discuss Moore's theory and in so doing, demonstrate why

it is an effective theory from which I can first explain my problem of practice and subsequently guide the design and study of my intervention for this action research study.

Effective instructor feedback

As online courses continue to gain popularity in higher education (Lederman, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a, 2017b), there is a need to ensure instructors are providing quality interactions, including feedback. Research has shown that instructor feedback can be a significant indicator regarding student satisfaction with a course (Furlich, 2013; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). York and Richardson (2012) noted that interpersonal interaction between peers and between the learner and the instructor are essential in the online learning process. Similarly, Lee and Choi (2011) and Sancho-Vinuesa, Escudero-Viladoms, and Masià (2013) both noted that learner retention rates in online classes tend to be higher when learners feel engaged with their instructor through interaction and feedback.

Brookhart (2017) identifies four characteristics of effective instructional feedback: amount, audience, mode, and timing. Through her articulation and description of these four characteristics of effective instructional feedback, Brookhart argues that feedback is a vital part of the assessment process as it helps both the instructor and the student to identify how they are doing in relation to the learning goals of the course (Brookhart, 2017).

In addition to Brookhart's four characteristics of effective feedback, Dweck (2008) and Boaler (2016) describe an additional characteristic of effective instructional feedback as the Message. Dweck (2008) points out the importance of promoting a growth mindset, the belief that one's abilities can be developed over time, when providing

instructional feedback. Boaler (2016) operationalized this by adding an affirmative phrase for students at the end of her instructional feedback, thus demonstrating a growth mindset regarding student achievement. In Boaler's study (2016), the use of this type of affirmation led to students feeling more satisfied and engaged in the course.

This research highlights the value of effective instructional feedback and how it can help alleviate dialogue gaps between instructor and student. By addressing this need, there is an opportunity for increasing student motivation, outcomes, and overall satisfaction with the course.

Theory of transactional distance

In Michael Grahame Moore's theory of transactional distance, transactional distance is explained as the cognitive perception that learners have while taking courses at a distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). When taking online or distance education courses, there is not only physical distance between the learner and the instructor, there is also psychological, or cognitive, distance between the learner and the instructor (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). Moore noted that the higher the level of interaction between the instructor and the learner in distance education courses, the less space there is in the transactional distance. This can lead the learner to report feeling higher levels of individualized attention (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

To create a sense of individualized attention, Moore's (1973) theory of transactional distance posits that we want to have the lowest amount of transactional distance between the learner and the course as possible. The three dimensions of an online course that influence transactional distance are Structure, Autonomy, and Dialogue (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). The dimension of Structure refers to the elements of the

course such as the learning objectives, lectures, reading, assessments, and other instructional activities. (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). While the structure of a course is an important element of online learning, if it is too stringent, it can result in increased transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). The dimension of Autonomy is defined as "the cognitive style variable of field dependence/independence" (M. G. Moore, 2013, p. 91). This refers to the personal goals and learning experiences of the students as well as to how much control the students have over their learning (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). The dimension of Dialogue is defined as "a particular kind of interpersonal interaction, and it happens after a course is designed, as teachers exchange words and other symbols with learners, aimed at the latter's creation of knowledge" (M. G. Moore, 2013, p. 70). This can include any kind of feedback that the instructors give the learners, such as direct feedback to individual learners, grades, and bulk feedback to the entire class. Moore argues that this transactional distance can be lessened by increasing learner individualization (autonomy) and dialogue between the students and their peers as well as between the students and their instructor (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

Based on the theory of transactional distance, when students feel there is a low level of effective instructor-student dialogue in a course, transactional distance increases (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). Conversely, higher levels of effective instructor-student dialogue can lead the learner to report feeling higher levels of individualized attention which also leads to higher levels of student satisfaction (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). By identifying what elements students find valuable in effective instructional feedback, we can potentially lower the communication gap that students are reporting (M. G. Moore,

1973, 2013). Additionally, by letting students identify what characteristics of feedback they find most valuable, we as instructors are also allowing them to have an active voice in their education and creating a blueprint for ourselves for giving equitable feedback to everyone in the course (Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019).

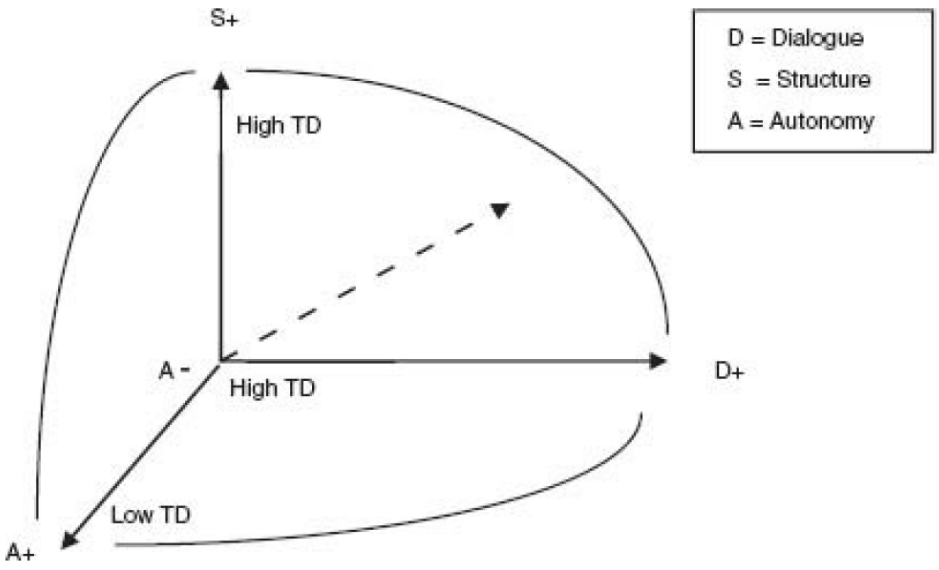

Figure 1.1. The three dimensions of transactional distance. Copyright 2013 From *Handbook of Distance Education* by Michael Grahame Moore. Reproduced by permission of Taylor and Francis Group, LLC, a division of Informa plc This permission does not cover any third party copyrighted work which may appear in the material requested. Please check the figure caption or acknowledgements section of the book. (M. G. Moore, 2013, p. 252).

When viewing the problem of practice from the perspective of transactional distance theory (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013), the request for more feedback from the students in my course indicates that there has been a miscommunication between what I as an instructor deem to be effective instructional feedback and what students consider to be effective instructional feedback. Using transactional distance theory to explain the problem indicates that any intervention to resolve the problem of practice would need to rely on providing effective instructional feedback that addresses the amount, audience,

message of the feedback, mode, and timing of the feedback, as Brookhart (2017), Dweck (2008) and Boaler (2016) have described. With these ideas in mind, I have designed and implemented an intervention-based action research study for this dissertation in practice. In the following sections, I will provide an outline of the research design that was developed from the perspective of transactional distance theory, focusing directly on the dimension of dialogue. Further specifying dialogue for this study, I have chosen to bound the dimension of dialogue within the provision of effective instructional feedback on student work which occurs exclusively between instructors and students.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative, action research dissertation in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016) was to examine the impact of sustained dialogue between instructor and students on the student's motivation to apply the feedback and the student's overall course satisfaction. For this study, the dialogue was facilitated by me, the instructor of the course. The dialogue began by identifying student preferences for the provision of instructor feedback, the provision of effective instructor feedback over the course of five sequential course writing assignments, and a final reflective survey administered after the intervention was completed. By sustaining effective dialogue (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013) and providing instructor feedback that demonstrates the characteristics of effective instructional feedback (Brookhart 2017, Dweck, 2008, Boaler, 2016), this intervention was designed to lessen the communication gap (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013) between me as the instructor and my students enrolled in the Learning Skills 1000 course. The following research questions were developed and guided this study.

1. What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course
2. What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course??

In this study, the dialogue from the theory of transactional distance is going to be viewed through the lens of the feedback given by the instructor to students and in return, the enactment of the blog posts based on that feedback. The feedback that the students give the instructor in Week 7 and end of course surveys is also part of that dialogue. Performance in this case is being examined in the light of student implementation of the blog posts, student motivation and satisfaction with the course.

These questions were selected because they helped to focus the study on the impact of providing effective instructional feedback on student motivation and overall course and instructor satisfaction. While there may have been other elements of dialogue that could have contributed to the problem, it is my professional opinion that these questions capture the most likely cause of the problem of practice. My experiences as both an instructional designer and an instructor of online courses played a large role in the design and implementation of this dissertation. In the following sections, I elaborate on those experiences and how they have influenced the design of this study.

Researcher Positionality

As someone who has spent a significant amount of his professional career in higher education, I recognize there are a number of elements that may impact my positionality in this action research study. The positionality of a researcher is their

relation to the participants and the setting of their action research study. This is important to disclose due the biases, conscious or unconscious, that researchers will undoubtedly bring to their research study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). My background as a learner, instructional designer, and instructor of online courses have all shaped my perspective on teaching and learning and inevitably affected my approach to this research. As this study focused on feedback, it was important to recognize my preferences. As a learner currently completing an online program myself, my feedback preference was less based on the modality or frequency and more concerned with the timeliness and applicability to the assignments. I also have expected online learning to be more self-directed than face-to-face instruction. This relates back to pedagogy versus andragogy. In pedagogy, learners are dependent upon the instructor for all learning wherein andragogy learners are more self-directed (Knowles, 1980). Pedagogy is more common at the undergraduate level, while andragogy is found in graduate level course work (Knowles, 1980). As a person whose online course experience has all been at the graduate level, this led me to assume that all learners, including undergraduate, should expect the same self-directed experience. This expectation undoubtedly affected my perspective as a researcher in this study as the course I teach, the one I examined, is an undergraduate class. Given my experience in online learning has been at the graduate level, I have an expectation that learners in my course will have the same high level of self-direction in their learning that I had in my graduate courses. This expectation may have led me to discount the need for feedback and added to the miscommunication gap.

As an online course instructor, I consider my primary objective to be helping my learners succeed in the course and in their learning. I aim to provide feedback as quickly

as possible and relate it to the assignment whenever possible as well as stay current with my grading. During the first week of the course, I make it a point to respond to every learner in the introduction discussion through text feedback. During the subsequent weeks of the course, I send the learners personalized messages if they miss an assignment; I also post reminders of when assignments are due. Given the time constraints and organization of the course, feedback is primarily limited to larger assignments such as blog posts and not, for example, on every discussion response. The form of feedback I provide (individual versus group) has been mostly dependent on the type of assignment. For example, I do not typically provide individual feedback on quizzes, but I do provide general feedback for all learners collectively after the quizzes have been graded. Often, I will also offer specific comments to students that have gone above and beyond expectations for any given assignment. The modality of my feedback is not something I had actively considered in the past. I had not normally varied the mode of the feedback which was provided in text modality.

In addition to these two roles as learner and instructor, I am also currently employed as an instructional designer for the same large public university in the Midwestern United States in which I am an instructor. In this role, I work with faculty to help design and implement their online courses. This role has also affected my perspective on feedback. I have had certain expectations when working with instructors on how they should leave feedback for their learners. For example, I have tended to believe that the mode of feedback is not as important as the timeliness of the responses.

Herr and Anderson (2015) utilize a continuum of positionality to help action researchers better understand their relationship to the research study process. Given that

most action research is concerned with problems of practice that the researcher is directly impacted by, this clarity about positionality is vital to maintaining research ethics and validity. Topics Herr and Anderson ask action researchers to consider include their relationship to the research process; the roles, values, beliefs, and experiences the researcher brings to the process; their viewpoint in terms of whether they are an insider or outsider to the research; their position in terms of hierarchy and status; and the ways in which these items impact research design and the research process (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 97). In terms of my research study, I was an insider to the process as I both taught the course being studied and was a full-time employee of the institution. As discussed above, my background as both a student and an employee in higher education helped me create certain beliefs around feedback and what constitutes quality online education. My role as a course instructor, however, was part-time, which meant I had low power or influence regarding decisions concerning the course.

For this study my role was as both the course instructor as well as the researcher. The course enrolls approximately 450 students each year and is taught by six different part-time instructors. I worked closely with the course supervisor in developing and implementing this research study. The study was only implemented in the section of the course I was teaching and did not include other sections or instructors. The next section will examine in closer detail the design and methodology of this research study as well as provide a brief rationale for these choices.

Research Design

For this dissertation in practice, I designed and enacted a qualitative, action research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016). This design was informed by

Moore's transactional distance theory and the work of Brookhart (2017), Dweck (2008) and Boaler (2016) related to effective instructional feedback. When framing the problem of practice as one in which there is an unintended increase in transactional distance between my students and myself, I decided to design an intervention that fostered sustained dialogue between my students and myself that revolved around providing effective instructional feedback. The recursive nature of the problem of practice, being persistent and impacting multiple stakeholders, made it an important problem to address (Creswell, 2014; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016).

Because problems of practice such as this one should be directly addressed by the practitioner, action research was selected as the primary methodology chosen for this study (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Mertler, 2016). Action research is a methodology in which insiders in a given context study themselves and the other participants who might be involved in order to solve problems of practice (Efron and Ravid, 2013). The problem, the participants, and the researcher are all integral parts of the effort to investigate or intervene in order to answer context dependent research questions that arise from local events, problems, or needs (Efron & Ravid, 2013). This work results in the generation of knowledge that is context-dependent and relevant to the participants in the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Given the context-dependent, practical nature of the problem being addressed by this dissertation, action research was determined to be an appropriate methodological strategy for this study.

While there are many variations across the models of action research, they all draw on the power of an intentional, cyclical, and reflective process. For this study, Stinger's action research interacting spiral was utilized (Mertler, 2016, p. 25). Stringer as

described by Mertler (2016), identified a three-step routine for ensuring the intentional, systematic, and thoughtful study of an intervention. Each cycle of action research consists of Stinger's three steps that include a looking, thinking, and acting routine (Mertler, 2016, p. 25).

In this study, the first cycle was the initial survey, the second cycle was the feedback cycle on blog posts, and the final cycle was the final survey. In cycle 1, I planned my intervention by reviewing the student data from prior course evaluations and the research literature about effective feedback, online learning, and the theory of transactional distance. I then developed (acted) and administered the Preferred Feedback Profile survey (see Appendix A) during the first week of the course. I selected a survey for the purpose of quickly identifying the characteristics students wanted in their feedback. This survey generated the participants' preferred feedback methods. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze and interpret this data. Finally, from my analysis and interpretation of this data, I developed the profile of aggregate student preferences (Preferred Feedback Profile, or PFP) (see Appendix A, B) and an action plan on how to implement this in the feedback provided to my students. Engaging in the use of a pre-intervention survey helped me to quickly identify the characteristics of effective feedback students felt were most important and represented the first action step intended to enhance the level and quality of instructor-student dialogue in the course.

In cycle two, I planned the process for providing feedback by recruiting volunteers and providing instructor feedback to students related to their submitted blog posts, a recurring assignment in the course. Since the topics of the blog post varied, the specific content of my feedback varied in response. However, in each round of effective

instructional feedback that I provided, the feedback I provided reflected the Preferred Feedback Profile (see Appendix A, B) and demonstrated the characteristics of effective instructional feedback (Brookhart 2017, Dweck, 2008, Boaler, 2016). Each round of feedback also represented an additional opportunity to elevate the amount of dialogue between my students and myself in the course in effort to further reduce the transactional distance between me and the students (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). In addition, I also analyzed student blog assignments for evidence of implementation of the feedback. I then developed a final survey to generate data about student perceptions related to the targeted feedback provided during the course.

In the final cycle, I planned how I would best distribute the survey and collected responses, and then acted by administering the survey and analyzing the data that generated. I captured the student perceptions about the feedback they received from me during the course through the use of the Week 7 survey on weekly blog feedback (see Appendix C). This brief survey was completed by participants during Week 7 to indicate satisfaction with the feedback they received on the blog assignments throughout the course. The teacher/researcher's Student Instructor Evaluation (SIE) quantitative scores (pre and post action research study), which are university-generated surveys that are distributed to all enrolled students at the end of each semester. were also used in this study (see Appendix D). The quantitative scores were utilized to create a baseline (pre-action research study SIEs). This baseline was then compared to the post-action research study SIEs to determine if there was any change. Another evaluation that was used was the Department Course Evaluations (DCE), which are department-level surveys that are distributed to all enrolled students of courses within the department in which this course

is taught (see Appendix E). Quantitative scores on the student enjoyment of the course were compared to measure any change in student perception regarding course feedback and satisfaction of the course and the course instructor compared to previous semesters where I taught this course.

In the third and final cycle, I developed a summary of everything I had learned and created an implementation plan for future work. Once the post-intervention data was collected and analyzed, I reflected on the entire action research project. This reflection was captured and described in the creation of chapter 5 of this dissertation in practice.

This study was conducted within one section of the Learning Skills 1000 course (course pseudonym) at a large university in the Midwest United States during the Spring of 2019. This course was conducted through an online learning management system (LMS) over a seven-week period. The participants in this study were students enrolled in this course. A request for volunteers was sent to all of the students in the course who were at least 18 years of age. Most students were matriculating students in either the freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior year of their respective major programs. Some participants may also have been part of the University's Senior Sixty (pseudonym) group, residents aged 60 or over who can take tuition free courses and earn college credit.

Throughout these three cycles of action research, I collected and analyzed qualitative data that would provide me with insight into the impact of my efforts to reduce the transactional distance between my students and myself. When collecting and analyzing qualitative data, the researcher generally collects the data in a specific environment, organizes the data for analysis, analyzes the data through coding that results in themes which the researcher then uses to develop their interpretations of the data

(Creswell, 2014). The qualitative approach was the most appropriate in the context of this study given the emphasis on dialogue over the more quantitative aspects of the problem.

Merriam & Tisdell (2015) refer to researchers conducting qualitative studies as "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences." (p. 6). Creswell (2014) describes qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem," (p. 4). In the qualitative process, the researcher generally collects the data in their environment, processes this information to create themes which the researcher uses to develops their interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, the qualitative approach in this study is a Phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological approaches to qualitative research look at shared experience, the communication or miscommunication for this study, among a particular group, in the case of this study, the students who have taken the Learning Skills 1000 course with me as an instructor (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The goal of the phenomenological approach is to try to figure out how or why this experience may have happened (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The researcher also tries to bracket their biases throughout the research. For this research it was accomplished first, through the teachers/researcher's positionality mentioned in this dissertation in practice as well at the creation of the Preferred Feedback Profile from the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey (see Appendix A) to make certain that the teacher/researcher is giving the same format for feedback to all students (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

Significance of the Study

A key element of quality education is providing feedback (Hattie, 2008, 2015). Due to the lack of face-to-face interactions in distance course, student can sometimes feel a disconnect with the course and the instructor. The theory of transactional distance notes that this lack of physical transactions can expand the cognitive distance between the learner and the subject matter. The goal is for the instructor to create the least amount of transactional distance between the learner and the course (M. G. Moore, 2013). Moore (2013) notes that one way to address this is through increased dialogue. According to M. G. Moore (2013), Dialogue in the theory of transactional distance is defined as "a particular kind of interpersonal interaction, and it happens after a course is designed, as teachers exchange words and other symbols with learners, aimed at the latter's creation of knowledge" (M. G. Moore, 2013, p. 70). By understanding the importance of dialogue and its role is closing the communication loop between instructor and students, online educators can help to create a more meaningful experience for their learners.

Given the problem of practice being examined, action research was the best method to conduct this study. This study attempted to address a common problem in the course I currently teach—the existence of a miscommunication gap between my students and myself as the course instructor. As one of the key stakeholders involved with the course, I have firsthand knowledge and experience with this issue and am able to take this knowledge and apply the intervention in a way that is practical and addresses the issue directly.

Most importantly, the largest significance of this study is on future iterations of the course being studied and the importance of the impact to the students. This course

currently enrolls approximately 450 students each year and is taught by six part-time instructors. The ability to identify what characteristics of feedback students find valuable will potentially assist instructors with providing students effective institutional feedback from the outset of the course and proactively reduce the communication gap between instructor and student that can develop in online courses. By gaining a better understanding of what students' value in online classes in terms of effective instructor feedback, faculty and curriculum designers partnering with faculty can work to build those elements into the delivery of their courses to better enhance the student experience.

Limitations of Study

As with any research study, certain limitations exist. The study was limited to undergraduate online learners; no graduate learners were included when examining the feedback preferences. In addition, the course used for this study was an elective course and not required for degree completion. A final limitation is the length of the course being studied. While traditional courses run 14–15 weeks, the course used for this study was only run for seven weeks.

