When Communities of Practice Fail to Form: Instructor Perceptions of Peer Support Networks and Developing Competence in Hybrid Course Design

Brian Fitzpatrick, Lourdes Fernandez, Ariel M. Goldenthal, Jessica Matthews, Brandon Biller, and Courtney Adams Wooten

The authors argue that attention to new instructional modes allows writing programs to more intentionally trace how faculty remain at the periphery or engage with their professional communities. Through interviews with faculty who have a range of experience teaching hybrid writing courses, the authors study how these faculty engage in hybrid course design by relying on prior knowledge, competence gained in other communities, and access to limited networks of peers. Findings show how the lack of informal networks to help solve labor-intensive course development problems has implications for WPAs' understanding of how hybrid and online learning environments shape faculty membership in their professional communities as they acquire competence and experience. Using Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's theory of communities of practice, the authors argue that writing faculty who are moving into new instructional modes such as hybrid courses can be best served by writing programs that actively support the development of informal communities of practice in addition to robust programmatic resources.

Introduction

The pressure on writing programs to offer classes in a variety of instructional modes has only increased since COVID-19 forced many institutions and classes online. Whereas before institutions may have taught in two or three different modes at most, there are now many instructional modes offered by writing programs. Our Composition Program, which serves almost nine thousand students a year at a large research institution in the mid-Atlantic, previously offered three modes of instruction: fully face-to-face, fully asynchronous online, and hybrid with one face-to-face meeting per week and the remaining instruction occurring asynchronously online. Now, in addition, we offer synchronous online courses and an online hybrid course with instruction delivered synchronously and asynchronously. These reflect some of the changes happening in other writing programs, which have asked faculty to adapt to teaching in a variety of instructional modes including these and others (such as the hyflex model popular at many institutions).

Understanding how faculty adapt to these instructional modes is an important part of identifying how writing programs can better support faculty. In Fall 2019, our program convened a Hybrid Task Force comprised of seven faculty in our program (six NTT full-time faculty and one PhD TA) to create teaching resources and establish better support for faculty teaching hybrid courses. While the faculty on this task force had scarce resources to consult that specifically examine hybrid courses (Caulfield; Garrison and Vaughan; Paull and Snart), they were able to examine work focused on the institutional considerations influencing hybrid writing course development (Snart). The CCCC Position Statement on Online Writing Instruction (2013) also includes principles that were useful to consider in relation to hybrid courses, even if they do not specifically address hybrid writing instruction. In reviewing this scholarship, the task force decided that a study of faculty perceptions of hybrid courses would help us understand faculty concerns and generate programmatic resources that address gaps in the field's scholarship about hybrid writing instruction. In Spring 2020, we developed a plan for surveying and interviewing faculty with experience teaching hybrid courses. However, as the pandemic developed and our institution moved fully online, our study became more urgent, so we decided to use the interview data to develop (1) problem-solving strategies faculty could use to design and solve issues in hybrid courses, (2) additional teaching resources, and (3) recommendations for future professional development initiatives. The task force achieved these goals but, in doing so, discovered a surprising lack of informal faculty networks that could provide peer support.

In interviews completed in Spring 2020, we found that our faculty were not as connected to our program's already-existing resources as we had previously thought, leading us to question the types of support faculty in writing programs need to adapt to different instructional modes, particularly hybrid teaching that has been less researched. Faculty described relying primarily on one administrator, while wanting access to informal peer support networks. Some faculty did mention small, yet strong peer networks, but these networks had formed prior to faculty joining the program. Many described going through labor-intensive problem-solving by themselves and often felt as if they were "flying blind"[1] when designing hybrid courses.

Our faculty come from a diverse variety of backgrounds, often with their own distinct practices, yet faculty in our program are often assigned hybrid courses based on institutional need rather than preference; the program offers relatively few hybrid courses, hiring often happens close to the beginning of the semester, and onboarding practices can be rushed. The task force was already addressing some of these issues, which are made more

salient by the large size of the program, the geographical dispersion of faculty, and by labor conditions that make contingent faculty work less secure and often temporary. During the study, we realized the problem was part of a larger issue of faculty having limited access to informal networks and professional development opportunities that could help them solve day-to-day, seemingly small but labor-intensive issues in their hybrid courses.