Unanticipated challenges that had an impact on the motivation of the student did arise over the course of this research study. These included situations where students missed a blog assignment, as well methodological and data collection decisions, such as not randomizing the feedback, instructor time limitations, and participant selection, may also have had some bearing on outcomes. Despite these limitations, I believe there is merit in pursuing replication and future implementation of the findings from this study. A detailed analysis of limitations and implications is discussed in Chapter 5.

Organization of the Dissertation

The following paper will outline the process that was taken to implement the study, research results, and final considerations and future research opportunities. Chapter 2 will include a deeper dive into the relevant literature around the theory of transactional distance and student motivation. I first discuss the literature related to the primary aspect of the problem on which this study is focused, the importance of sustained and effective instructor-student dialogue in online courses. Chapters 3 will outline the specific research design and methodologies implemented in this study. The Context, Participants, and Researcher Positionality section will detail the demographics of the population in the study as well as explain how the researcher's positionality was considered during the implementation of the study. The Research Design section will provide further justification as to why action research was used in this study, along with a description of the setting where the research was conducted. The Data Collection Measures, Instruments, and Tools section will provide a synopsis of the surveys that were created and explain how the collection of student-generated content was archived. Chapter 4 will provide a review of the research results. This chapter will present the data that was collected over the course of the research study, as well as a discussion of the connection between the data and the theoretical framework and available literature. This chapter is divided into the three themes of interest: dialogue in online courses, quality instructor feedback in online courses, and course satisfaction and motivation. The chapter will conclude with an overall summary and final thoughts on the data. The paper will conclude with Chapter 5, which includes discussion around the implications of this study as well as future research opportunities.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative, action research dissertation in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016) was to examine the impact of sustained dialogue between instructor and students on the student's motivation to apply the feedback and the student's overall course satisfaction. In this study, the sustained dialogue between the instructor and the students focused on the instructional feedback I provided to students on a recurring writing assignment in the course. This focus was in response to the specific problem of practice I was experiencing as the instructor of an online undergraduate course, Learning Skills 1000 (course pseudonym). Course evaluations from previous courses indicated that students were not completely satisfied with the instructional feedback that I was providing. In order to address this persistent and important problem of practice, I developed the following research questions to guide the study,

1. What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?
2. What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course??

Based on the review of the literature described in this chapter, I designed and implemented a three-phase, qualitative action research study that was informed by my

research into the problem as well as into the possible solutions. The literature in this review was found using multiple methods. I was introduced to textbooks for the theoretical framework while attending classes at the Midwestern university as well as at a Southern university. (To ensure confidentiality, "the Southern university" will be the pseudonym used throughout this dissertation for the Southern university involved in this study.) Using the Online Learning Consortium Online Learning Journal and the Quality Matters database (Quality Matters, 2018), I cross-referenced the articles to ensure they were peer-reviewed articles using the Southern university's PASCAL online catalog system. Articles that were peer-reviewed were kept, and articles that were not peer-reviewed were discarded. The final method was utilizing Google Scholar to search for articles while performing the same peer review cross-check that was previously mentioned. After checking the peer review system, the articles from EBSCO Host and Sage Publications were read and vetted as applicable to the study. Once they were vetted as being relevant to the study, the citations were stored using the Mendeley citation manager by Elsevier (Mendeley Ltd., 2019) and the Zotero citation manager, which is a project of the Corporation for Digital Scholarship (Corporation for Digital Scholarship, 2019).

In the following pages, I first discuss the literature related to the primary aspect of the problem on which this study is focused, the importance of sustained and effective instructor-student dialogue in online courses. In this discussion, I will draw on several theoretical frameworks related to distance education and the role feedback plays in student engagement and learning. then discuss transactional distance theory (Moore, 2013), the primary theory on which the theoretical framework for this study is based.

This is followed by a synthesis of the literature related to the problem, the theoretical framework, and the intervention that was developed for this study.

Historical Perspectives: Distance Education

Distance education can trace its beginnings as far back as the 1700s. Not everyone lives close to an institution of higher education, and individuals are not always able or willing to relocate in order to pursue their educational goals. Since the Internet, as we know it is a relatively recent phenomenon, one may assume the history of distance education has been a short one. Simply accessing course content online, however, is only one of the latest developments. Distance education has primarily taken the form of four different types of mediums: written correspondence, auditory recordings, audiovisual recordings, and Internet-based correspondence.

The early days of distance education came in the form of letter writing. In 1728 the first documented example of distance education appeared through an advertisement in the Boston Globe newspaper. A man named Caleb Philipps offered to teach students who enrolled in his course how to write shorthand. This education was facilitated through letters sent back and forth between the students and Phillips. One of the selling points Phillips included in his advertisement was that he could teach anyone in the country since there was no need for face-to-face interactions (Spector, Merrill, Elen, & Bishop, 2014). Almost 150 years later, in 1873 the first correspondence schools in the United States were founded. “In 1873, Anna Eliot Ticknor founded the Society to Encourage Studies at Home. Ticknor’s Society established one of America’s first correspondence schools, a distance learning option conducted through the mail. This Society was aimed at the education of women and enrolled more than seven thousand women. Education by mail

was a quality approach to provide education for all because it allowed universities to access an infinite number of potential students" (Caruth & Caruth, 2013, p. 141).

Brick-and-mortar schools soon took note of Ticknor's schools and began to launch their own distance education courses (Spector et al., 2014). In 1892 the University of Chicago began offering correspondence courses, becoming the first traditional educational institution to take part in this new trend (Spector et al., 2014). By the early 1920s, radio broadcasting had emerged as an efficient way to communicate information. Universities took note of this and soon began looking for ways to capitalize on this technology. Both Pennsylvania State University and Iowa State University soon began offering courses to distance education students via radio broadcast. As technology continued to expand, so did the ways education could be offered to students independent of their locations. Broadcast television and telephone were soon utilized by universities to offer for-credit courses to interested individuals (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Kentnor, 2015). The first fully virtual college was established in 1976; Coastline Community College was the first higher education institution to offer credited courses without a physical location (Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Kentnor, 2015).

The introduction of the Internet into society may have had a huge impact on the world of distance education. For the first time, universities were able to create both synchronous and asynchronous distance education by utilizing text, audio, and video mediums in one context. This arena continues to expand with more colleges offering online programming as an element in a degree program, in hybrid models of degree programs, or as complete degree programs offered online.

Learning in Online Spaces

Across the educational spectrum, the presence of online courses is growing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a). Online courses can be taken in elementary, secondary, postsecondary, and graduate education. According to data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics, "In fall 2015, there were 5,954,121 students enrolled in any distance education courses at degree-granting postsecondary institutions" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a). This number rose to approximately 6,294,801 the following fall of 2016 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b). Online education has overtaken the correspondence courses of the past as the primary means of professional development and continuing education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). With this rapid and continuing expansion, how are instructors guaranteeing they are making the same instructor-to-learner connection as they would in a traditional brick-and-mortar classroom?

In the environment where this study took place, a Midwest U.S. state (to ensure confidentiality, "the Midwest U.S. state" will be the pseudonym used throughout this dissertation for the general location of this study), the definitions of online courses are set by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The HLC is the United States Department of Education's accreditation body for the central United States region, which includes the Midwest U.S. state in which this study was conducted. The HLC sets the definitions of what is and is not considered "distance" courses. HLC defines distance courses as "courses in which at least 75 percent of the instruction and interaction occurs via electronic communication, correspondence or equivalent mechanisms, with the faculty and students physically separated from each other" (Higher Learning Commission, 2018).

For this research study, “online” is used as the term to describe the mode of the distance course being taught. The course utilized in this study was conducted in what is considered a fully asynchronous distance course that is taught online.

Student engagement in online learning has become an important area of study for educational researchers with about 416,000 possible articles since 2015, according to Google Scholar. Today’s student has numerous options when it comes to his or her higher education options (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). I believe that institutions that are trying to enroll and retain online students must work harder than traditional institutions to keep students engaged.

In the course I teach, there are several types of assignments, including quizzes, discussions, and blog assignments. Assignments are broken down into two different categories. For the first category of assignments, learners must submit an electronic artifact. The second category of assignment involves an online blog. Throughout the course, I try to provide different types of feedback to all students. In-depth feedback is given on the blog. This feedback usually focuses on the highlights and strong points that learners have taken the time to compose and share. Personalized feedback is given to all learners for the first discussion board. This personalization includes intentionally including the learner’s name in the response, calling attention to parts of the assignment where I thought the learner excelled or provided particularly good insight, and finally including some insights of my own to provide areas where the learner could improve in or examine further. Generalized feedback is given on the quizzes and the artifacts turned in by students. This feedback provides either an acknowledgment to the students that they have done “a great job” or a reason why they have missed points. Feedback on

subsequent assignments is approached in a scattered, rotating fashion. In this method, learners are divided into blocks, and in-depth feedback is provided to one block at a time until all blocks have received feedback. The medium in which feedback is given (i.e., text, audio, or video feedback) is switched throughout the term of the course. While this feedback model was originally developed with the intent of providing adequate feedback to all students, learners have indicated that they would still like more throughout the course.

Previous research studies have shown that while students reported increased course satisfaction and engagement across all delivery methods, no data indicated that the delivery method was significant (Borup, West, Thomas, & Graham, 2014; York & Richardson, 2012). Rather, this increase was credited to the fact that feedback was given versus the way it was received (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016). This research will be discussed in more detail in the following literature review.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical framework that was utilized was the theory of transactional distance. This theory was selected due to its applicability to the problem of practice, its strong foundation in the pedagogical study, and its interconnectedness with one another. Constructivism and the work of John Dewey lay the groundwork for this study. M. G. Moore built upon the ideas of John Dewey, and in turn, constructivism, to create the theory of transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). The theory of transactional distance looks at the cognitive (transactional) distance the learner has in relation to the learning taking place in a distance course (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). This theory was first developed during the early days of distance education. When first being

developed, distance education took the form of correspondence courses where learners communicated with their instructor via the United States mail system (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). While the medium of distance education has evolved and changed, the idea of transactional distance remains applicable. The main premise is the lower the transactional distance, the greater the satisfaction becomes for the learner (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

Constructivist theory (or constructivism)

According to Bhattacharjee (2015), "Constructivism is an epistemology, or a theory, used to explain how people know what they know" (p. 65). In constructivist theory, the learner takes the course content from the classroom and uses his or her personal experiences to create meaning around the curriculum. According to constructivists, learners create knowledge for themselves based on their experiences. The work of constructivists began with thought leaders such as Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky (Bhattacharjee, 2015). Later work conducted by Dewey contributed to the concept that real-world problems and issues needed to be incorporated into the school curriculum to facilitate quality learning.

Constructivism is the foundation upon which the theory of transactional distance is based. To be more specific, the works of John Dewey are mentioned explicitly in the reading from the authors of the theory and framework. In a 2015 article about the works of Dewey, Kandan Talebi talks about the life of Dewey and the contributions he made to the world of education and how Dewey added to the role of teaching. According to Talebi (2015), the main teaching skill that Dewey believed teachers should have included "a natural desire to communicate one's knowledge with others" (p. 9).

Lev Vygotsky is another individual whose work has also added to the knowledge base of constructivism. One of Vygotsky's predominant concepts is the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which states that students will create their own learning when they are given a task that is just right outside of their proximal zone of knowledge. This will force them to develop and learn the skills that are needed in order to accomplish their tasks. The caveat to this process, however, is that the task should not be so difficult that the learners become frustrated or unwilling to complete the task (Wass & Golding, 2014).

In M. G. Moore's (1973, 2013) work where the theory of transactional distance was generated, Moore discusses the nature of teaching, the definition of the school environment, and independent learning practices. According to Moore, "Teaching consists of planned behaviors intended to induce learning" (M. G. Moore, 2013, p. 662).

M. G. Moore (1973) goes on to define the "school environment" as "the classroom, lecture or seminar" (p. 662). The nature of the classroom that I teach is completely online and therefore does not meet M. G. Moore's definition of a "school environment." M. G. Moore (1973) goes even further, stating, "outside the school environment" is considered "all settings in which a person pursuing knowledge is physically separated from a teacher, and in which the teacher's assistance must be communicated by print or some other medium" (p. 662). This holds true when it comes to online learning if we look at how the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) defines an online course. OLC defines online education as one in which "all course activity is done online; there are no required face-to-face sessions within the course and no requirements for on-campus activity" (Online Learning Consortium, 2014).

There are many aspects that contribute to constructivist learning. However, for this research study, we will be focusing on only two of these characteristics: “Errors provide the opportunity for insight into students’ previous knowledge constructions,” and “Exploration is a favored approach in order to encourage students to seek knowledge independently and to manage the pursuit of their goals” (Bhattacharjee, 2015, p. 69).

Both of these aspects of constructivism provide background and direction for examining student feedback. The first characteristic - “Errors provide the opportunity for insight into students’ previous knowledge constructions” (Bhattacharjee, 2015, p. 69)—is based on the idea that instructors can use incorrect responses as an opportunity to correct wrong answers as well as build on students’ past learning to enhance future opportunities. Similarly, the second aspect - “Exploration is a favoured approach in order to encourage students to seek knowledge independently and to manage the pursuit of their goals” (Bhattacharjee, 2015, p. 69) - can also be used to enhance the quality and effectiveness of instructor feedback. Rather than providing learners with the correct answers, this constructivist characteristic encourages instructors to point learners in the right direction so they discover the correct answers on their own (Bhattacharjee, 2015; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

The theory of transactional distance

As mentioned above, transactional distance theory is an offshoot of constructivism. The theory of transactional distance was originally developed in 1973 by education professor Michael Grahame Moore. The creation of this theory was difficult because, according to M. G. Moore, “there was no theory framing such out-of-classroom practice, there was no academic research either” (M. G. Moore, 2013, pp. 66–67). Along

with constructivism, this theory was also derived from research conducted by psychologists in the field of self-management and the works of education professor Robert Boyd. In the context of this study, the term transaction originated from the works of John Dewey and his definition is most applicable (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

The theory of transactional distance examines the cognitive space between the learner and the course (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). Rather than the physical transaction that happens between student and instructor in a face-to-face setting, the theory of transactional distance focuses on the elements that can expand the cognitive distance between the learner and the subject matter. The goal is for the instructor to create the least amount of transactional distance between the learner and the course. Transactional distance is broken down into three dimensions: Dialogue, Structure, and Autonomy (M. G. Moore, 2013).

According to M. G. Moore (2013), Dialogue in the theory of transactional distance is defined as "a particular kind of interpersonal interaction, and it happens after a course is designed, as teachers exchange words and other symbols with learners, aimed at the latter's creation of knowledge" (M. G. Moore, 2013, p. 70). This can include any kind of feedback that the instructors give the learners, such as direct feedback to individual learners, grades, and bulk feedback to the entire class (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

The Structure dimension of transactional distance theory refers to the elements that make up the course curriculum. This can include items such as learning objectives, lectures, reading, assessments, and other activities. (M. G. Moore, 2013). While the structure of a course is an important element of online learning, if it is too stringent, it can result in the increased transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 2013). The theory of

transactional distance also states that less dialogue and more structure in an online course will result in increased cognitive distance between the learner and the content (M. G. Moore, 2013).

The third dimension of transactional distance is Autonomy. Autonomy is defined as "the cognitive style variable of field dependence/independence" (M. G. Moore, 2013, p. 91). This refers to the personal goals and learning experiences of the student. When autonomy is high in a course, the learner's engagement is self-driven versus instructor driven. High autonomy is usually associated with lower levels of transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

The theory of transactional distance states that an increase in Structure or a decrease in Dialogue or Autonomy will all result in an increase in the learner's transactional distance. Online courses should strive to find a balance between these elements to enhance student learning and engagement in the course (M. G. Moore, 2013).

Dialogue in Online Courses

As noted in the theory of transactional distance, dialogue is a key component of student learning. The theory of transactional distance seeks to have high learner autonomy (student control, in this case) and for the instructor to create the least amount of transactional distance for the students in a distance education course (and for this study, a fully asynchronous online course) (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). In his over-800-study meta-analysis regarding factors that impact student achievement, John Hattie (2008) ranks the idea of "student control over learning" as the 132nd most influential factor (out of 138 factors) in teaching (Hattie, 2008, p. 352). While low in regard to influence on teaching, Hattie points out that student choice is one of the strongest factors

that influence the "motivation of outcomes" (Hattie, 2008, p. 352). The caveat to this is that those choices the student is making in his or her own learning must have high relevance to the student (Hattie, 2008, p. 245).

Studies have shown that providing students meaningful choices in their learning not only increases their motivation but also increases their engagement in the course (Evans & Boucher, 2015; Hattie, 2008, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019). For example, in the case of McDowell et al. (2019) students had the ability to customize their combination of face-to-face and online lecture sections for their general chemistry courses. Students could start off in an online or face-to-face section of a lecture and then move to an online version of the lecture at any time of the semester. The same held true of the students choosing which format of the recitation they wanted to start and end the semester with. At the conclusion of the courses, student performance either stayed consistent or improved when student choice was implemented, independent of the combination of course format chosen by students during the course (McDowell et al., 2019).

Despite these positive results, student choice must be balanced with boundaries. Evans & Boucher (2015) examined the theoretical implications of providing student choice and how it impacts motivation. This study reiterates the idea that student choice must be related to the outcomes of the course. One of the major conclusions in Evans & Boucher (2015) is that providing students with too much choice can be detrimental or overwhelming and can decrease engagement overall. The article nevertheless concludes by emphasizing the power that student choice has on increasing autonomy, which is an

important factor in the theory of transactional distance (Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

A large challenge of online education in regard to dialogue is the lack of face-to-face interaction. Otter et al. (2013) compare the perceptions of faculty who have taught the same course using online and traditional formats to the perceptions of students who have taken online and traditional courses. Their study found students tend to see online courses as more self-directed and must be more willing to teach themselves (Otter et al., 2013, p. 97). Similarly, Fetzner (2013) conducted a survey and found that two of the top ten reasons for students to drop out of an online course was a dislike of the online format and a lack of engagement with the instructor (p. 166). As noted previously, much of the importance of feedback in distance education goes back to the idea that feedback makes the learner feel connected to the instructor and his or her classmates. However, this is not always the case. Cole et al. (2017) found in their research on predictors of student motivation in online learning that higher levels of perceived instructor presence predicted negative student motivations in the course. They also point out that "the greater degree to which students react negatively emotionally to instructor feedback, the less motivated they appear toward online courses," (p. 255).

Gillett-Swan (2017) discusses how there many barriers that need to be overcome, especially in an online environment. Without the benefit of face to face interaction, many students report feeling disengaged and alone in online courses. One strategy to overcome this disengagement is through the use of immediate feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017).

Quality Instructor Feedback in Online Courses

One way to address the lack of dialogue in online courses and miscommunication gap this can create is through the use of quality instructor feedback. In his meta-analysis of over 800 studies regarding factors that impact student achievement, John Hattie (2008) determined that feedback was among the top 10 influencing factors that impact student achievement among all domains that Hattie created. Regarding the idea that teachers are activators (able to influence change in a student), Hattie found that feedback ranked as the second most important factor (Hattie, 2008). Hattie (2008) suggests that the feedback that is most effective is when students are giving feedback to the teacher, not the other way around. Hattie (2008) goes on to explain that the purpose of feedback is to fill in a gap of knowledge that the recipient may not have previously had as well as to provide information. However, Hattie (2008) maintains that the meta-analysis reveals that some forms of feedback are more effective than others. Hattie (2008) mentions that the most important goal with feedback is to ensure that it is used by the students (Hattie, 2008).

In a study conducted by Hattie and Timperley (2007), they did a review of a number of previous studies on feedback to determine if any themes in feedback effectiveness were available. They determined that quality feedback falls into four categories. These areas included, "Feedback about the task, feedback about the processing of the task, feedback about self-regulation, and feedback about the self as a person," (Brookhart, 2017, p. 11).

In addition, several studies have investigated the types of feedback that are most effective specifically for computer-based learning (Mason & Bruning, 2001; Van der Kleij, Feskens, & Eggen, 2015). A central finding in this research is that feedback that

concentrates on what students were thinking and not only on whether their answers were correct leads to more improvement in learning than simple knowledge of results. This finding is evident across studies of feedback in other settings, as well (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Mason & Bruning, 2001; Shute, 2008). Feedback needs to describe where students are in relation to the learning they are aiming for and make at least one suggestion for the next step in learning. (Brookhart, 2017).

There are certain limitations to keep in mind regarding the impact of feedback on online students. One element to consider is how much interaction students choose to have with the technology when it is provided to them. A study conducted by Krause et al. (2017) explored how students experienced the use of multiple media by their instructor and classmates in both online announcements and discussions as well as whether students used or would be likely to use multiple media for similar communications. The results of the study indicate that while not all students (only 31 students of 56) admitted to watching these multimedia posts, 37 of 55 students found them useful and 39 of 56 students enjoyed the experience. Students chose not to participate in using multimedia for their own responses, even though instructions and encouragement were provided throughout the course and the technology was readily available within the learning management system. However, they did report that they believed these tools helped them relate more to their instructor and classmates as real people (Krause et al., 2017).

A second consideration to keep in mind involves students' personalities and past experiences with feedback. Many times, a student's disposition and history will impact how effective and helpful they find feedback (Malachowski, Martin, & Vallade, 2013; Robinson, Pope, & Holyoak, 2013). Similarly, a student's reaction to feedback can be

impacted by their personal learning goals, their level of motivation, the type of assignments offered by the instructor, and the overall content of the course (Ladyshewsky, 2013).

Course Satisfaction and Motivation

One of the potential results of the increased dialogue in online courses is an increase in student satisfaction and motivation. In a 2016 Gibbs & Taylor (2016) performed a study that looked at the achievement levels of students that received individualized feedback vs students that were given an answer key to weekly assignments. What was found in this study was that all the students, no matter if they received the individualized feedback or not, maintained the same level of academic achievement in the form of letter grades. Also, there was also no significant difference between the two groups on an assessment that was given. Where Gibbs & Taylor (2016) did see the difference was on the levels of satisfaction with their perception of the understanding of the content, the interest of the instructor, and overall course satisfaction. The student who received the individualized feedback rated those areas as higher, although not significantly higher, then those students that received only the answers keys (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016).

One of the main proponents in developing and motivating learners through a "growth mindset," is Carol Dweck. In the book, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (2008) Dweck states, "The growth mindset is based on the belief in change," (p. 213). A growth mindset model encourages learners to focus on positivity in their thinking. Dweck (2008) says, "A growth mindset is about believing people can develop their abilities," (p. 211). A "fixed mindset" does not mean there are not positive traits,

rather it is the mindset of, “Believing that your qualities are carved in stone,” (p. 5). An example would be a learner thinking, “I am smart.” This thought is not negative, it is a fixed mindset if they do not want to grow that ability. Often students with a fixed mindset, “creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over,” (pp. 5-6) because they do not want to lose the label of being smart (Dweck, 2008).

Since Dweck, others have taken this “growth mindset” model and have examined its impact on learners. One area that research on a “growth mindset” has expanded is its impact on minorities. In 2014 Cohen & Garcia conducted a study to examine the effects the growth mindset model can have on African American learners. One of the several assignments that Cohen & Garcia used in their study was a writing assignment testing the effect of positive affirmations. This assignment had one set of learners complete an “a values affirmation writing exercise,” and the control group writes a “non-affirming or control writing exercise,” (p. 17). The value affirming writing exercise asked learners to read through a set of values, identify the ones that they related to the most, and then write about those topics. In comparison, the learners in the non-affirming writing exercise group were asked to write about values that were not valuable to them, such as daily tasks or routines. The researchers found that those learners who completed the self-affirmation exercises had a long-term positive effect, even years later. They state, “This improved academic performance not only spilled over to students’ other courses but also persisted. At the end of middle school, two years later, the affirmed students had higher GPAs in their core courses than their non-affirmed African American peers,” (p. 17).

In her book, *Mathematical Mindsets: Unleashing Students' Potential Through Creative Math, Inspiring Messages, and Innovative Teaching*, Jo Boaler (2016) also uses

the idea of a growth mindset in her math courses. At the end of each piece of feedback, she would provide to her students, Boaler would add an affirmative phrase. The use of this type of constant affirmation led to students feeling more satisfied and engaged in the course. However, Boaler also provides some limitations to this type of feedback. In particular, she mentioned that an instructor should be cognizant of varying the affirmative phrases they use. She points out that if a student receives the same phrase repeatedly, it begins to sound trite and will lose its effectiveness (Boaler, 2016).

One factor that is not accounted for in the studies thus far is the impact holidays can have on student implantation of feedback. In a study, Milyavskaya et al. (2014) found that as students started off at a high point of positive effects of feedback and as time got closer to breaks in the academic year, the positive effects of feedback were on a downward trajectory. After the break, the positive effects of feedback rebounded (Milyavskaya et al., 2014).

Conclusion

This literature review has provided a historical overview on rising of distance education, examined the theory of transactional distance and its applicability to the problem of practice, and reviewed the relevant literature related to the three areas of research in this study: dialogue in online courses, quality instructor feedback in online courses, and course satisfaction and motivation. All of these elements informed the development of the research design and methodologies for this study in order to address the problem of practice surrounding the communication gap that existed in my course. A further discussion of this design and methodologies will be included the next chapter.

For this study, the theory of transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013) was a key theory in regard to highlighting the importance of increased Dialogue and increased Autonomy (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). One of the primary ways to strengthen Dialogue in online courses is through feedback (Hattie, 2008, 2015; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). Autonomy can be expanded by providing students more control in their learning (Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). One way to increase this learner control is by allowing students to choose the type of feedback they prefer (Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

Multiple modalities of feedback are available for online instructors. Based on the research, it does not appear that one mode is superior to others (Berry, 2017; Bondi, Daher, Holland, Smith, & Dam, 2016; Borup et al., 2014; King, 2014; Krause, Portolese, & Bonner, 2017; Lowenthal, Dunlap, & Snelson, 2017; Malachowski et al., 2013; Mathieson, 2012; Portolese Dias & Trumpy, 2014; Robinson et al., 2013). Rather, research indicates that students value dialogue with their instructors in their online courses and a reduction in the miscommunication gap. When present, this has the possibility to result in higher levels of course satisfaction and motivation in the course (Berry, 2017; Cole et al., 2017; Fetzner, 2013; Hattie, 2008, 2015; Krause, Portolese, & Bonner, 2017; Ladyshewsky, 2013; Malachowski et al., 2013; Otter et al., 2013; Sahawneh & Benuto, 2018).

Chapter 3

Methods

As an online instructor, it is my goal to provide my students with the same level of interaction and educational experience as their peers enrolled in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting. However, based on course evaluations, my students perceive a communication gap. One way to address this is through the use of dialogue as presented in the theory of transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013) The purpose of this qualitative, action research dissertation in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016) was to examine the impact of sustained dialogue between instructor and students on the student's motivation to apply the feedback and the student's overall course satisfaction. Given the nature and context of this problem of practice, an intervention action research was determined to be the best fit. By providing consistent, targeted feedback based on student identified preferences, I believe the communication gap between instructor and student will be lessened.

The following research questions were developed and guided this study.

1. What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?
2. What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course?

These questions were selected because they can directly address the problem of practice regarding how targeted feedback can impact student motivation and overall course satisfaction. While there may have been other elements of dialogue that have led to the problem, it is my professional opinion that these questions capture the most likely aspects of the problem that if addressed well, can lead to resolution of the problem. My experiences as both an instructional designer and an instructor of online courses play a large role in the design and implementation of this dissertation.

This chapter will outline the methods used to conduct the research study. The Context, Participants, and Researcher Positionality section will detail the demographics of the population in the study as well as explain how the researcher's positionality was considered during the implementation of the study. The Research Design section will provide further justification as to why action research was used in this study, along with a description of the setting where the research was conducted. The Data Collection Measures, Instruments, and Tools section will provide a synopsis of the surveys that were created and explain how the collection of student-generated content was archived. This section will also identify how and why those tools were chosen. The Research Procedure section will explain, in detail, the steps that were taken by the researcher in the study to allow replicability in the future. Next, the Treatment, Processing, and Analysis of Data section will illustrate the statistical analyses that were used for the quantitative portions and the coding that was used for the qualitative portions of the study. This chapter will conclude with a summarization of the entire methodology.

Context, Participants, and Researcher Positionality

The action research study was conducted during one section of the Midwestern University's Spring 2019 (second session) Learning Skills 1000 course. This course was conducted completely online and ran for seven weeks through the Canvas Learning Management System (LMS) by the company Instructure (2019). The sample was a convenience sample composed of students enrolled in the Midwestern university's Spring 2019 (second seven-week session) Learning Skills 1000 course.

The population targeted for this study was college undergraduate students 18 years of age or older. Participants were asked to self-identify to ensure they met the criteria for the study. The following were the inclusionary criteria for participants:

- Enrolled in the Midwestern University's Spring 2019 Learning Skills 1000 course
- Identified as volunteering (consenting) to participate
- College undergraduate student 18 years of age or older
- Existing freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior

Participants may also have been part of the Midwestern University's Senior Sixty (pseudonym) group (the Midwestern University allows residents age 60 or over to take for-credit classes tuition free).

Exclusionary criteria for the study included the following:

- Have identified as not volunteering (consenting) to participate
- Students under the age of 18 years old
- Graduate-level college students

An announcement was posted in the Canvas LMS during the seventh (and final) week of the Spring 2019 course providing information for students about the study and how to participate (see Appendix F). A follow-up email was sent out to students enrolled in the Spring 2019 Learning Skills 1000 course with the same message during the seventh (and final) week of the course (see Appendix F). A link to the invitation letter and consent form (see Appendix G) housed in Qualtrics (2019) was included in both the announcement and the email (see Appendix F, G). All the collected data were either student generated or generated by the teacher/researcher. The data of any participant who dropped out of the study was excluded from the results.

The sample population for this action research study was chosen due to the researcher's role as instructor in this course. This study took place in the confines of the teacher/researcher's course with the intent to enhance understanding of the needs of students in the course. The purpose of action research is to take the instructor's setting and identify a problem of practice that can be researched to improve the instructor's teaching (Efron & Ravid, 2013). One of the most beneficial aspects of action research is its applicability to the researcher. As this type of study deals directly with the instructor's setting, relevancy is virtually guaranteed, with the teacher/researcher also the beneficiary of the results (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Perhaps even more importantly, action research also helps the teacher/researcher become more effective in his or her classroom (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Collaboration is another key element of action research. For this study, collaborations were primarily between the instructor/doctoral student, his doctoral advisor at the Southern University, and his course supervisor at the Midwestern

University. All three of these individuals were involved in the research design of this study. In addition to assisting with the research design, the course supervisor was also utilized as a resource, when needed, during the implementation of the study.

Research Design

For this dissertation in practice, I enacted a qualitative, action research study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016). This design focused on the study of my intervention to address the problem associated with an increased transactional distance my students were experiencing in the online course in which I am the instructor. For this study, the theory of transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013) was a key theory in regard to highlighting the importance of increased Dialogue and increased Autonomy (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). One of the primary ways to strengthen Dialogue in online courses is through feedback (Hattie, 2008, 2015; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). Autonomy can be expanded by providing students more control in their learning (Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). One way to increase this learner control is by allowing students to choose the type of feedback they prefer (Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). In addition to the theory of transactional distance, the work of Brookhart (2017), Dweck (2008) and Boaler (2016) related to effective instructional feedback.

Along with the theoretical framework, it is important to note the ontological and epistemological lens in which this study was developed. This study was developed through the lens of Pragmatism ontology. While epistemological paradigms are often the source for studies, there has been a recent shift among researchers toward ontology (Frankel Pratt, 2016; Given, 2019). Where epistemology concerns the nature of

knowledge (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010), ontology is more focused on how one sees the world and knowledge, and how that perspective on knowledge shapes research endeavors (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010). As Goldkuhl, (2012) explains, "Pragmatism is concerned with action and change and the interplay between knowledge and action," (Goldkuhl, 2012, p. 136). This description of pragmatism could situate itself well not only with qualitative research, but also with action research. Pragmatism ontology was therefore the most appropriate for conducting a qualitative study (Given, 2019; Goldkuhl, 2012).

This study was also completed from an emic perspective. "An emic perspective is the insider's view of reality" (Given, 2019, p. 249). As both the researcher and instructor in the class for this study, I clearly took an insider's perspective. This perspective is also common among studies that utilize qualitative research methods (Given, 2019), which were one source of data in this study. The final paradigm utilized in this study was constructivism. With the roots of the theory of transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013) found in constructivism, this study was conceived through a constructivist epistemological paradigm.

In addition to the paradigms used in this study, it is also important to note the action research modes and models. The work of Jürgen Habermas identifies three cognitive interests that informed the types of action research used in this study. These include Technical, Practical, and Emancipatory (Berg, 2001; Brunkhorst, Kreide, & Lafont, 2017; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Newton & Burgess, 2008). This study focused primarily on the practical cognitive interest. According to Berg (as cited in Newton & Burgess, 2008), Practical action research seeks "to improve practice-and-service delivery

of the practitioner through application of the "personal wisdom of the participants" (Berg, 2001, p. 168).

For this study, Stinger's action research interacting spiral was utilized (Mertler, 2016, p. 25). Stringer as described by Mertler (2016), identified a three-step routine for ensuring the intentional, systematic, and thoughtful study of an intervention. Each cycle of action research consists of Stinger's three steps that include a looking, thinking, and acting routine (Mertler, 2016, p. 25).

Throughout three cycles of action research, I collected and analyzed qualitative data that would provide me with insight into the impact of my efforts to reduce the transactional distance between my students and myself. When collecting and analyzing qualitative data, the researcher generally collects the data in a specific environment, organizes the data for analysis, analyzes the data through coding that results in themes which the researcher then uses to develop their interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative approach was the most appropriate in the context of this study given the emphasis on dialogue over the more quantitative aspects of the problem.

Specifically, the qualitative approach in this study is a phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological approaches to qualitative research look at shared experience, the communication or miscommunication for this study, among a particular group, in the case of this study, the students who have taken the Learning Skills 1000 course with me as an instructor (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The goal of the phenomenological approach is to try to figure out how or why this experience may have happened (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The researcher also tries to bracket their biases throughout the

research. For this research it was accomplished first, through the teachers/researcher's positionality mentioned in this dissertation in practice as well at the creation of the Preferred Feedback Profile from the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey (see Appendix A) to make certain that the teacher/researcher is giving the same format for feedback to all students (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

With the cyclical and iterative nature of action research in mind, I designed a three-phase study that would generate qualitative data related to the intervention. Three primary objectives were examined: 1) which characteristics of feedback students deem to be effective, 2) impact of providing this preferred feedback on student implementation, and 3) overall student satisfaction with the feedback. Two research questions were addressed in this study: "What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?" and "What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course?"

In this study, the first cycle was the initial survey, the second cycle was the feedback cycle on blog posts, and the final cycle was the final survey. In cycle 1, I planned my intervention by reviewing the student data from prior course evaluations and the research literature about effective feedback, online learning, and the theory of transactional distance. I then developed (acted) and administered the Preferred Feedback Profile survey (see Appendix A) during the first week of the course. I selected a survey for the purpose of quickly identifying the characteristics students wanted in their feedback. This survey generated the participants' preferred feedback methods. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze and interpret this data. Finally, from my

analysis and interpretation of this data, I developed the profile of aggregate student preferences (Preferred Feedback Profile, or PFP) (see Appendix A, B) and an action plan on how to implement this in the feedback provided to my students. Engaging in the use of a pre-intervention survey helped me to quickly identify the characteristics of effective feedback students felt were most important and represented the first action step intended to enhance the level and quality of instructor-student dialogue in the course.

In cycle two, I planned the process for providing feedback by recruiting volunteers and providing instructor feedback to students related to their submitted blog posts, a recurring assignment in the course. Since the topics of the blog post varied, the specific content of my feedback varied in response. However, in each round of effective instructional feedback that I provided, the feedback I provided reflected the Preferred Feedback Profile (see Appendix A, B) and demonstrated the characteristics of effective instructional feedback (Brookhart 2017, Dweck, 2008, Boaler, 2016). Each round of feedback also represented an additional opportunity to elevate the amount of dialogue between my students and myself in the course in effort to further reduce the transactional distance between me and the students (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). In addition, I also analyzed student blog assignments for evidence of implementation of the feedback. I then developed a final survey to generate data about student perceptions related to the targeted feedback provided during the course.

In the final cycle, I planned how I would best distribute the survey and collected responses, and then acted by administering the survey and analyzing the data that generated. I captured the student perceptions about the feedback they received from me during the course through the use of the Week 7 survey on weekly blog feedback (see

Appendix C). This brief survey was completed by participants during Week 7 to indicate satisfaction with the feedback they received on the blog assignments throughout the course. The teacher/researcher's Student Instructor Evaluation (SIE) quantitative scores (pre and post action research study) were used in this study (see Appendix D). The quantitative scores were utilized to create a baseline (pre-action research study SIEs). This baseline was then compared to the post-action research study SIEs to determine if there was any change. Another evaluation that was used was the Department Course Evaluations (DCE) (see Appendix E). Quantitative scores on the student enjoyment of the course were compared to measure any change in student perception regarding course feedback and satisfaction of the course and the course instructor compared to previous semesters where I taught this course.

In the third and final cycle, I developed a summary of everything I had learned and created an implementation plan for future work.

Data Collection, Measures, Instruments, and Tools

The instruments used during this study included a pre survey that collected quantitative data and a post-survey that collected quantitative and qualitative data. According to Mertler (2016), "Survey research involves acquiring information from individuals representing one or more groups...by specifically asking them questions and then tabulating their responses," (Mertler, 2016, p. 98). The benefit of surveys includes their simple design and approach, as well as their ability to gather the opinions of a group (Mertler, 2016). Surveys were selected as the primary data collection tool in this study for several reasons. Efron & Ravid (2013) state, "Surveys are one of the most common and efficient ways to gather information" (p. 107). Given the time frame of this course (seven

weeks), it was vital to collect and analyze the data quickly in the first week to create the Preferred Feedback Profile that was utilized throughout the rest of the course session and study. Given the widespread usage of surveys, the teacher/researcher believed this was a tool that students would be familiar with and would be willing to complete. Additionally, the rank-order survey that was created allowed the teacher/researcher to gain the perspectives of students while also providing a set of fixed choices (Alwin & Beattie, 2016; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Krosnick, 2018).

Emergent coding was also utilized (Blair, 2015; Stuckey, 2015). According to Blair (2015), emergent coding is when "codes are drawn from the text and a priori coding where codes are created beforehand and applied to the text" (p. 16). In this study, emergent coding was utilized to better discern the impact of the high Dialogue that was created by implementing the Preferred Feedback Profile.

The survey-based portion of the study was triangulated by student-created blog posts along with the instructor's feedback on the blogs, which were curated to create an audit trail that would stablish the credibility of the study and its findings.

Research question 1: What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?

To answer this question, the following instruments were used:

Preferred feedback profile survey. This survey was completed by participants by the second week of the course (see Appendix A). The link to this survey was included as part of a graded assignment during Week 2 in the Midwestern University's Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). Participants were given until Wednesday at 11:59 p.m. of Week 2 to complete the survey to allow the teacher/researcher time to analyze the

data and use it to develop a profile of aggregate student feedback preferences. The results were stored on the Southern university's version of Qualtrics (2019).

Week 7 survey on weekly blog feedback. This brief survey was completed by participants during Week 7 to indicate satisfaction with the feedback they for the blog assignments throughout the course (see Appendix C). The link to this survey was included as part of a graded assignment during Week 7 in the Midwestern university's Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). A five-point, fixed, Likert Scale survey was created that directly asked the students about their satisfaction on the blog feedback. An open-ended question was also included to gather further insights into their responses. This tool allowed the teacher/researcher to gain the perspectives of the students in their own words in addition to their answers to a set of fixed choices (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The results were stored on the Southern university's version of Qualtrics (2019).

The Preferred Feedback Profile Survey and the Week 7 Survey on Weekly Blog Feedback were both new instruments developed for this study. Both were informed by Moore's transactional distance theory and the work of Brookhart (2017), Dweck (2008) and Boaler (2016) related to effective instructional feedback.

Research question 2: What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course?

To answer this question, the following instruments were used:

Preferred feedback profile. The Preferred Feedback Profile (PFP) was created based on the results of the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey. The PFP provided a

personal record that was used to guide the instructor's feedback on the student blog assignments and ensure the Preferred Feedback Profile was consistently followed.

Student blog/instructor feedback curation. The student-generated blog content and the instructor feedback for the corresponding blog assignments comprised additional data sources. One of the primary reasons this was done was to create an audit trail. "An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 252).

Student instructor evaluations (SIEs). These are university-generated surveys that are distributed at the end of each semester at the Midwestern University (see Appendix D). All the teacher/researcher's Student Instructor Evaluations' quantitative scores (pre and post action research study) were used.

Department course evaluations (DCEs). Another evaluation that was used was the Department Course Evaluations (DCE), which are department-level surveys that are distributed to all enrolled students of courses within the department in which this course is taught (see Appendix E).

Research Procedure

As previously mentioned, Stinger's action research interacting spiral was utilized in this study (Mertler, 2016, p. 25). A detailed summary of the sequence of activities undertaken in this study is listed below. In all cycles below, the primary intent was to address the communication gap between instructor and student through the use of dialogue.

Cycle 1: Creating the preferred feedback profile

In this study, the first cycle was the initial survey, the second cycle was the feedback cycle on blog posts, and the final cycle was the final survey. In cycle 1, I planned my intervention by reviewing the student data from prior course evaluations and the research literature about effective feedback, online learning, and the theory of transactional distance. I then developed (acted) and administered the Preferred Feedback Profile survey (see Appendix A) during the first week of the course. I selected a survey for the purpose of quickly identifying the characteristics students wanted in their feedback. This survey generated the participants' preferred feedback methods. Descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze and interpret this data. Finally, from my analysis and interpretation of this data, I developed the profile of aggregate student preferences (Preferred Feedback Profile, or PFP) (see Appendix A, B) and an action plan on how to implement this in the feedback provided to my students. Engaging in the use of a pre-intervention survey helped me to quickly identify the characteristics of effective feedback students felt were most important and represented the first action step intended to enhance the level and quality of instructor-student dialogue in the course.

The initial feedback preferences survey and end-of-course feedback satisfaction survey were built into the course assignments. During the second week of the course, students were asked to complete the Preferred Feedback Survey as part of their weekly assignment. While the Preferred Feedback Survey was included as part of the weekly assignment, students were able to opt in or opt out of the study at the end of the course when the data was collected and analyzed. The research element that students chose to participate in or not participate in was the curating and analysis of the surveys, blog

posts, and feedback. Students who consented to participate in the study were agreeing to allow their de-identified survey responses, blog posts, and feedback they received on blog posts to be combined and analyzed for research purposes.

The results of the Preferred Feedback Survey were stored on the Southern University's version of Qualtrics (2019). The link to this survey was included as part of a graded assignment during Week 2 in the Midwestern university's Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). Participants were given until Wednesday at 11:59 p.m. of Week 2 to complete the survey to allow the teacher/researcher time to analyze the data and use it to develop a profile of aggregate student feedback preferences.

For the Preferred Feedback Survey, students were asked to rank five different characteristics of feedback, based on the research of Brookhart (2017), Dweck (2008) and Boaler (2016), from most preferred to least preferred. The results were stored on the Southern University's version of Qualtrics (2019) (see Appendix A, B). The teacher/researcher used the Midwestern University's username system to provide the students with the credit for the assignment; afterward, the Midwestern University username system was de-identified during analysis on the teacher/researcher's password-protected, encrypted laptop. The de-identified results of this survey were used to create feedback profiles that were then used to guide the teacher/researcher's feedback to students for their blog posts in Weeks 2–6.

Cycle 2: Implementing the preferred feedback profile

In cycle two, I planned the process for providing feedback by recruiting volunteers and providing instructor feedback to students related to their submitted blog posts, a recurring assignment in the course. Since the topics of the blog post varied, the

specific content of my feedback varied in response. However, in each round of effective instructional feedback that I provided, the feedback I provided reflected the Preferred Feedback Profile (see Appendix A, B) and demonstrated the characteristics of effective instructional feedback (Brookhart 2017, Dweck, 2008, Boaler, 2016). Each round of feedback also represented an additional opportunity to elevate the amount of dialogue between my students and myself in the course in effort to further reduce the transactional distance between me and the students (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). In addition, I also analyzed student blog assignments for evidence of implementation of the feedback. I then developed a final survey to generate data about student perceptions related to the targeted feedback provided during the course.

The feedback that the teacher/researcher gave depended on whether the students successfully complete the tasks that were outlined in the assignment rubric (see Appendix H). If the student did not meet the rubric criteria on the assignment, feedback was provided using the PFP with the content based on the rubric. If the student met all rubric criteria on the assignment, the feedback from the instructor followed the PFP and was guided by their interpretation of four feedback areas based on the work of Hattie and & Timperley (2007), as outlined by Brookhart (2017). These areas included, "Feedback about the task, feedback about the processing of the task, feedback about self-regulation, and feedback about the self as a person," (Brookhart, 2017, p. 11). This guide aligned to the research study as it helped to further the dialogue between the instructor and students and provided a research-based supplement to Brookhart's (2016) criteria in cases where the rubric criteria were met.

At the end of Week 7, participants were asked to complete the Week 7 Survey on Weekly Blog Feedback. The brief survey was completed by participants during Week 7 to indicate their level of satisfaction with the feedback they received for the blog assignments throughout the course (see Appendix C). The results (see Appendix I) were stored on the Southern University's version of Qualtrics (2019). The link to this survey was included as part of a graded assignment during Week 7 in the Midwestern University's Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). Participants were given until the last day of the course to complete the survey. The Midwestern university lastname.# ID system was used to provide students with the credit for the assignment. The survey responses were not read until after grades for the course were assigned, and all responses were de-identified before conducting analysis.

An announcement was posted in the Canvas LMS during the seventh (and final) week of the course providing information for students on how to enroll in the study. An email was also sent out by the instructor/researcher to students enrolled in the Midwestern University's Spring 2019 Learning Skills 1000 course with the same message during the seventh (and final) week of the course. A link to the invitation letter and consent form (see Appendix F, G) was included in both the announcement and the email. The consent form was voluntarily completed by participants during the seventh (and final) week of the course. The results were stored on the Southern University's version of Qualtrics (2019). The link to the consent form was available during the seventh (and final) week of the course and was delivered via a link in Midwestern University's Canvas Learning Management System (LMS). The link to this survey was available in an announcement in Midwestern University's Canvas LMS as well as in an

email to the current enrollees of the course. The link was available until the end of the seventh week of the course. The consent form introduced the potential participants to the following aspects of the study: Purpose, Procedures/Tasks, Confidentiality, Incentives, Future Research, Duration, Risks and Benefits, Participant Rights, and Contacts and Questions (see Appendix G). The students self-identified there if they agreed to participate in the research study and were 18 years of age or older, or they indicated that they either had chosen not to agree to participate in the research study or were under 18 years of age. If they agreed to participate in the research study and were 18 years of age or older, they were prompted to share their Midwestern University username to receive two points of extra credit.

This survey was given during the seventh (and final) week of the course and the responses were read after grading was complete to ensure there was no instructor bias when leaving feedback. Participants were given until the last day of the course to complete the survey. The identities of participants were not known until extra credit was awarded as final grades were being posted. Once the Midwestern University username identifiers were used to give the students the extra credit, the Midwestern University username for each student was de-identified during analysis on the teacher/researcher's password-protected, encrypted laptop.

Participation was confidential. Specifically, students' answers to the feedback surveys and the content of their blog posts were de-identified prior to analysis, with their username being collected only initially in order to provide incentives and keep students' survey responses, feedback, and blog posts together as a set. All survey results were stored in the secure, password protected Qualtrics (2019) survey platform through the

Southern university. Once the data sources were combined, the teacher/researcher assigned each student a three-digit code in lieu of their username and removed all identifying information prior to analysis. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet logging the participants' three-digit codes and references to their corresponding username were created, stored, and maintained in a separate folder location in the Midwestern University's Box website, which is an online data storage service that secures data with dual authentication and was approved for the storage of data related to educational records. The folder that contains that spreadsheet was only accessible to the teacher/researcher, and the principal investigator. Identifying marks on all the survey data, blog posts, and blog post feedback were redacted and stored on the teacher/researcher's password-protected, encrypted laptop. The overall results of the study have the potential to be published or presented at professional meetings, but the student identities will never be revealed. Study information and materials will be stored for 60 months after completion of the study.

Cycle 3: Analyzing and reflecting upon post-course data

In the final cycle, I planned how I would best distribute the survey and collected responses, and then acted by administering the survey and analyzing the data that generated. I captured the student perceptions about the feedback they received from me during the course through the use of the Week 7 survey on weekly blog feedback (see Appendix C). This brief survey was completed by participants during Week 7 to indicate satisfaction with the feedback they received on the blog assignments throughout the course. The teacher/researcher's Student Instructor Evaluation (SIE) quantitative scores (pre and post action research study), which are university-generated surveys that are

distributed to all enrolled students at the end of each semester. were also used in this study (see Appendix D). The quantitative scores were utilized to create a baseline (pre-action research study SIEs). This baseline was then compared to the post-action research study SIEs to determine if there was any change. Another evaluation that was used was the Department Course Evaluations (DCE), which are department-level surveys that are distributed to all enrolled students of courses within the department in which this course is taught (see Appendix E). Quantitative scores on the student enjoyment of the course were compared to measure any change in student perception regarding course feedback and satisfaction of the course and the course instructor compared to previous semesters where I taught this course.

In the third and final cycle, I developed a summary of everything I had learned and created an implementation plan for future work. Once the post-intervention data was collected and analyzed, I reflected on the entire action research project. This reflection was captured and described in the creation of chapter 5 of this dissertation in practice.

Study Timeline

- Week 1: The students completed the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey by the Wednesday of the second week.
- Week 2: The students completed the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey by the Wednesday of the second week. The teacher/researcher created the feedback profile based on the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey. The teacher/researcher created the participant key spreadsheet (this enabled the de-identification of participant responses) and stored it in a secure location.

- Week 3–7: The teacher/researcher left feedback on students' blog posts based on the Preferred Feedback Profile.
- Week 7: The students completed a survey on the weekly blog feedback they received throughout the course.
- Week 7: The students read information about the study and completed the consent form.

Participants received no monetary compensation. As an incentive, students who consented to participate in the study received two points of extra credit. The alternative to study participation was to complete the course without allowing materials to be used for research purposes. To reduce coercion, students had the opportunity in the course to receive an equivalent amount of extra credit for an alternative activity not connected to the study in Week 7, a video reflection assignment (see Appendix J). The identities of participants were not known until extra credit was awarded as final grades were being posted.

Participants could choose to withdraw from the study at any time. Students could withdraw by contacting the instructor/researcher directly. There was no impact on their grade or progress in the course. Participants were permitted to keep any extra credit points that were earned up to the point of withdrawal. The alternative to study participation was to complete the course without allowing materials to be used for research purposes. A Statement of Withdrawal was included in the invitation letter under the Duration and Participant Rights sections. This study was determined exempt from the Midwestern university's IRB review and Non-Human Research from the Southern university's IRB review.

Treatment, Processing, and Analysis of Data

Given that this study took a qualitative research approach, analysis was needed to address both the quantitative and qualitative data. Howard Becker (1977) coined the term *quasi-statistic* to describe quantitative data analysis within a qualitative research study (p. 81). Becker realized that the addition of quantitative data may be necessary in a qualitative study, it was important to have a term that describes this phenomenon (Becker, 1977). Since in qualitative research inferences cannot be made, the research cannot use inferential statistics. In the Lisa Given goes on to state that, "In qualitative research, descriptive statistics are typically observed in mixed method, action research, or other qualitative designs," (Given, 2019, p. 210) With that, this study will employ a mixture of quantitative data in the form of descriptive statistics and emergent coding.. A more detailed description of each is included below.

Preferred feedback profile survey. Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the participants' preferred feedback methods. The results were stored and tabulated on the Southern State university's version of Qualtrics (2019). The frequency counts where then inputted into Microsoft Excel. They were then processed using the Microsoft Excel descriptive statistics data analysis tool.

Feedback application in blog assignments. Emergent coding and tagging were both utilized to create an audit trail between feedback given on a blog and the application of that feedback on succeeding blog assignments. Each participating student's blog post as well as the teacher/researcher's preceding feedback was copied and pasted into a separate Microsoft Word document per participant. Each the feedback from the teacher/researcher was compared to the proceeding blog post. Highlights were used in the

documents to match the feedback given to the feedback enacted. The teacher/researcher then counted the number of feedback recommendations that were given and the number of feedback recommendations that were enacted. The frequency counts where then inputted into Microsoft Excel. They were then processed using the Microsoft Excel descriptive statistics data analysis tool. The teacher/researcher then used emergent coding and created themes of these recommendations. The frequency counts where then inputted into Microsoft Excel. They were then processed using the Microsoft Excel descriptive statistics data analysis tool.

Week 7 blog feedback survey. Descriptive statistics were utilized their level of satisfaction with the feedback students were given using the Preferred Feedback Profile. The frequency counts where then inputted into Microsoft Excel. They were then processed using the Microsoft Excel descriptive statistics data analysis tool. The results were stored and tabulated on the Southern University's version of Qualtrics (2019). Emergent coding was utilized to create detail-rich qualitative descriptions of the open-ended feedback provided in the Week 7 Blog Feedback Survey to identify possible explanations for why students were or were not satisfied with the feedback that was given.

Department course evaluations (DCEs). Feedback from Department Course Evaluations pre and post research study was compared to measure any change in student perception regarding course feedback. This was completed using descriptive statistics were used to compare scores from the pre research study session of this course to the course session involved during this research study. The means for each session were

inputted into Microsoft Excel. They were then processed using Microsoft Excel to create the graphs necessary to display the trends over the semesters.

Historical student instructor evaluations (SIEs). Scores were used to compare and report on previous scores (pre action research study) to the scores obtained after the action research study (post action research study) using descriptive statistics were used to compare scores from the pre research study session of this course to the course session involved during this research study. The means for each session were inputted into Microsoft Excel. They were then processed using Microsoft Excel to create the graphs necessary to display the trends over the semesters.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the methods utilized in this mixed methods research study. The purpose of this qualitative, action research study (Creswell, 2014; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016) was to examine how targeted feedback can impact student motivation and overall course and instructor satisfaction. The specific research design utilized qualitative data with pre-test and post-test surveys analyzed in the form of descriptive statistics as well as emergent coding. The sample was a convenience sample composed of students enrolled in the Midwestern University's seven-week Spring 2019 (second session) Learning Skills 1000 course that was conducted completely online. The instruments used during this study were a pre survey and a post survey that collected qualitative data. Data analysis methods that were utilized included descriptive statistics and emergent coding. The results of the research study will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this qualitative, action research dissertation in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016) was to examine the impact of sustained dialogue between instructor and students on the student's motivation to apply the feedback and the student's overall course satisfaction. This study attempted to address a common problem in the course I currently teach—students in the course I teach report the existence of a communication gap. By sustaining effective dialogue and providing instructor feedback that demonstrates the characteristics of effective instructional feedback (Brookhart 2017, Dweck, 2008, Boaler, 2016), this intervention was designed to lessen the communication gap between me as the instructor and my students enrolled in the Learning Skills 1000 course. Along with the work of Brookhart (2017), Dweck (2008) and Boaler (2016), the theory of transactional distance provided the primary theoretical framework (M. G. Moore, 2013) for this action research study. The theory of transactional distance examines the cognitive space between the learner and the course. Rather than the physical transaction that happens between student and instructor in a face-to-face setting, the theory of transactional distance focuses on the elements that can expand the cognitive distance between the learner and the subject matter. The goal is for the instructor to create the least amount of transactional distance between the learner and the course.

Transactional distance is broken down into three dimensions: Dialogue, Structure, and Autonomy (M. G. Moore, 2013).

1. What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?
2. What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course?

These questions were selected because they helped to focus the study on the impact of providing effective instructional feedback on student motivation and overall course and instructor satisfaction. While there may have been other elements of dialogue that could have contributed to the problem, it is my professional opinion that these questions capture the most likely causes of the problem of practice.

This study implemented Stringer's three stage action research model (Mertler, 2016, p. 25).

In the first cycle, I developed and administered the Preferred Feedback Profile survey (see Appendix A) during the first week of the course. From my analysis and interpretation of this data, I developed the profile of aggregate student preferences (Preferred Feedback Profile, or PFP) (see Appendix A, B) which guided me as I developed and shared my instructor feedback with students during the course. This data point was used to address Research Question 1: What do students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?

In the second cycle, I provided instructor feedback to students related to their submitted blog posts, a recurring assignment in the course. Each round of feedback

represented an additional opportunity to elevate the amount of dialogue between my students in the course and myself in effort to further reduce the transactional distance between me and the students (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013).

In the third cycle, I captured the student perceptions about the feedback they received from me during the course Quantitative scores on the student enjoyment of the course were compared to measure any change in student perception regarding course feedback and satisfaction of the course and the course instructor compared to previous semesters where I taught this course.

This chapter will outline the data collected over the course of this study. Three primary themes of interest have been identified: dialogue in online courses, quality instructor feedback in online courses, and course satisfaction and motivation. Data points and analysis for each of these sections will be included.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

This chapter will present the data that was collected over the course of the research study, as well as discussion the connection between the data and the theoretical framework and available literature. The chapter is divided into the three themes of interest: dialogue in online courses, quality instructor feedback in online courses, and course satisfaction and motivation. The chapter will conclude with an overall summary and final thoughts on the data. Limitations and future implications will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Dialogue in Online Courses

The first theme was the characteristics of effective dialogue in online course. As noted in the theory of transactional distance, dialogue is a key component of lowing the

transactional distance, or in the case of this study, the space where miscommunication is happening. A large challenge of online education in regard to dialogue is the lack of face-to-face interaction. Fetzner (2013) found that one of the top ten reasons for students to drop out of an online course was a lack of engagement with the instructor (p. 166). Gillett-Swan (2017) also discuss how, without the benefit of face to face interaction, many students report feeling disengaged and alone in online courses. One strategy to overcome this disengagement is through the use of immediate feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017).

When viewing the problem of practice from the perspective of transactional distance theory (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013), the request for more feedback from the students in my course indicates that there has been a miscommunication between what I as an instructor deem to be effective instructional feedback and what students consider to be effective instructional feedback. Per the theory of transactional distance, it could be perceived that this request for additional feedback is an indication that student want higher dialogue in the course between themselves and the instructor to help close this gap.

As noted in Table 4.1, survey results from students who agreed to participate in the study revealed that students ranked Amount ("Providing feedback on several points about the assignment") highest of all the characteristics. Under the Amount subcategory, "Providing feedback on three or more main point(s) about the assignment" was the highest. Message of the Feedback ("The balance of positive and negative feedback points") was the second highest ranked characteristic. Regarding the subcategory, "Pointing out an equal number of positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the

artifact with an equal number of negative (areas to improve) of the assignment" was the highest for this category. The categories of Audience ("Individual feedback, group/class feedback"), Mode ("Audio, text, or video with audio feedback"), and Timing ("How much time passes before you receive feedback")—equally received low rankings. For the full results of the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey (see Appendix B).

Table 4.1.

Student frequency counts of primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback (most valuable) (n = 11)

Feedback Characteristics	Count	Percentage
Amount (Providing feedback on a number of points about the assignment)	6	54.55%
Audience (Individual Feedback, Group/Class Feedback)	1	9.09%
Message of the Feedback (The balance of positive and negative feedback points)	2	18.18%
Mode (Audio, Text, or Video with Audio Feedback)	1	9.09%
Timing (How much time passes before you receive feedback)	1	9.09%
Total	11	100%

The results of this data align with the problem of practice. The results of my course evaluations from the most recent sections of the course (at the time of this writing) indicate that students feel lower levels of satisfaction with the course and my instruction. These low levels of satisfaction can indicate a miscommunication between my students and myself. Based on the theory of transactional distance, we know that when students feel there is a low level of dialogue in a course (in this case, feedback from the instructor), transactional distance increases (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). Conversely, high dialogue possibly could lead to the learner reporting feeling higher levels of individualized attention, which also leads to higher levels of student satisfaction (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). By identifying Amount as the most preferred feedback

characteristic, it can be believed that students are indicating their desire for higher levels of communication between themselves and the instructor.

Quality Instructor Feedback in Online Courses

The second theme of interest in this study was the impact of instructor feedback. One possible way to address lack of dialogue in online courses and miscommunication this could create is through the use of quality instructor feedback. In his meta-analysis of over 800 studies regarding factors that impact student achievement, John Hattie (2008) determined that feedback was among the top 10 influencing factors that impact student achievement among all domains that Hattie created. Regarding the idea that teachers are activators (able to influence change in a student), Hattie found that feedback ranked as the second most important factor (Hattie, 2008). However, Hattie (2008) also maintains that some forms of feedback are more effective than others, noting the most important goal with feedback is to ensure that it is used by the students (Hattie, 2008).

In addition, several studies have investigated the types of feedback that are most effective specifically for computer-based learning (Mason & Bruning, 2001; Van der Kleij, Feskens, & Eggen, 2015). A central finding in this research is that feedback that concentrates on what students were thinking and not only on whether their answers were correct leads to more improvement in learning than simple knowledge of results. This finding is evident across studies of feedback in other settings, as well (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Mason & Bruning, 2001; Shute, 2008). Feedback needs to describe where students are in relation to the learning they are aiming for and make at least one suggestion for a next step in learning. (Brookhart, 2017).

The impact of the instructor feedback was determined by examining the amount of recommendations provided by the instructor that were implemented by students on subsequent blog assignments. This was used to answer Research Question 2: What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course? Based on the results of the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey mentioned above, the types of feedback provided by the instructor on the blog assignments were delineated and are listed below in Table 4.2. These characteristics of feedback were provided to all students on blog assignments during the course.

- Providing feedback on three or more main point(s) about the assignment
- Feedback is delivered to me as an individual
- Pointing out an equal number of positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the artifact with an equal number of negative (areas to improve) of the assignment
- Feedback is given using only text
- Feedback on an assignment is given within one day after it is due

Table 4.2

Blog feedback and coding: Week 2 example

Instructor Feedback: Week 2	**Student Blog: Week 3**
I am glad to see that you found multiple useful points in this module (netiquette. email writing, and time management). You may want to focus in on one point and expand on a deeper level about that one point. The example of using netiquette in social media is a great thing to think about. I would recommend giving an example of what you have seen other people post and how those skills could be improved when trying to talk about a topic while trying to get the same information across.	Hello everyone! This week helped open my eyes more on ways to beat procrastination and better manage my time. My favorite assignment this week was creating and tracking what I did for 24 hours for 7 days. This time sheet assignment helped to breakdown activities into categories and see where I spend most my time and if I need to reallocate that time to another task. I would urge any college student that is having a hard time completing assignments ahead of deadlines to try tracking their time!

Table 4.2 Continued

It does not have to be an extended example of what it would look like to apply this concept. adding that information would be great to show your synthesis of the information. Finally, the information that you have is great. I would recommend writing about how you see your topic being used in your future career and how the module content can better prepare you. Professor Lombardo	One thing in particular that I am sure most of us do in our free time is play on our phones, whether we actually should have that time or not. Over the past 7 days I noticed that I probably spent one or two hours on my phone each night and I could have used that time to try and get some of my school work done as opposed to procrastinating and waiting until the day my assignments were due. On slide 22 of Lesson: Module 3 there are recommendations for reducing your digital distraction. The one that stands out to me the most is placing your phone in another room when working. This is a suggestion that I plan to make use of immediately to see if it may help to reduce my distractions and the amount of time it takes for me to complete my assignments! As a student that has always waited until the last second to complete my work I hope you take my advice and try tracking your time for just one week. You never know, it might surprise you. You should try it even if you are not a procrastinator. It's It's just as important to have down time to enjoy yourself as it is to have enough time to study! So be sure you are spending your time wisely! Procrastinator or not it's it's also a good idea to unplug from social media and technology when trying to get schoolwork done. The less distractions the faster or easier your assignments could be completed!

The feedback that the teacher/researcher gave depended on if the students successfully complete the tasks that were outlined in the assignment rubric (see Appendix H). If the student did not meet the rubric criteria on the assignment, feedback was provided using the PFP with the content based on the rubric. If the student met all rubric criteria on the assignment, the feedback from the instructor followed the PFP and was guided by their interpretation of four feedback areas based on the work of Hattie and & Timperley (2007), as outlined by Brookhart (2017). These areas included, "Feedback about the task, feedback about the processing of the task, feedback about self-regulation, and feedback about the self as a person," (Brookhart, 2017, p. 11). This guide aligned to the research study as it helped to further the dialogue between the instructor and students

and provided a research-supported supplement to Brookhart's (2017) criteria in cases where the rubric criteria were met.

Beginning with the feedback provided on the Week 2 blog, the instructor feedback for students who agreed to participate in the study was collected and coded. The coding was completed by first identifying the recommendations that were offered for each blog post. These recommendations were then compared to the succeeding blog. For example, the instructor's Week 2 blog feedback was compared to the students' Week 3 blog assignments. Instances where individual students utilized the feedback were coded. This process was done up to and including the final Week 7 blog. When students failed to complete an assignment, the recommendations from the most recent preceding blog assignment were coded and applied to the next blog assignment that was turned in. For example, a student turned in Week 3's blog assignment but missed Week 4's assignment. In this instance, the instructor coded the recommendations for Week 3's blog and applied them to the Week 5 blog.

After the completion of the course, coding of the feedback and recommendations was completed. First, all of the blog assignments were curated along with the instructor feedback. The feedback for each week was matched with the preceding week's blog assignment to determine what feedback was enacted. Any audio or video blog submissions were transcribed for coding. Examples of the instructor feedback are included in Table 4.3. Colored highlighting (underlining for this manuscript) was utilized to match the feedback recommendation to the student enactment when applicable.

Once this initial coding process was completed, the instructor feedback was broken down into the following common themes:

- Personalization of week's topic
- Application of course topics to future career/outside of the classroom setting
- Correctly following assignment requirements
- Write blog post in Microsoft Word first to check for spelling and grammar
- Utilizing Canvas tools
- Completing assignment early
- Focus blog on one point/topic
- General grammatical recommendations
- Utilize Microsoft Word to read back blog to check flow of writing

Table 4.3

Instructor feedback examples

Instructor Feedback: Week 4
We talked about using different tools this week, so I would like to focus my feedback about various tools that can help. Great job again on the blog post, there were one or two sentences that although they weren't picked up as grammatical errors, the word choice was off. I would recommend having Microsoft Word read your blog post to you once it is typed up in Word. When I read the blog posts, I have Microsoft Word read it to me. so I can do a better job getting the context of the post. With that, I would recommend writing your blog post in Microsoft Word first and then using Microsoft''s text to speech to read back to you. You can find information about it here https://support.office.com/en-us/article/use-the-speak-text-to-speech-feature-to-read-text-aloud-459e7704-a76d-4fe2-ab4.8-189d6b83333c I also have been using this feature a lot as well as a student in my dissertation. You went into great depth about the SQ3R technique. I would still recommend talking about how you would use this in your future job or later in your academic career. Overall, this was another great blog post. One thing that I would recommend is to try using some of the tools in Carmen to submit your blog either as a video blog or an audio blog (using the tools from the "Discussion: 10 Tips for e-Learners"). Professor Lombardo
Instructor Feedback: Week 6
I enjoyed reading your blog post this week and you had a lot of valuable information form the module's content. I would still recommend writing the blog post in Microsoft Word first, check the spelling and grammar and then copy and paste your blog post into your online blog. There was a major incorrect word that was used in the third sentence that was used over the word that was intended. I have seen these types of mistakes in journal articles and books, it helps to avoid these mistakes in the future. You gave great examples of quality and utility and I like the analogy that you made at the end with the sprinkles. I would recommend going just a little bit more depth, especially for the final blog that is coming up, on how you see yourself using the materials after the course is over. Overall, this was a great blog post. I hope that you continue working the way you did to get your work in early as there is a sizeable amount of work in module 7 I also hope that you maintain the quality of writing that you have in this post. Professor Lombardo

Table 4.3 Continued

Instructor Feedback: Week 2
I am glad to see that you found multiple useful points in this module with the communications and using different tools. You may want to focus in on one point and expand on a deeper level about that one point. You do a great job talking about how you communicate online through social media and messaging family. I would recommend writing an example of what a social media post or message would look like. It doesn't have to be a long example. You bring a lot of the tools and concepts that are mentioned during the lesson, remember that that is part of the requirements to reference a specific page number or quote from readings, resource, or video in this week's lesson. Professor Lombardo

This coding of common themes was utilized to determine what types of feedback in regard to topics were most and least likely to be enacted upon by students. The results of this thematic coding are included in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Percentage by emergent coded themes of enacted instructor recommendations given on student blog assignments (n = 11)

Feedback Themes	Feedback Offered	Feedback Enacted	Percentage Enacted
Personalization of week's topic	29	27	93.10%
Application of course topics to future career/outside of the classroom setting	32	28	87.50%
Correctly following assignment requirements	12	10	83.33%
Write blog post in Microsoft Word first to check for spelling and grammar	32	18	56.25%
Utilizing Canvas tools	10	2	20.00%
Completing assignment early	19	8	42.11%
Focus blog on one point/topic	11	10	90.90%
General grammatical recommendations	4	4	100%
Utilize Microsoft Word to read back blog to check flow of writing	3	1	33.33%
Total	**152**	**108**	

On average 71.7% of the recommendations were enacted by participants. The categories with the highest number of recommendations were "Application of course topics to future career/outside of classroom setting" (32 recommendations) and "Write blog post in Microsoft Word first to check for spelling and grammar" (32 recommendations). Interestingly, the recommendations geared toward applying the course work to a future career or other contexts were one of the higher areas of implementation at 87.5%, while the recommendations for utilizing Microsoft Word to correct for grammar and spelling were lower at 56.3% implementation.

Overall, students were most likely to utilize feedback that dealt with the content of the blog assignment. The two highest categories of feedback that were enacted were "General grammatical recommendations" (100%) and "Personalization of the week's topic" (93.10%). The feedback that was least likely to be enacted dealt with items that were more technical. The two lowest categories of feedback were "Utilizing Canvas tools" (20.0%) and "Utilize Microsoft Word to read back blog to check flow of writing" (33.3%). Regarding technology recommendations, students seemed to be much more likely to implement those that dealt with more familiar tools, such as Microsoft Word processing. When asked to implement tools that may have been less common, such as a text reader or Canvas tools, students seemed much more reluctant.

As mentioned above, in a study conducted by Hattie and Timperley (2007), a review of several previous studies on feedback was conducted to determine if any themes in feedback effectiveness were available. These areas included, "Feedback about the task, feedback about the processing of the task, feedback about self-regulation, and feedback about the self as a person," (Brookhart, 2017, p. 11). This guide aligned to the research

study as it helped to further the dialogue between the instructor and students and provided a research-supported supplement to Brookhart's (2017) criteria in cases where the rubric criteria were met (see Appendix H). They determined that quality feedback falls into four categories. In Table 4.5, the themes mentioned above were also grouped under these four areas of effective feedback.

Table 4.5

Percentage by emergent coded themes of enacted instructor recommendations given on student blog assignments (n = 11)

Feedback Themes	Feedback Offered	Feedback Enacted	Percentage Enacted
Feedback about the task	16	14	87.5%
Feedback about the processing of the task	45	21	46.6%
Feedback about self-regulation	30	18	60%
Feedback about the student as a person	61	55	90.2%
Total	**152**	**108**	

When examining the recommendation enactment numbers in light of the four areas of effective feedback based on the work of Hattie and & Timperley (2007), "Feedback about the person" ranked the highest at 90.2% enactment rate. The lowest number of enactments was "Feedback about the process of the task" at 46.6%.

In addition to the recommendation enactment, an analysis of student comments regarding the overall satisfaction with the course was also conducted. Courses that do not include effective strategies for providing effective instructional feedback have been shown to be less educative than courses that do provide effective instructional feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). Providing targeted, intentional feedback should have increased the dialogue in the course and may have contributed to higher levels of course satisfaction among students.

At the end of Week 7, participants were asked to complete the Week 7 Survey on Weekly Blog Feedback. The intent brief survey was to ascertain participant satisfaction with the feedback they received from the instructor on the blog assignments throughout the course (see Appendix C). Students were asked to rank "How satisfied were you with the instructor feedback on blog assignments throughout the course?" as "Extremely Satisfied," "Somewhat Satisfied," "Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied," "Somewhat Dissatisfied," and "Extremely Dissatisfied." Comments from the Week 7 Survey on Weekly Blog Feedback were also collected and reviewed for any mention of the impact on reported levels of feedback satisfaction and value. This data was used to answer Research Question 1: What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?

Data results from the Department Course Evaluations were also utilized to address student satisfaction with the given feedback. This department-level survey is distributed to all enrolled students of courses within the department in which this course is taught. Scores on the student enjoyment of the course from both pre and post research study were compared to measure any change in student perception regarding course feedback and satisfaction of the course and the course instructor. Students were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement that the instructor provided helpful feedback on their work. This ranking was a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "Strongly Disagree," 2 indicated "Disagree," 3 indicated "Neutral," 4 indicated "Agree," and 5 indicated "Strongly Agree." These results were used to answer Research Question 1: What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate

course? The frequency counts for the Week 7 survey results regarding student satisfaction are listed below in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Week 7 survey on student satisfaction with the feedback results frequency count

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Table 4.6 Continued				
Extremely Satisfied	10	90.9	90.9	90.9
Somewhat Satisfied	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Extremely Dissatisfied	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Totals (n = 11)	11	100.0	100.0	

An analysis was also completed on student comments on the overall satisfaction with the course. The data analysis focused on both the rankings and comments left by study participants. Comments from the Week 7 Survey on Weekly Blog Feedback were collected and reviewed for any mention of instructor presence in the course and its impact on reported levels of course satisfaction and value. The full list of comments can be seen below (see Appendix I). Overall, students reported very high levels of satisfaction with the feedback provided on the blog assignments.

As online courses continue to gain popularity in higher education (Lederman, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a, 2017b), there is a need to ensure instructors are providing quality interactions, including feedback. Students evaluations for my course have indicated the existence of miscommunication between my students and myself. Per the theory of transactional distance, one possible way to address this is to increase dialogue in the course. Research has shown that instructor feedback could be an indicator regarding student satisfaction with a course (Furlich, 2013; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). Based on enactment rates, students enacted recommendations that asked them to apply the material to themselves and their own situation. These high enactment rates

could indicate that students viewed the application of the content to their own situation as addressing a gap of knowledge. In addition, several studies have found feedback that concentrates on what students were thinking and not only on whether their answers were correct leads to more improvement in learning than simple knowledge of results (Mason & Bruning, 2001; Van der Kleij, Feskens, & Eggen, 2015). Enactment rates in this study were highest in areas where the students were asked to apply the content to their personal lives over recommendations that were centered on more concrete right-or-wrong topics.

Course Satisfaction and Motivation

The final theme was student satisfaction with the course and student motivation. A lack of effective strategies for providing learners in online courses with opportunities to experience educative dialogue has been shown to reduce the motivation for online learners to apply feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). Instructor feedback, one form of instructional dialogue, is a critical aspect of online learning. Courses that do not include effective strategies for providing effective instructional feedback have been shown to be less educative than courses that do provide effective instructional feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). When students feel that instructor feedback was not useful or effective, students express higher levels of dissatisfaction with the course and thus lower motivation to apply feedback to subsequent assignments which could negatively affect learning outcomes (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016; Moore, 2013).

Gibbs & Taylor (2016) performed a study that looked at the achievement levels of students that received individualized feedback vs students that were given an answer key to weekly assignments. What was found in this study was that all the students, no matter

whether they received the individualized feedback or not, maintained the same level of academic achievement in the form of letter grades. Where Gibbs & Taylor (2016) did see the difference was on the levels of satisfaction with their perception of the understanding of the content, the interest of the instructor, and overall course satisfaction. The student who received the individualized feedback rated those areas as higher, although not significantly higher, then those students that received only the answers keys (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016).

In the third cycle of this research study, I captured the student perceptions about the feedback they received from me during the course. One evaluation tool that was used was the Department Course Evaluations (DCE), which are department-level surveys that are distributed to all enrolled students of courses within the department in which this course is taught (see Appendix E). This survey measures multiple facets of the course. Two questions were utilized for their application to this action research study. The first question centered on student satisfaction with the feedback. For the Department Course Evaluations (DCE) analysis, descriptive statistics were used to compare scores from the pre research study session of this course to the course session involved during this research study.

The results of this are included in Figure 4.1 below. These were used to answer Research Question 2: What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course? The second question on this survey utilized for this study were centered on student satisfaction with the course. These means are exhibited below in Figure 4.2 to provide a comparison between the sessions.

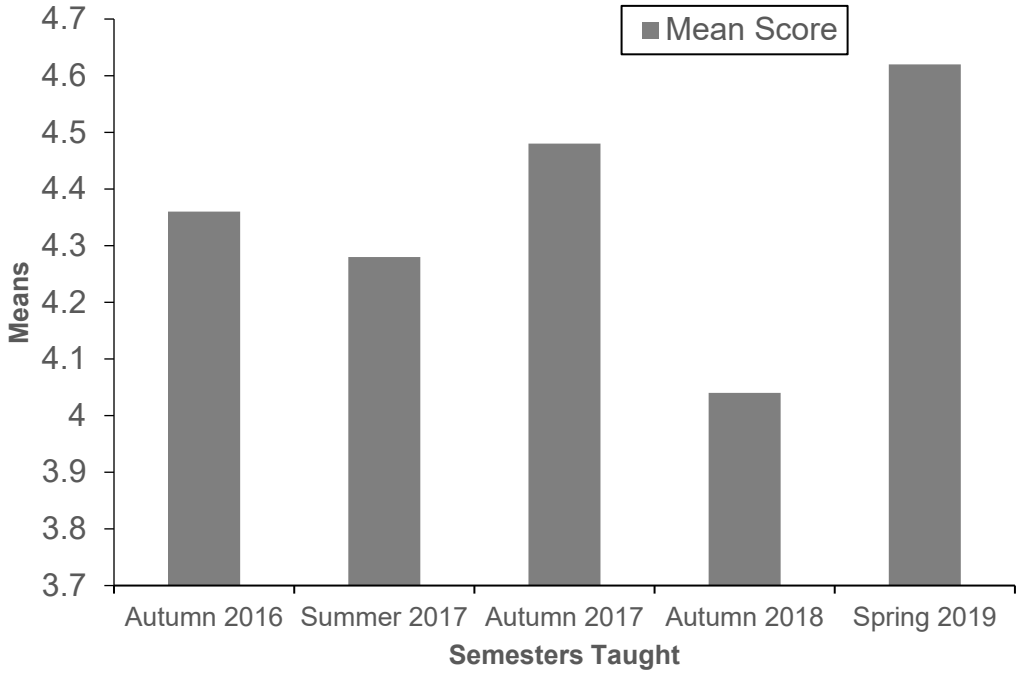

Figure 4.1. Mean scores from department course evaluations for the question: "Provided helpful feedback on my work." Scores were based on a 1-5 scale with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

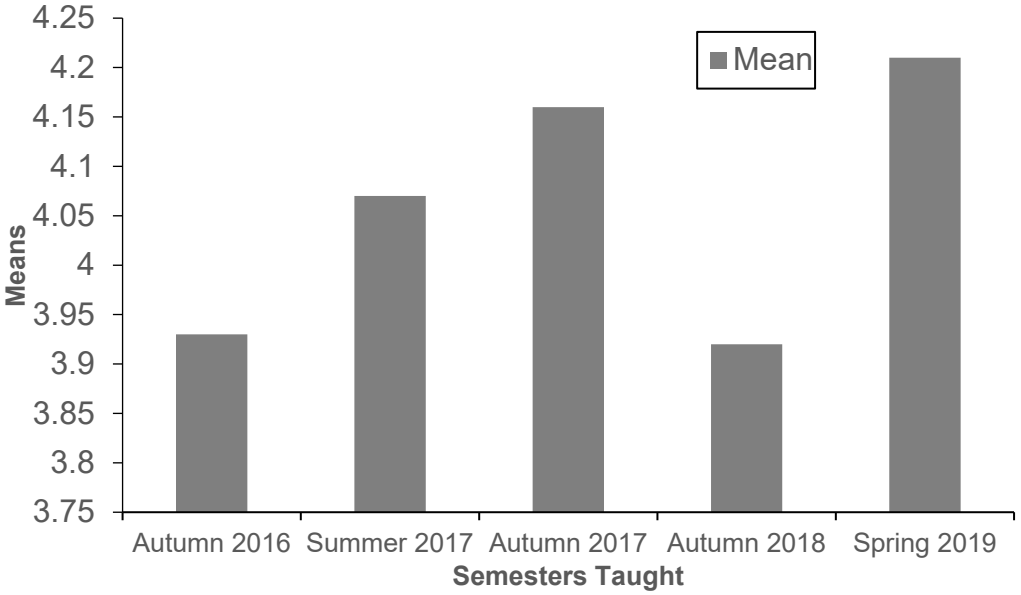

Figure 4.2. Mean scores from department course evaluations for the question: "I enjoyed this course." Scores were based on a 1–5 scale with 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The second question on this survey utilized for this study were centered on student satisfaction with the course. These means are exhibited in Figure 4.2 to provide a comparison between the sessions.

As mentioned above, a lack of effective strategies for providing learners in online courses with opportunities to experience educative dialogue has been shown to reduce the motivation for online learners to apply feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). When students feel that instructor feedback was not useful or effective, students express higher levels of dissatisfaction with the course and thus lower motivation to apply feedback to subsequent assignments which could negatively affect learning outcomes (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016; Moore, 2013). By sustaining effective dialogue and providing instructor feedback that demonstrates the characteristics of effective instructional feedback (Brookhart 2017, Dweck, 2008, Boaler, 2016), this intervention was designed to lessen the communication gap between me as the instructor and my students. Based on research, this increased level of dialogue could also be a factor in higher levels of student motivation in the course.

To assess student motivation, the feedback enactment rates were analyzed. This coding of common themes was utilized to determine what types of feedback regarding topics were most and least likely to be enacted upon by students. The results of this thematic coding by week is included in Tables 4.7. On average 71.7% of the recommendations were enacted by participants. The highest number of recommendations were enacted during Week 1 (92.8%), and the lowest number of recommendations was during Week 3 (54.3%). Week 3 was the first assignment due for the course following the university's spring break, which may have accounted for the low enactment rate. Weeks

4 and 5 saw a progressive swing back up, with Week 5 concluding at a 73.3% enactment rate, very close to the overall average enactment rate for the course (71.7%). tools, students seemed much more reluctant. During Week 3, there appeared to be a dip in enacted recommendations due to two students not submitting their blog assignment for that week. This week was the first assignment following the university's spring break, which may explain the missed assignments.

Table 4.7

Percentage by week of enacted instructor recommendations given on student blog assignments (n= 11)

	Recommendations Given	Recommendations Enacted	Percentage Enacted
Week 3	28	26	92.80%
Week 4	33	24	72.70%
Week 5	35	19	54.30%
Week 6	26	17	65.40%
Week 7	30	22	73.30%

As mentioned previously in M. G. Moore's theory of transactional distance, transactional distance is explained as the cognitive perception that learners have while taking courses at a distance. The introduction of dialogue, particularly between instructor and student, has been shown to strengthen student motivation in a course (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016; Moore, 2013). Over the course of this study, increased dialogue has been implemented to address a miscommunication gap between students and instructor. Based on the results of the post course surveys described in this section, students reported high levels of satisfaction with the course when the preferred feedback method was enacted. Similar to the study conducted by Gibbs & Taylor (2016), while academic achievement was not changed, the difference seen after the intervention was on the levels of

satisfaction with their perception of the understanding of the content, the interest of the instructor, and overall course satisfaction.

The dip in enactment during Week Three aligns with the findings of Milyavskaya et al. (2014). In a study, Milyavskaya et al. (2014) found that as students started off at a high point of positive effects of feedback and as time got closer to breaks in the academic year, the positive effects of feedback where on a downward trajectory. After the break the positive effects of feedback rebounded (Milyavskaya et al., 2014). Leading up to spring break, student enactment rates of the feedback dropped. However, after the break enactment rates returned to the previous frequency and continued to remain high.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, action research dissertation in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016) was to examine the impact of sustained dialogue between instructor and students on the student's motivation to apply the feedback and the student's overall course satisfaction. For this study, the dialogue was facilitated by me, the instructor of the course. The dialogue began by identifying student preferences for the provision of instructor feedback, the provision of effective instructor feedback over the course of five sequential course writing assignments, and a final reflective survey administered after the intervention was completed. By sustaining effective dialogue and providing instructor feedback that demonstrates the characteristics of effective instructional feedback (Brookhart 2017, Dweck, 2008, Boaler, 2016), this intervention was designed to lessen the communication gap between me as the instructor and my students. In previous iterations of the course, the feedback provided in the course was not consistent in frequency or amount provided. By providing consistent, targeted feedback

based on student identified preferences, I believe the communication gap between instructor and student will be lessened.

Based on the results of the Preferred Feedback Profile, students indicated that the Amount ("Providing feedback on several points about the assignment") was their top choice regarding feedback. This aligns with the assumption that students desired an increase in dialogue between themselves and the instructor. It also helps answers Research Question 1: What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course? Student satisfaction and motivation were also examined during this study. The introduction of dialogue, particularly between instructor and student, has been shown to strengthen student motivation in a course (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016; Moore, 2013). When considering Research Question 2— What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course?— students who participated in the study ranked their overall experience of the course as either "Satisfied" or "Extremely Satisfied." In addition, the data shows that students also put the feedback their received into action. This aligns with the belief that by providing consistent, targeted feedback based on student identified preferences, the communication gap between instructor and student will be lessened.

This action research study is a small step into the much larger arena of instructor-student communication. In Chapter 5, we will discuss the overall thought process of what possibly could be done next with the results of this action research study.

Chapter 5

Limitations and Implications

As the field of online education continues to expand (Lederman, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a, 2017b) it is vital that students receive the same quality of education as their peers enrolled in the traditional face-to-face classroom. As an online instructor, it has always been my objective to connect and communicate with my students. However, despite this intention, my students often report feeling a communication gap.

Research shows that instructor communication and dialogue play a significant part in the student experience in online education (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016, Moore, 1973, 2013, Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015). Instructors of online courses who do not have an effective strategy for supporting instructor-student (and student-student) dialogue tend to have students who perceive higher levels of psychological or cognitive distance between themselves and the course (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016, Moore, 1973, 2013). Low levels of instructor-student dialogue have also been shown to reduce the motivation for online learners to apply feedback provided by the instructor (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). When students feel that instructor feedback was not useful or effective, students express higher levels of dissatisfaction with the course and thus lower motivation to apply feedback to subsequent assignments which can negatively affect learning outcomes (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016; Moore, 2013).

The purpose of this qualitative, action research dissertation in practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016) was to examine the impact of sustained dialogue between instructor and students on the student's motivation to apply the feedback and the student's overall course satisfaction. For this study, the dialogue was facilitated by me, the instructor of the course. By sustaining effective dialogue and providing instructor feedback that demonstrates the characteristics of effective instructional feedback (Brookhart 2017, Dweck, 2008, Boaler, 2016), this intervention was designed to lessen the communication gap between me as the instructor and my students enrolled in the Learning Skills 1000 course. The following research questions were developed and guided this study.

1. What do my students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?
2. What is the impact on student motivation and course satisfaction when I attempt to provide sustained, effective, preference-based instructional feedback to students in an online undergraduate course?

These, the dialogue from the theory of transactional distance was viewed through the lens of the feedback that the instructor is giving the students and in return, the enactment of the blog posts based on that feedback. The feedback that the students give the instructor in Week 7 and end of course surveys is also part of that dialogue.

These questions were selected because they helped to focus the study on the impact of providing effective instructional feedback on student motivation and overall course and instructor satisfaction. While there may have been other elements of dialogue

that could have contributed to the problem, it is my professional opinion that these questions capture the most likely causes of the problem of practice.

For this dissertation in practice, I designed and enacted a qualitative, action research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016). This design was informed by Moore's transactional distance theory and the work of Brookhart (2017), Dweck (2008) and Boaler (2016) related to effective instructional feedback. When framing the problem of practice as one in which there is an unintended increase in transactional distance between my students and myself, I decided to design an intervention that fostered sustained dialogue between my students and myself that revolved around providing effective instructional feedback. The recursive nature of the problem of practice, being persistent and impacting multiple stakeholders, made it an important problem to address (Creswell, 2014; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertler, 2016).

Because problems of practice such as this one should be directly addressed by the practitioner, Action Research was selected as the primary methodology chosen for this study (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015; Mertler, 2016). With the cyclical and iterative nature of action research in mind, I designed a three-cyle study that would generate qualitative data related to the intervention. When considered together, each phase of the study not only generated data for the dissertation but also contributed to an increase in the amount of dialogue between my students in the course and myself. During the first cycle, I first ascertained detailed information from my students regarding their preferences for instructor feedback. In the second cycle, using this information, I provided effective instructional feedback for a group of students (who volunteered to be part of the study) over a period of seven weeks that targeted a persistent learning activity

in the course, the writing of a series of blog posts. In the third cycle, upon completion of the intervention, I gave my students an opportunity to reflect on their experience in the course as it related to my provision of instructor feedback by responding to a survey that focused on their perceptions of the course and the instructor feedback they received.

This chapter will provide a summary of the key findings from the study, how the findings relate back to the theoretical framework and literature, and the transferability of this study and its results. The theory of transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013) was the theoretical framework utilized in this study. The results of this research will be examined through these lenses. This chapter will conclude with final considerations and future areas for application and study.

Reflection on Key Findings

The results of this research highlight the value of feedback and how it can help alleviate dialogue gaps between instructor and student. By addressing this need, there is an opportunity for increasing student motivation, outcomes, and overall satisfaction with the course. The theory of transactional distance seeks to lessen the amount of the transactional distance between the learner and the course (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). The three primary elements of this theory include Dialogue, Structure, and Autonomy (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). This research study proposed that student feedback could be one potential way to decrease the transactional distance between student and the course. By decreasing the transactional distance, student satisfaction with the course would increase. While both the Structure and Autonomy elements of the course were kept consistent with previous iterations, the Dialogue element was altered through the addition of the Preferred Feedback Profile. Students were given the opportunity to choose their preferred

way to receive feedback (high dialogue) on blog assignments in the course, thus creating conditions that were favorable to low transactional distance.

Survey results from students who agreed to participate in the study revealed that students ranked Amount ("Providing feedback on several points about the assignment") highest of all the characteristics. Under the Amount subcategory, "Providing feedback on three or more main point(s) about the assignment" was the highest. Per the theory of transactional distance, it could be perceived that this request for additional feedback possibly could be an indication that student want higher dialogue in the course between themselves and the instructor. Transactional distance is the space where miscommunication often occurs. Dialogue, in this case feedback, could be used as one element to assist in closing this gap. On the survey administered at the end of the course asking students to indicate their satisfaction with the course, students reported feeling "Extremely Satisfied" or "Somewhat Satisfied" with the feedback provided to them. Research has shown that instructor feedback could be an indicator regarding student satisfaction with a course (Furlich, 2013; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). While it may not be the only factor impacting the reported high satisfaction rates for students in my course, it seems plausible that it was part of the impact. In addition, no comments regarding students needing more feedback were found in the Student Course Evaluations.

Regarding the theory of transactional distance, M. G. Moore (1973, 2013) noted that giving students increased dialogue lessened the cognitive distance between the student and the distance course, in this case a fully asynchronous online distance course. A lack of effective strategies for providing learners in online courses with opportunities to experience educative dialogue has been shown to reduce the motivation for online

learners to apply feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). Instructor feedback, one form of instructional dialogue, is a critical aspect of online learning. Courses that do not include effective strategies for providing effective instructional feedback have been shown to be less educative than courses that do provide effective instructional feedback (Gillett-Swan, 2017; Kauffman, 2015; Moore, 2013). When students feel that instructor feedback was not useful or effective, students express higher levels of dissatisfaction with the course and thus lower motivation to apply feedback to subsequent assignments which could negatively affect learning outcomes (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016; Moore, 2013). Enactment rates in this study were highest in areas where the students were asked to apply the content to their personal lives over recommendations that were centered on more concrete right-or-wrong topics. The feedback that was enacted was also consistent with the Milyavskaya et al. (2014) study. Students started strong with the feedback and as time got closer to Spring Break, the amount of recommendations declined. After the break, the amount of enacted recommendations was then back on an upswing.

Personal reflection

This research study experience for me has been quiet eye opening, both as an instructor and as a researcher. From the beginning of my experiences with online instruction, I have recognized the importance of connecting with my students in ways that emulate the processes for building rapport with students in traditional, face-to-face courses. To this end, one of my primary goals as an online instructor is to maintain an effective pattern of communication with my students. Given the asynchronous nature of online courses, this communication has taken many forms over the years including

responding to discussion board posts, using various modes of feedback (i.e. text, audio, video with audio), and leaving only positive feedback on their assignments. Despite these efforts, I have come to realize that there is still space for me to improve my communication practices with online students.

The theory of transactional distance notes that this lack of physical transactions can expand the cognitive distance between the learner and the subject matter. By understanding from the beginning of my course that there is a risk of a communication gap between me and my students, I can be better equipped to be proactive in addressing this concern. My role as an instructor is to create the least amount of transactional distance between the learner and the course (M. G. Moore, 2013). By understanding the importance of dialogue and its role is closing the communication loop between instructor and students, as an online educator I can help to create a more meaningful experience for their learners.

Transferability

Merriam & Tisdell (2015) define transferability, or external validity, as "the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (p. 253). Transferability is differentiated from generalizability in that it "involves leaving the extent to which a study's findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 256). While not generalizable, the results of this study have a significant level of transferability to both online courses and to face-to-face sessions.

A key element of quality education is providing feedback (Hattie, 2008, 2015). Due to the lack of face-to-face interactions in distance course, student can sometimes feel

a disconnect with the course and the instructor. The theory of transactional distance notes that this lack of physical transactions can expand the cognitive distance between the learner and the subject matter. The goal is for the instructor to create the least amount of transactional distance between the learner and the course (M. G. Moore, 2013). Moore (2013) notes that one way to address this is through increased dialogue. According to M. G. Moore (2013), Dialogue in the theory of transactional distance is defined as "a particular kind of interpersonal interaction, and it happens after a course is designed, as teachers exchange words and other symbols with learners, aimed at the latter's creation of knowledge" (M. G. Moore, 2013, p. 70). By understanding the importance of dialogue and its role is closing the communication loop between instructor and students, online educators can help to create a more meaningful experience for their learners. While this particular research study was completed in an undergraduate elective course, the role of dialogue can extend to other settings, such as graduate-level courses or classes that are required for a major, with the potential for similar results.

Reflection on Action Research

The purpose of action research is to take the instructor's setting and identify a problem of practice that can be researched to improve the instructor's teaching (Efron & Ravid, 2013). The goals of action research include the generation of new knowledge, the achievement of action-oriented outcomes, opportunities for education for both researcher and participants, the development of results that are relevant to locale, and the use of sound and appropriate research methodologies (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

There are a number of benefits to this type of research. One of the most valuable elements is the relevance it has to the teacher/researcher (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr &

Anderson, 2015). As this type of study deals directly with the instructor's setting, there is a high level of engagement with the topic (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Relevancy is virtually guaranteed as the teacher/researcher is also the beneficiary of the results (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Potentially even more importantly, action research also helps the teacher/researcher become more effective in his or her classroom (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

This study took place in the confines of the teacher/researcher's course. The goal of the study was to examine a current problem of practice that existed in the course (students feel that a communication gap exists between themselves and the instructor) and utilize research-supported interventions to better understand the issue and strategies to address it. The theory of transactional distance was utilized to create the opportunity for students to be active participants in their learning by giving them a choice of characteristics they find most valuable in feedback. This opportunity was favorable to creating low transactional distance (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). This feedback was then implemented by the instructor, creating a sense of high Dialogue that lowered student transactional distance.

This research study was accomplished using a phenomenological qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological approaches to qualitative research look at shared experience, the communication or miscommunication for this study, among a particular group, in the case of this study, the students who have taken the Learning Skills 1000 course with me as an instructor (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The goal of the phenomenological approach is to try to figure out how or why this experience may have happened (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer,

Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). The researcher also tries to bracket their biases throughout the research. For this research this was accomplished first, through the teachers/researcher's positionality mentioned in this dissertation in practice as well at the creation of the Preferred Feedback Profile from the Preferred Feedback Profile Survey (see Appendix A) to make certain that the teacher/researcher is giving the same format for feedback to all students (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019).

Reflecting on the design of this study, certain elements would be altered when replicating the research. One of the primary aspects of the study that would be changed is the implementation of the feedback. There would have been high value in randomizing the feedback profiles throughout the span of the course (Lange, Sauerland, Lauterberg, & Windeler, 2017). In the current study, all students received the same feedback (individualized comments that were a balance of positive feedback and areas for improvement) on all completed blog assignments. This design did not allow room for comparison to other feedback methods. In future iterations of this study, there would benefit to randomize the feedback to help determine if the preferred feedback method is thought to be more beneficial than other types.

Limitations

As with any research study, certain limitations existed in this study. The study was limited to undergraduate online learners; no graduate learners were included when examining the feedback preferences. As Knowles (1980) noted, there is a difference between traditional undergraduate learners and adult learners who are more likely to be enrolled in graduate studies. In addition, the course used for this study was an elective course and not required for degree completion. A final limitation was the length of the

course being studied. While traditional courses run 14–15 weeks, the course used for this study was only run for seven weeks. This accelerated time frame may have impacted what characteristics of feedback the learners valued.

Unanticipated challenges that had an impact on the outcome of the study included situations where students missed a blog assignment. In addition, methodological and data collection decisions, such as not randomizing the feedback, instructor time limitations, and participant selection, may also have had some bearing on outcomes.

As previously mentioned, all participants received the same type of feedback (individualized comments that were a balance of positive feedback and areas for improvement) on all completed blog assignments to create an environment conducive to high Dialogue (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). While valuable, this consistent type of feedback did not allow for a comparison of the effectiveness of the preferred feedback method to others that were not selected by the majority. There was also no way to go back and compare student work from past sections to the work done during this section.

Another limitation worth noting was difficulty in accurately measuring the level of impact student choice had on satisfaction. Research studies have shown that providing students a choice in their learning is a positive component of course design (Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019; M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013), and it is fair to assume this played a role in the results of this study as well. However, this study did not include a specific way to measure this component and its impact on the student satisfaction scores for the course. As this study is replicated, adding a question in the post-course survey regarding feelings around being given the chance to choose the

feedback type would be beneficial in order to measure more accurately the impact of this component of the intervention.

A final limitation was regarding the participant selection process. All students took the initial survey, received the feedback based on that survey, and took the final feedback satisfaction survey. However, not all the students agreed to have their results counted toward the study. Due to the time constraints of getting IRB approval, it was decided to go for the traditional opt-in consent process, which was already covered in the exempt IRB approval, over asking students to opt out of the study if they desired, a process which would have constituted a full IRB review. Studies have shown that having the participants opt *out* of a study yields more participants (approximately 40% more participants) over having participants need to opt *in* to the study (Hunt, Shlomo, & Addington-Hall, 2013).

Despite these limitations, I believe there is merit in pursuing replication and future implementation of the findings from this study. A detailed approach to these implications is discussed in the next section.

Implementation Plan

Given that the purpose of action research is to create knowledge regarding a problem of practice for the researcher/practitioner (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015), future implementation of this study's results are logical factors to consider. Similar to face-to-face classrooms, online students rely on effective instructor feedback to improve their work and achieve the learning objectives of the course (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016, Moore, 1973, 2013). When students perceive the instructor feedback to be of high quality, it can have a direct impact on a student's motivation to apply the

feedback and their overall course satisfaction (Gibbs & Taylor, 2016). The results of my course evaluations from the most recent sections of the course indicated that students continue to feel lower levels of satisfaction with the course and my instruction. These low levels of satisfaction can indicate a miscommunication between my students and myself, and a need to increase the dialogue in the course. Knowing that there has existed a gap between my students and myself and based on the results of this research study and the literature, it seems logical to continue to provide targeted, frequent feedback in courses I teach in the future.

Based on these results of the Preferred Feedback Profile, individualized, text-based feedback was by far the highest ranked among the options provided. Knowing this, it seems logical to continue to provide students primarily with this type of feedback on assignments in future iterations of the course. The research data also indicate that students prefer feedback that relates back to the content of their assignments and were more likely to enact feedback recommendations that related to the student as a person. Following this trend, future feedback on assignments will focus more on the content of the blog assignments rather than on technical improvements.

Given the cyclical nature of action research and the focus on continual evidence-based improvement (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015), slight modifications will be made when implementing the results of this study in future courses. One primary change will be regarding the timing of providing feedback to students. In the original study, attempts were made to provide feedback within 24 hours. While this was based on the Preferred Feedback Profile results, it created an instructor workload that proved difficult to maintain. Moving forward, the goal will be to provide feedback on the student

blog assignments within 72 hours of the assignment due date. Based on the results of the study, this extension should be able to be implemented without significant impact on student satisfaction.

Another aspect of feedback that deserves further consideration is the impact of student choice. Studies have shown that providing students meaningful choices in their learning can increase not only their motivation but also their engagement in the course (Hattie, 2008; Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019). Similarly, in the theory of transactional distance, M. G. Moore (2013) noted that giving students increased student control, or Autonomy, lessened the cognitive distance between the student and the distance course (M. G. Moore, 1973, 2013). However, this choice must be balanced with boundaries and relate back to the course objectives (Evans & Boucher, 2015; McDowell et al., 2019). For example, Evans and Boucher (2015) pointed out that providing students with too much choice can be detrimental and overwhelming and decrease engagement overall. A future study examining the satisfaction levels of students who are given a choice in their feedback mode compared to those who were not offered a choice could provide further insight into the impact of student choice and involvement in regard to feedback satisfaction. This focus would align well with the goals of action research, particularly around developing new knowledge, achieving action-oriented outcomes, and adding to the education of both the researcher/practitioner and the participants (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015).

Conclusion

Overall, this study was able to address the practitioner's problem of practice and align with the goals of action research. One of the primary objectives of action research is

the generation of new knowledge for the researcher, the participants, and other practitioners (Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). As the researcher/practitioner, I recognize that the request for more feedback from students indicated the existence of a miscommunication gap. By understanding this underlying issue of communication, I feel confident in my ability to continue to apply this knowledge to future sessions of both my current course as well as other classes I may teach in the future.

As mentioned previously, Hattie (2015) notes that the quality of the feedback had a more significant impact on learners than the quantity of the feedback. Based on the results from this action research study, student exhibited high levels of motivation to enact the feedback provided and reported high levels of satisfaction with the course. While there are numerous factors that may have impacted this, it is my professional opinion that the increased levels of dialogue played a role. In addition, I also believe that by providing the high dialogue via their identified preferred method (Amount), students may also have perceived that the quality of the feedback was high. This aligns back to Hattie's assertion that the quality of the feedback matters. (Hattie, 2010, 2015; Moore, 1973, 2013).

The results of this study can be translated in future actions in this course. I have worked closely with the course supervisor throughout this process and feel it is important to share my findings with my peers who are also teaching this same course at my university. This will hopefully lead to a change in methods among my colleagues to help ensure a level of high dialogue is consistent among all sections. A student's experience with a course should not vary from that of their peers simply because they have a

different instructor. Having a consistent set of expectations for all the instructors can only help to enhance the students' experiences. I also hope to share the results of this study with my fellow instructional designers. By noting the importance of student-instructor communication and dialogue in the online courses we are building, we can help instructors be more proactive in reducing miscommunication between themselves and their students.

After completing this research study, I also feel more empowered as a practitioner/researcher. This process has instilled in me a renewed appreciation for the theories, frameworks, and models involved in online education and how I can apply those to create a better educational experience for my students as well as add to the body of knowledge in my chosen field of study.

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Appendix A

Week 1 Preferred Feedback Profile Survey

Survey Flow

Standard: Introduction Text (1 Question)
Standard: Verification of Participant (1 Question)
Block: Primary Characteristics Ranking (1 Question)
Standard: Amount (How many points are made, How much about each point) (1 Question)
Standard: Audience (Individual Feedback, Group/Class Feedback) (1 Question)
Standard: Content of the Feedback (Message) (1 Question)
Standard: Mode (Audio, Text, or Video Feedback) (1 Question)
Standard: Timing (How long after the content is over do you want to receive feedback) (1 Question)

Q1
This survey will rank different characteristics of effective student feedback based on Susan M. Brookhart's book *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students, Second Edition* (2017).

The information gathered in this survey will be used to create feedback profiles that will be utilized when the instructor provides feedback for the blog assignments in weeks 2-6. The feedback characteristics will be chosen based upon which options receive the most votes from you and your fellow students.

This survey is broken into three sections.

1. First, please list your lastname.# so you can get credit for participating in this assignment.

2. Next, you will be asked to rank the listed primary characteristics of effective feedback based on what **you** find most valuable.

3. Finally, you will be asked to rank sub-characteristics for all of the primary characteristics of effective feedback based on what **you** find most valuable.

The survey should only take 5-6 minutes to complete. The answers provided will remain confidential as described in the invitation letter.

When you are ready, click the "Next" to begin.

Q2 Please enter your lastname.

Q3 Consider the following primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you value the most? Using a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 = most valuable and 5 = least valuable, rank the following characteristics from most valuable to least valuable.

_____ Amount (Providing feedback on a number of points about the assignment) (1)
_____ Audience (Individual Feedback, Group/Class Feedback) (2)
_____ Message of the Feedback (The balance of positive and negative feedback points) (3)
_____ Mode (Audio, Text, or Video with Audio Feedback) (4)
_____ Timing (How much time passes before you receive feedback) (5)

Q4 Consider the following based on the **Amount** characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

_____ Providing feedback on one main point(s) about the assignment (1)
_____ Providing feedback on two main point(s) about the assignment (2)
_____ Providing feedback on three or more main point(s) about the assignment (3)

Q5 Consider the following based on the **Audience** characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 2 where 1 = Most Preferred and 2 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

_____ Feedback is delivered to me as an individual (1)
_____ Feedback is delivered to the group/class and shares general themes (2)

Q6 Consider the following based on the **Message of the Feedback** characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

_____ Only pointing out positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the assignment (1)
_____ Pointing out an equal number of positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the artifact with an equal number of negative (areas to improve) of the assignment (2)
_____ Only pointing out negative aspects (areas to improve) of the assignment (3)

Q7 Consider the following based on the **Mode** characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

_____ Feedback is given using only audio (1)
_____ Feedback is given using only text (2)
_____ Feedback is given using only video with audio (3)

Q8 Consider the following based on the **Timing** characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 4 where 1 = Most Preferred and 4 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

_____ Feedback on an assignment is given within 1 day after it is due (1)
_____ Feedback on an assignment is given within 3 days after it is due (2)
_____ Feedback on an assignment is given within 7 days after it is due (3)
_____ It does not matter how long passes before I receive feedback (4)

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey and participating in this study.

Your response has been recorded.

The points will be manually added to this week's blog feedback survey assignment by the instructor.

Appendix B

Week 1 Preferred Feedback Profile Survey Results

Q3 Statistics

Consider the following primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you value the most? Using a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 = most valuable and 5 = least valuable, rank the following characteristics from most valuable to least valuable.

Table #B1.

Student value of primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback statistics

Characteristic	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance
Amount (Providing feedback on a number of points about the assignment)	2.09	1.00	1	1.446	2.091
Audience (Individual Feedback, Group/Class Feedback)	3.18	3.00	3[a]	1.401	1.964
Message of the Feedback (The balance of positive and negative feedback points)	2.82	3.00	4	1.168	1.364
Mode (Audio, Text, or Video with Audio Feedback)	4.18	5.00	5	1.250	1.564
Timing (How much time passes before you receive feedback)	2.73	2.00	2	1.191	1.418
Totals (N = 11)					

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Q3 Frequency Tables

Consider the following primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you value the most? Using a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 = most valuable and 5 = least valuable, rank the following characteristics from most valuable to least valuable. - Amount (Providing feedback on a number of points about the assignment)

Table #B2

Amount characteristic frequency

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	6	54.5	54.5	54.5
2	1	9.1	9.1	63.6
3	2	18.2	18.2	81.8
4	1	9.1	9.1	90.9
5	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
Totals (N = 11)	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you value the most? Using a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 = most valuable and 5 = least valuable, rank the following characteristics from most valuable to least valuable. - Audience (Individual Feedback, Group/Class Feedback)

Table #B3

Audience characteristic frequency

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	2	18.2	18.2	18.2
2	1	9.1	9.1	27.3
3	3	27.3	27.3	54.5
4	3	27.3	27.3	81.8
5	2	18.2	18.2	100.0
Totals (N = 11)	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you value the most? Using a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 = most valuable and 5 = least valuable, rank the following characteristics from most valuable to least valuable. - Message of the Feedback (The balance of positive and negative feedback points)

Table #B4

Message characteristic frequency

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	2	18.2	18.2	18.2
2	2	18.2	18.2	36.4
3	3	27.3	27.3	63.6
4	4	36.4	36.4	100.0
5	0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Totals (N = 11)	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you value the most? Using a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 = most valuable and 5 = least valuable, rank the following characteristics from most valuable to least valuable. - Mode (Audio, Text, or Video with Audio Feedback)

Table #B5

Mode characteristic frequency

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2	2	18.2	18.2	18.2
3	1	9.1	9.1	27.3
4	1	9.1	9.1	36.4
5	7	63.6	63.6	100.0
Totals (N = 11)	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following primary characteristics of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you value the most? Using a scale of 1–5 where 1 = most valuable and 5 = least valuable, rank the following characteristics from most valuable to least valuable. - Timing (How much time passes before you receive feedback)

Table #B6

Timing characteristic frequency

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
2	5	45.5	45.5	54.5
3	2	18.2	18.2	72.7
4	2	18.2	18.2	90.9
5	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
Totals (N = 11)	11	100.0	100.0	

Q4 Statistics

Consider the following based on the Amount characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

Table #B7

Amount characteristic statistics

		Providing feedback on one main point(s) about the assignment	Providing feedback on two main point(s) about the assignment	Providing feedback on three or more main point(s) about the assignment
N	Valid	11	11	11
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		2.27	1.64	2.09
Median		2.00	2.00	3.00
Mode		3	2	3
Std. Deviation		.786	.505	1.044
Variance		.618	.255	1.091

Q4 Frequency Tables

Consider the following based on the Amount characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Providing feedback on one main point(s) about the assignment.

Table #B8

Amount characteristic frequency – Providing feedback on one main point(s) about the assignment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	18.2	18.2	18.2
	2	4	36.4	36.4	54.5
	3	5	45.5	45.5	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Amount characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Providing feedback on two main point(s) about the assignment.

Table #B9

Amount characteristic frequency – Providing feedback on two main point(s) about the assignment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	36.4	36.4	36.4
	2	7	63.6	63.6	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Amount characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Providing feedback on three or more main point(s) about the assignment.

Table #B10

Amount characteristic frequency – Providing feedback on three or more main point(s) about the assignment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	5	45.5	45.5	45.5
	3	6	54.5	54.5	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Q5 Statistics

Consider the following based on the Audience characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 2 where 1 = Most Preferred and 2 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

Table #B11

Audience characteristic statistics

		Feedback is delivered to me as an individual	Feedback is delivered to the group/class and shares general themes
N	Valid	11	11
	Missing	0	0
Mean		1.18	1.82
Median		1.00	2.00
Mode		1	2
Std. Deviation		.405	.405
Variance		.164	.164

Q5 Frequency Tables

Consider the following based on the Audience characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 2 where 1 = Most Preferred and 2 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Feedback is delivered to me as an individual.

Table #B12

Audience characteristic frequency – Feedback is delivered to me as an individual

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	9	81.8	81.8	81.8
	2	2	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Audience characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 2 where 1 = Most Preferred and 2 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Feedback is delivered to the group/class and shares general themes.

Table #B13

Audience characteristic frequency – Feedback is delivered to the group/class and shares general themes

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	18.2	18.2	18.2
	2	9	81.8	81.8	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Q6 Statistics

Consider the following based on the Message of the Feedback characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

Table #B14

Message of the Feedback characteristic statistics

		Only pointing out positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the assignment	Pointing out an equal number of positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the artifact with an equal number of negative (areas to improve) of the assignment	Only pointing out negative aspects (areas to improve) of the assignment
N	Valid	11	11	11
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		2.64	1.18	2.18
Median		3.00	1.00	2.00
Mode		3	1	2
Std. Deviation		.674	.603	.405
Variance		.455	.364	.164

Q6 Frequency Tables

Consider the following based on the Message of the Feedback characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Only pointing out positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the assignment

Table #B15

Message of the Feedback characteristic frequency – Only pointing out positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the assignment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	2	18.2	18.2	27.3
	3	8	72.7	72.7	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Message of the Feedback characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Pointing out an equal number of positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the artifact with an equal number of negative (areas to improve) of the assignment

Table #B16

Message of the Feedback characteristic frequency – Pointing out an equal number of positive aspects (what was done correctly) of the artifact with an equal number of negative (areas to improve) of the assignment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	10	90.9	90.9	90.9
	3	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Message of the Feedback characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Only pointing out negative aspects (areas to improve) of the assignment

Table #B17

Message of the Feedback characteristic frequency – Only pointing out negative aspects (areas to improve) of the assignment]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	9	81.8	81.8	81.8
	3	2	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Q7 Statistics

Consider the following based on the Mode characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

Table #B18

Mode characteristic statistics

		Feedback is given using only audio	Feedback is given using only text	Feedback is given using only video with audio
N	Valid	11	11	11
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		2.27	1.27	2.45
Median		2.00	1.00	3.00
Mode		2	1	3
Std. Deviation		.647	.647	.688
Variance		.418	.418	.473

Q7 Frequency Tables

Consider the following based on the Mode characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Feedback is given using only audio.

Table #B19

Mode characteristic frequency – Feedback is given using only audio

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	6	54.5	54.5	63.6
	3	4	36.4	36.4	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Mode characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Feedback is given using only text.

Table #B20

Mode characteristic frequency – Feedback is given using only text

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	9	81.8	81.8	81.8
	2	1	9.1	9.1	90.9
	3	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Mode characteristic of effective instructor feedback. Which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 3 where 1 = Most Preferred and 3 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Feedback is given using only video with audio.

Table #B21

Mode characteristic frequency – Feedback is given using only video with audio

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	9.1	9.1	9.1
	2	4	36.4	36.4	45.5
	3	6	54.5	54.5	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Q8 Statistics

Consider the following based on the Timing characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 4 where 1 = Most Preferred and 4 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred.

Table #B22

Timing characteristic statistics

		Feedback on an assignment is given within 1 day after it is due	Feedback on an assignment is given within 3 days after it is due	Feedback on an assignment is given within 7 days after it is due	It does not matter how long passes before I receive feedback
N	Valid	11	11	11	11
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.27	2.00	2.45	3.27
Median		2.00	2.00	3.00	4.00
Mode		1	2	3	4
Std. Deviation		1.191	.894	.934	1.191
Variance		1.418	.800	.873	1.418

Q8 Frequency Tables

Consider the following based on the Timing characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 4 where 1 = Most Preferred and 4 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Feedback on an assignment is given within 1 day after it is due.

Table #B23

Timing characteristic frequency – Feedback on an assignment is given within 1 day after it is due

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	36.4	36.4	36.4
	2	2	18.2	18.2	54.5
	3	3	27.3	27.3	81.8
	4	2	18.2	18.2	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Timing characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 4 where 1 = Most Preferred and 4 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Feedback on an assignment is given within 3 days after it is due.

Table #B24

Timing characteristic frequency – Feedback on an assignment is given within 3 days after it is due

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	3	27.3	27.3	27.3
	2	6	54.5	54.5	81.8
	3	1	9.1	9.1	90.9
	4	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Timing characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 4 where 1 = Most Preferred and 4 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - Feedback on an assignment is given within 7 days after it is due

Table #B25

Timing characteristic frequency – Feedback on an assignment is given within 7 days after it is due

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	18.2	18.2	18.2
	2	3	27.3	27.3	45.5
	3	5	45.5	45.5	90.9
	4	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Consider the following based on the Timing characteristic of effective instructor feedback, which one of these do you prefer the most? Using a scale of 1 - 4 where 1 = Most Preferred and 4 = Least Preferred, rank the following from most preferred to least preferred. - It does not matter how long passes before I receive feedback

Table #B26

Timing characteristic frequency – It does not matter how long passes before I receive feedback

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	18.2	18.2	18.2
	3	2	18.2	18.2	36.4
	4	7	63.6	63.6	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	

Appendix C

Week 7 Survey on Weekly Blog Feedback

Block: Introduction Text (1 Question)
Standard: Verification of Participant (1 Question)
Block: Multiple Choice question on the satisfaction of blog feedback (1 Question)
Standard: Open Response on the satisfaction of the feedback of the previous week's blog (1 Question)

Q1 Introduction
This survey is going to measure your satisfaction with the feedback that your instructor gave you throughout the course on the **blog assignments**. This survey is broken into three sections.

1. First, please list your lastname.# so you can get credit for participating in this assignment.

2. Next, you are going to be asked to indicate your level of satisfaction with the instructor feedback.

3. Last, you will be asked to provide additional information on why you responded that way.

The survey should only approximately 5 minutes to complete. The answers provided will remain confidential.

When you are ready, click the “Next” to begin.

Q2 Please enter your lastname.#

Q3 How satisfied were you with the instructor feedback on **blog assignments** throughout the course?

- ○ Extremely Satisfied (5)
- ○ Somewhat Satisfied (4)
- ○ Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied (3)
- ○ Somewhat Dissatisfied (2)
- ○ Extremely Dissatisfied (1)

Q4 What, specifically, about the feedback led you to be ${Q3/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} with it? Please provide as much detail as possible to help your instructor understand.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey and participating in this study.

Your response has been recorded.

The points will be manually added to this week's blog feedback survey assignment by the instructor.

Appendix D

Student Instructor Evaluations (SIE, pseudonym) Questionnaire

I ENROLLED IN THIS CLASS BECAUSE...

- It is specifically required in my major/minor.
- It was one of several choices to meet a requirement in my major.
- It fulfills a General Education requirement.
- It was a free elective choice.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable
1. The subject matter of this course was well organized.						
2. This course was intellectually stimulating.						
3. The instructor was genuinely interested in teaching.						
4. The instructor encouraged students to think for themselves.						
5. The instructor was well prepared.						
6. The instructor was genuinely interested in helping students.						
7. I learned a great deal from this instructor.						

8. The instructor created an atmosphere conducive to learning.						
9. The instructor communicated the subject matter clearly.						
	Excellent	Good	Neutral	Fair	Poor	no N/A option for Q10
10. Overall, I would rate this instructor as						

Comments

Appendix E

Study Area (Pseudonym) - Course Evaluation

INSTRUCTIONS Thank you for taking the time to complete this end-of-course evaluation for your LEARNING (Pseudonym) course. This survey is not meant to serve as a replacement for the official university instructor evaluation (the SIE, Pseudonym); we ask that you take the time to complete both forms of course evaluation. You and your opinions regarding this course are very important to the instructors and staff of Study Area (Pseudonym).

This survey is an opportunity for you to reflect on your experience and to tell us what you think about the course and your instructor. Your responses will be **anonymous** and not impact your grade for this course. Taking this survey provides a chance for you to have your say about what we teach and how we teach it. We will also use this information to make improvements for future students. **At the end of the survey, you will receive a *four-digit code*, which you will *enter into Canvas (Pseudonym)*** to receive credit for completing the survey. **If you are taking more than one LEARNING SKILLS (Pseudonym) course this semester, be sure to complete the survey one time for each course.** Your instructor will be provided with an aggregate report of responses at the end of the semester after grades have been submitted. Thank you again. We (the Study Area (Pseudonym) instructors and staff) value your input!

COURSE
To begin, please indicate the course you are evaluating.

Which course are you evaluating?

○ LEARNING SKILLS 1000 (pseudonym): Online Learning Strategies and Skills (1)

FORMAT What is the format of your course?

- ○ An ONLINE section (the class did NOT meet in a physical classroom) (4)

OVERALL

A. Overall Course Evaluation

Please let us know how much you agree with the statements below with respect to the **course as a whole**.

Overall...

	Strongly **Disagree** (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly **Agree** (5)
I enjoyed this course (OVERALL_ENJOY_COURSE)	○	○	○	○	○
I learned a lot in this course (OVERALL_LEARNED_ALOT)	○	○	○	○	○
What I learned in this course will be useful in the future (e.g., other courses and/or my career) (OVERALL_LEARNED_USEFUL)	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend this course to a friend (OVERALL_RECOMMEND)	○	○	○	○	○
This course improved my motivation for learning (OVERALL_IMPRV_MOTIVATION)	○	○	○	○	○
I am more confident in my ability to achieve academic success after taking this course (OVERALL_MORE_CONFIDENT)	○	○	○	○	○
The teaching methods used in this course were effective (OVERALL_EFF_TCH_MTHD)	○	○	○	○	○
The assignments supported my learning in the course (OVERALL_ASSIGNMENTS)	○	○	○	○	○
The instructional materials (e.g., readings, videos) supported my learning in the course (OVERALL_INSTR_MAT)	○	○	○	○	○

WORK Given the number of credit hours, **the amount of work in this course** was:

- ○ Not nearly enough (1)
- ○ A little bit light (2)
- ○ Just right (3)
- ○ A little too heavy (4)
- ○ Way too much work (5)

GRADEREACTION What is your **reaction to the grade** you are about to receive in this course? *(Check any/all that apply.)*

- ☐ The high grade I am about to receive is a fair reflection of my efforts. (1)
- ☐ The low grade I am about to receive is a fair reflection of my efforts. (3)
- ☐ My instructor's course policies were too strict. I deserved a higher grade. (5)
- ☐ My instructor's grading was too harsh. I deserved a higher grade. (12)
- ☐ My instructor's course policies were too lenient. I deserved a lower grade. (10)
- ☐ My instructor's grading was too lenient. I deserved a lower grade. (9)
- ☐ Other (please specify) (8)

_____

CANVAS (Pseudonym)WELL
B. Canvas (Pseudonym)

What about the use of Canvas (Pseudonym) in this course **worked well for you**?

_____

CANVAS (Pseudonym)NOTWELL What about the use of Canvas (Pseudonym) in this course was **unclear** or otherwise **did not work well** for you? What suggestions do you have about Canvas (Pseudonym)?

MATERIALSSUPPORT **C. Instructional Materials**

What aspects of the instructional materials (e.g., assigned books, readings, videos) **supported your learning?**

MATERIALSNOTLIKE What aspects of the instructional materials (e.g., assigned books, readings, videos) did you **<u>not</u> like?** What might improve this situation?

_____

_____

_____

ASSIGNVALUEABLE
D. Assignments

Which assignments, or types of assignments, did you find **most valuable**? Why? *(Please be specific.)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

ASSIGNNOTVALUABLE Which assignments, or types of assignments, did you **not find valuable**? Why? *(Please be specific.)*

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

INSTRUCTORRATING
E. Quality of Instructor and Instruction

Please answer the following questions about **your instructor's teaching style.**

My instructor...

	Strongly **Disagree** (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly **Agree** (5)
Used effective examples to illustrate points (INSTRUCTORRATING_WELL_ORG)	○	○	○	○	○
Promoted an atmosphere conducive to work and learning (INSTRUCTORRATING_KNOWLEDGEABLE)	○	○	○	○	○
Facilitated meaningful class activities and discussions (INSTRUCTORRATING_COMM_CLR)	○	○	○	○	○
Cared about how much I learned (INSTRUCTORRATING_EFF_EX)	○	○	○	○	○
Helped me when I didn't understand (INSTRUCTORRATING_FAC_CLASS_DISC)	○	○	○	○	○
Noticed when I was good at something (INSTRUCTORRATING_ATMOS_LRN)	○	○	○	○	○
Understood me and what I needed to succeed (INSTRUCTORRATING_FAIR_GRADING)	○	○	○	○	○
Was there for me if I had a problem or concern (INSTRUCTORRATING_FRIENDLY_APPROACHABLE)	○	○	○	○	○
Was easy to talk to (INSTRUCTORRATING_VAL_MBR_CLASS)	○	○	○	○	○

Made me feel valuable and supported (INSTRUCTORRATING_HELPFUL_FEEDBACK)	○	○	○	○	○
Was always willing to help me (INSTRUCTORRATING_ENTHUS_TCH)	○	○	○	○	○
Provided helpful feedback on my work (INSTRUCTORRATING_MOT_SUCCEED_HIGHERED)	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, I would rate my instructor as excellent (INSTRUCTORRATING_EXC_TCH)	○	○	○	○	○

INSTRUCTORSTRENGTHS What were your instructor's **strengths**?/What did your instructor do particularly **well**?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

INSTRUCTORADVICE What specific **advice** would give to your instructor to **enhance his or her teaching** in the future?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPRECIATE What **did you appreciate most**
about your ${COURSE/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} experience?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

RECOMMENDATIONS What **recommendations** would you give your instructor to improve your ${COURSE/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices} experience?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

TOPICHEADER **F. Course Topics**

TOPICS_TOOMUCH_TIME Were there any topics the course spent **too much** time on? Which ones?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

TOPICS_MORETIME Were there any topics you wish the course spent **more time** on? Which ones?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Display This Question:

If To begin, please indicate the course you are evaluating. Which course are you evaluating? = LEARNING SKILLS 1000 (pseudonym): Online Learning Strategies and Skills

LEARNING SKILLS 1000 (pseudonym) TOPICS Please indicate how **helpful** it was for you to learn about the following LEARNING SKILLS 1000 (pseudonym) course topics.

	Not at All Helpful (1)	Just A Little Helpful (6)	Moderately Helpful (3)	Very Helpful (5)	One of the Most Helpful Topics Thus Far in College (4)
Online calendars (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_ONL_CAL)	○	○	○	○	○
Online task lists (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_ONL_TASKS)	○	○	○	○	○
Goal setting strategies (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_GOAL_STRAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Time management strategies (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_TIME_MGMT_STRAT)	○	○	○	○	○
Writing blogs (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_BLOG_WRITING)	○	○	○	○	○
Reading blogs (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_BLOG_READING)	○	○	○	○	○
Using proper netiquette (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_PROPER_NETIQ)	○	○	○	○	○
Web-based study tools (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_WEB_STUDY_TOOLS)	○	○	○	○	○
Online instructional videos (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_ONL_INSTR_VID)	○	○	○	○	○

Active reading strategies (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_ACTIVE_READING)	○	○	○	○	○
Active listening and note taking strategies (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_ACTIVE_LISTENING)	○	○	○	○	○
Online search strategies (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_ONL_SRCH)	○	○	○	○	○
Online citation generators or management tools (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_ONL_CITATION)	○	○	○	○	○
Source credibility (determining the value of an online resource) (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_SRC_CREDIBILITY)	○	○	○	○	○
Assessing yourself as a learner (1000 (Pseudonym)TOPICS_ASSESS_LRNER)	○	○	○	○	○

CHANGELEARN **G. Closing Thoughts**

How has this class changed the ways you learn/study?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CHANGEATTIT How has this class changed your attitude toward college?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

FINALCOMMENTS If you have any final comments you'd like to share, please add them below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

FINALINSTRUCTIONS Click the Next >> button at the bottom of the page to submit your responses. **Please wait for your response to be recorded; you will then be shown a four-digit code, which you will enter into Canvas (Pseudonym)** to receive credit for completing the survey.

Remember to take the survey once for each LEARNING SKILLS (Pseudonym) course you may be enrolled in. Thank you again for your participation. We hope you found the course rewarding and appreciate the time you spent sharing your feedback.

Appendix F

E-mail/Canvas Announcement to Participate in Study

Hello Students,

My name is Timothy Lombardo. In addition to my role as an instructional designer and instructor at this midwestern university (pseudonym), I am a graduate student in the Curriculum Studies Department at the Southern university (pseudonym). I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D.: Curriculum Studies Concentration, and I would like to invite you to participate. This study will take place in Learning Skills 1000 (pseudonym), where I am an instructor, using the teacher-as-researcher model.

The objective of this study is to examine what elements of feedback college undergraduate students find valuable in online courses. Participants are eligible to earn 2 points of extra credit in the course.

The alternative to study participation is to complete the course without allowing materials to be used for research purposes.

You also have an alternative opportunity to receive extra credit for completing the "EXTRA CREDIT: Video Reflection" available in Week 7 which is not connected to this study.

The identities of participants will not be known until extra credit is awarded as final grades are being posted.

The study will address two specific research questions:

> **Research Question 1:** What do students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course?
>
> **Research Question 2:** What is the impact on student performance when the instructor takes an aggregate of student preferences of feedback and uses that to guide the feedback given to students?

Next steps: If you would like to learn more or think you might want to participate, please read and complete the Spring 2019 LEARNING SKILLS 1000 (PSEUDONYM) Research Study Invitation Letter and Consent Form, located at: [LINK]

With kind regards,

Researcher/Teacher (pseudonym)

555-555-5555 (pseudonym)

Abc123@emailaddress (pseudonym)

Appendix G

Research Study Invitation Letter and Consent Form

Block: Research Study Invitation Letter and Consent Form Text and Consent Question (2 Questions)

Branch: New Branch
If
If Please indicate your agreement to participate in the research study and/or self-identify your age No, I do not agree to participate in the research study, or I am under 18 years of age Is Selected

EndSurvey: Advanced

Branch: New Branch
If
If Please indicate your agreement to participate in the research study and/or self-identify your age Yes, I agree to participate in the research study and am 18 years of age or older Is Selected

EndSurvey: Advanced

Q1
Dear student,

My name is Timothy Lombardo. I am a graduate student in the Curriculum Studies Department at the Southern university (pseudonym). I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, Ed.D.: Curriculum Studies Concentration, and I would like to invite you to participate. This study will take place in Learning Skills 1000 (pseudonym), where I am an instructor, using the teacher-as-researcher model.

This is a consent form for research participation.
It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.
The alternative to study participation is to complete the course without allowing materials to be used for research purposes.

You also have an alternative opportunity to receive extra credit for completing the "EXTRA CREDIT: Video Reflection" available in Week 7 which is not connected to this study.

The identities of participants will not be known until extra credit is awarded as final grades are being posted.

Your participation is voluntary
Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

Purpose

This study will examine: What do students consider to be effective feedback in an online undergraduate course, and what is the impact on student performance when the instructor takes an aggregate of student preferences of feedback and uses that to guide the feedback given to students?

Procedures/Tasks

This study will focus on several assignments in Learning Skills 1000 (pseudonym): a survey about feedback preferences, your blog posts, and a survey about your satisfaction with the feedback you received. All students in the course will complete these assignments as part of regular course activities; however, students are not required to participate in the study. Participation in the study means that you agree to allow your de-identified survey responses, blog posts, and feedback you receive on blog posts to be combined and analyzed for research purposes. The only additional activity required by the research is to complete the consent form. The identities of participants will not be known until extra credit is awarded as final grades are being posted.

Confidentiality

Participation is confidential. Specifically, students' answers to the feedback surveys and the content of their blog posts will be de-identified prior to analysis, with name.# being collected only initially in order to provide credit and keep students' survey responses, feedback, and blog posts together as a set. All survey results will be stored in the secure, password-protected Qualtrics survey platform purchased through the Southern university (pseudonym). Once the data sources are combined, the teacher/researcher will assign each student a three-digit code in lieu of their name.# and remove all identifying information prior to analysis. The three-digit codes and their reference to name.# will be created and stored in a Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet maintained in a separate folder location in The Midwestern university's (pseudonym) Mid-WestBox (pseudonym), which secures data with dual authentication and is approved for the storage of data related to educational records. The folder that contains that spreadsheet will only be accessible to the teacher/researcher and the P.I. Identifying marks on all the survey data,

the blog posts, and blog post feedback will be redacted and stored on the teacher/researcher's password-protected, encrypted laptop. The overall results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but student identity will not be revealed. Study information and materials will be stored for 60 months after completion of the study. For students that do consent, the identities of participants will not be known until extra credit is awarded as final grades are being posted

The research team will work to make sure that no one sees your online responses without approval. But, because we are using the Internet, there is a chance that someone could access your online responses without permission. In some cases, this information could be used to identify you.

Also, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- *Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;*
- *The Mid*western university *(pseudonym) Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;*
- *The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study*

Incentives

You will receive extra credit for participating in the study:

- Consent form: 2 extra credit points

The alternative to study participation is to complete the course without allowing materials to be used for research purposes.

The identities of participants will not be known until extra credit is awarded as final grades are being posted.

Future Research

Your de-identified information may be used or shared with other researchers without your additional informed consent.

Duration

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Midwestern university (pseudonym).

To withdraw from the study, please contact the teacher/researcher at Abc123@emailaddress (pseudonym).

Participation, non-participation or withdrawal will not affect your grades in any way. If you begin the study and later decide to withdraw, you will still receive research credit up to point of withdrawing from the study.

Risks and Benefits

The focus of this research is to improve the teacher's/researcher's instruction in online courses. As such a benefit is to serve the students with better feedback. The risks are minimal as the intent of the study is to improve the educational experience for students.

Participant Rights

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at the Midwestern university (pseudonym), your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By agreeing to participate, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

This study has been determined exempt from IRB review.

Contacts and Questions

We will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact the teacher/researcher at 555-555-5555 (pseudonym) or Abc123@emailaddress (pseudonym)my faculty advisor, Cory Hawkins (pseudonym) Ph.D., 555-555-5555 (pseudonym), Abc123@emailaddress (pseudonym), or the Primary Investigator, Sabrina Thompson (pseudonym), Ph.D., 555-555-5555 (pseudonym), Abc123@emailaddress (pseudonym). You can also reach the Southern university's (pseudonym) Office of Research Compliance 555-555-5555 (pseudonym) if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, or you feel you have been harmed as a result of study participation, you may contact the teacher/researcher at 555-555-5555 (pseudonym) or Abc123@emailaddress (pseudonym).

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 555-555-5555 (pseudonym) or Abc123@emailaddress (pseudonym).

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please indicate so at the bottom of this content form. When you are done, please complete the feedback preferences survey.

With kind regards,

Researcher/Teacher (pseudonym)

555-555-5555 (pseudonym)

Abc123@emailaddress (pseudonym)

Q2 Please indicate your agreement to participate in the research study and/or self-identify your age

- ○ Yes, I agree to participate in the research study and am 18 years of age or older (1)
- ○ No, I do not agree to participate in the research study, or I am under 18 years of age (2)

If Please indicate your agreement to participate in the research study and/or self-identify your age **No, I do not agree to participate in the research study, or I am under 18 years of age** Is Selected

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

If Please indicate your agreement to participate in the research study and/or self-identify your age **Yes, I agree to participate in the research study and am 18 years of age or older** Is Selected

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey and participating in this study.

Your response has been recorded.

The points will be manually added to this week's research study extra credit assignment by the instructor.

Appendix H

Study Area (Pseudonym) – Sample Blog Rubric

MODULE 02 ASSIGNMENT: Communicating and Collaborating Blog Post (5 points)				
Criteria	**Ratings**			**Pts**
Blog URL	**1.0 pts** **Meets Expectations** U.OSU.EDU blog site URL included and linked in assignment	**0.5 pts** **Somewhat Meets Expectations** U.OSU.EDU blog site URL included but not linked in assignment	**0.0 pts** **Does Not Meet Expectations or Did Not Submit** U.OSU.EDU blog site URL not included in assignment, or student did not submit assignment	1.0 pts
Reflection	**3.0 pts** **Meets Expectations** Answers one or more of the required questions; specific page number or quote from readings, resource, or video in this week's lesson is referenced; post is 200+ words	**1.5 pts** **Somewhat Meets Expectations** Answers one or more of the required questions; specific page number or quote from readings, resource, or video in this week's lesson may not be	**0.0 pts** **Does Not Meet Expectations or Did Not Submit** Answers one or less of the required questions; specific page number or quote from readings, resource, or video in this week's lesson	3.0 pts

MODULE 02 ASSIGNMENT: Communicating and Collaborating Blog Post (5 points)				
Criteria	**Ratings**			**Pts**
	or 3-5 minute video/vlog or audio/podcast; module number is references in post	referenced; post is 100+ words or 2-3 minute video/vlog or audio/podcast; module number is references in post	not referenced; post is less than 100 words or 2-3 minute video/vlog or audio/podcast; module number is not referenced in post	
Reader-friendly/Grammar and syntax	**1.0 pts** **Meets Expectations** Professionally written reflection with no more than one grammar or spelling error; engaging style; audio/video is easily viewed and understood	**0.5 pts** **Somewhat Meets Expectations** Reflection contains more than one grammar or spelling error which makes reading difficult; style somewhat engaging; audio/video can be viewed but may not be completely clear	**0.0 pts** **Does Not Meet Expectations or Did Not Submit** Reflection contains many grammar or spelling errors making reading comprehension nearly impossible; style is not engaging; audio/video is difficult to view and and understand	1.0 pts

MODULE 02 ASSIGNMENT: Communicating and Collaborating Blog Post (5 points)				
Criteria	**Ratings**			**Pts**
MO2.4: Write a blog post reflecting on use of technology tools to develop positive online relationships around academic projects view longer description threshold: 3.0 pts	**5.0 pts** **Exceeds Expectations**	**3.0 pts** **Meets Expectations**	**0.0 pts** **Does Not Meet Expectations**	--
Total Points: 5.0				

Appendix I

Week 7 Survey on Student Satisfaction with the Feedback

Q3 - How satisfied were you with the instructor feedback on blog assignments throughout the course?

Table #J1

Week 7 survey on student satisfaction with the feedback participant satisfaction statistics

	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance
Participant Satisfaction Totals (N = 11)	4.91	5.00	5	.302	.091

Table #J2

Week 7 survey on student satisfaction with the feedback participant satisfaction frequency count

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Extremely Satisfied	10	90.9	90.9	90.9
Somewhat Satisfied	1	9.1	9.1	100.0
Neither Satisfied Nor Dissatisfied	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Extremely Dissatisfied	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Totals (N = 11)	11	100.0	100.0	

Q4 - What, specifically, about the feedback led you to be [QID7-ChoiceGroup-SelectedChoices] with it? Please provide as much detail as possible to help your instructor understand.

Table #J3

Week 7 survey on student satisfaction student responses to question 4

Student Responses
What, specifically, about the feedback led you to be [QID7-ChoiceGroup-SelectedChoices] with it? Please provide as much detail as possible to help your instructor understand.
How to do well on time management and the leading us to get accessed to the variety resources.
Feedback was given for every assignment. Not only that but the instructor also gave explanations of what was done right but what was also done wrong.
I got good informative feedback every week and it helped my writing.
was balanced with encouragement and helpful criticism
Feedback specifically indicated what I could do to improve for the next blog post most of the time.
Only slightly dissatisfied with feedback when I was told I had grammatical errors, yet not specifically told what. Although I emailed Professor Lombardo and he clarified what errors I had, since Microsoft Word wasn't picking them up.
I was extremely satisfied with the way that our professor would give us constructive feedback in a way that it seemed very thoughtful as well as helpful. He was very specific in the feedback he gave, no generalizations, so you didn't have to question what you could change on the next post
Feedback in and of itself! I rarely got individualize feedback as a student unless I specifically asked for it
I feel like the instructor actually took time to read our blog post and give thorough feedback. The feedback contained suggestions for multiple parts of the post and gave specific details for what to improve for the next one. The feedback was also lengthy which indicated the instructor took time to write these comments each week.
What I loved the most was the positive feedback. It made me excited to see he appreciated my writing style and personal reflections throughout my post. He gave good advice and things to work on and the way he said it was very helpful and made me realize things I need to improve on. He commented on every aspect of posts and made sure to tell us to keep up the good work. He also would give helpful tips such as start working on assignments earlier, and to use other useful tools to help with grammar.
The specifics as well as the resources to help with any criticism.
For the most part I got a lot of really good feedback on each of my blogs. However, I was getting comments about using Word to help with grammar and spelling issues. I used this for the next blog and still got the same feedback so I wasn't sure what else I needed to change. Word said that grammar and spelling was checked and fine, but I still was getting comments that I should use Word to work on those things. A little confused.
I appreciated that the instructor gave feedback in a very timely manner. Also, I like constructive criticism, so hearing ways in which he believed I could improve my blog posts or involvement in class was nice to see. It also showed that he took the time to read over what I had posted and gave distinct thoughts on my posts as to opposed going through a checklist and moving on.

Appendix J

Extra Credit for Video Reflection

Extra Credit: Video Reflection

Context

Read the information below to learn how to gain extra credit for posting a video reflection about your overall experience in the course.

Instructions

- **Choose 3 of the following questions to respond to in your video reflection:**
  - How would you describe your knowledge and skills at the beginning of the course vs. at the end of the course?
  - What are the most important, useful, or interesting things you learned in this course?
  - What have you learned about yourself by taking this course?
  - What was your most meaningful experience in the course? Why?
  - How will you apply what you learned in this class in the future?
  - What was the experience of reflecting in video format (as opposed to typing) like for you?
- **Record your response in a 2-3 minute video reflection. To do so, click "reply" and using the built-in "record media/upload media" tool**.
  - *To create your post, scroll down and click the word "Reply."*
  - *Then, click the icon the looks like a rounded rectangle with a triangle in it ( )*  *to record or upload your video reflection. (For tech help: See "How to Participate" below.)*
  - *Click "Post Reply."*
  -

Tech Tips: How to Participate

- How do I reply to a Discussion as a student?
  - https://guides.instructure.com/m/8470/l/190706-how-do-i-reply-to-a-discussion-as-a-student

- How do I record a video using the Rich Content Editor?
  - https://guides.instructure.com/m/4152/l/41509-how-do-i-record-a-video-using-the-rich-content-editor

Adobe Flash

- If you are having Adobe Flash compatibility concerns, use the Google Chrome Browser:
  - Download Chrome: https://www.google.com/chrome/browser/desktop/ (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.
  - Enable Flash: (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.
    - **Note**: These settings may not save when you close Google Chrome and may need to be repeated each time you use the Record/Upload Media tool in Canvas.

Response Expectations

Criteria	**Points**
Thoughtful response to 3 questions	1
Video and audio are easy to comprehend	1