In this article, we describe how faculty with a range of experiences engage in hybrid course design by relying on competence gained in other communities, access to a limited network of peers, and prior knowledge. We show how the lack of informal networks and opportunities for solving labor-intensive problems has implications for WPAs' understanding of how hybrid learning environments shape faculty membership in professional communities. We argue that paying attention to new instructional modes allows writing programs to more intentionally trace how faculty remain at the periphery or engage with their professional communities. Using Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's theory of "communities of practice" we show that writing faculty transitioning into new instructional modes such as hybrid courses can be best served by writing programs that recognize the need for and actively support the development of informal peer communities of practice in addition to robust programmatic resources.

Expertise and Labor Conditions in Writing Program Communities of Practice

As hybrid and online teaching have become more common at many institutions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as faculty support systems including professional development funding have declined due to budget constraints, writing programs have struggled to adequately support faculty rapidly transitioning to different instructional modes. The tension between additional demands on faculty and fewer resources to support them is exacerbated in writing programs that often include high numbers of contingent faculty who have historically been underpaid and overworked (working conditions that have been called out by organizations such as CWPA, NCTE, CCCC, MLA, and the Association of Departments of English as well as scholars in the field, notably Seth Kahn, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Biniek; Randall McClure, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton; Eileen Schell and Patricia L. Stock; and Nancy Welch and Tony Scott).

Despite such constraints, many WPAs have tried to establish and sustain supportive communities among their faculty before and after the pandemic, identifying this sense of community as an important part of faculty

gaining confidence, expertise, and a sense of belonging (Devitt, Jones, and Rife; Penrose; Rutz and Wilhoit; Willard-Traub). One generative way to theorize writing program communities is through the lens of Lave and Wenger's communities of practice, first presented in their 1991 book *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. This theory argues that a community of practice forms when a group of people who are practitioners in an area (e.g., teachers, midwives, tailors) individually and collectively participate in activities and produce resources through a "history of learning" to work toward a common goal, which becomes a community of practice (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 180). Others can come to this community of practice as "newcomers" and perform less vital tasks as they observe "oldtimers" in their work, eventually becoming competent in this work themselves and identifying with the goals of the community (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 182). This theory has been taken up by writing studies and technical communication scholars exploring the informal social networks that support community formation and continuation (Donahue; Droz and Jacobs; Haneda; Kinney, Snyder-Yuly, and Martinez; Kline and Alex-Brown; Kline and Barker; McGrath and Guglielmo; Wittenbrink and Pauschenwein).

Two particularly useful extensions of communities of practice in relation to our study of faculty adjustments to hybrid writing instruction are Christie Toth and Patrick Sullivan's discussion about communities of practice in two-year institutions in their article "Toward Local Teacher-Scholar Communities of Practice: Findings from a National TYCA Survey" and Mary K. Stewart, Jenae Cohn, and Carl Whithaus's work on communities of practice in relation to hybrid composition courses in the article "Collaborative Course Design and Communities of Practice: Strategies for Adaptable Course Shells in Hybrid and Online Writing." These articles demonstrate how WPAs can use communities of practice to analyze the work they and their faculty are doing in their programs and what they can do to support this work. As our own study results show, WPAs may also have misconceptions about how strongly communities of practice have formed in their own programs, misconceptions that need to be addressed.

Toth and Sullivan's article presents findings from a survey of TYCA members "about how faculty find and use published scholarship" (247). They argue that although many survey respondents were actively engaging with scholarship both as readers and as researchers, they often did so as "a largely solitary, individual pursuit, rather than a collaborative activity undertaken with departmental colleagues" (248). Despite not teaching at two-year institutions where labor conditions are typically even more austere than in our context, NTT faculty in our program face some of

the barriers Toth and Sullivan mention (adjunct faculty are typically not assigned hybrid courses), including: time constraints, wide-ranging professional preparation, and little incentive for scholarly activity. Elizabeth Wardle notes that "newcomers to a community normally experience a 'grace period' for adopting community practices" ("Identity"). Newly-hired writing instructors, however, are brought in essentially as experts who are seen as already understanding writing pedagogy. There is neither sustained master-apprentice shadowing before a writing instructor steps into the classroom, nor any participation in a process of moving from being a newcomer to an expert in a particular community, which Lave and Wenger call "legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave and Wenger 29). It is expected that those candidates who fit the job requirements and have the requisite credentials and experience come in ready to perform the expected core task of teaching writing.

These challenges affect how engaged our program's faculty are with each other and the program overall. While our institution has promotion pathways for full-time NTT faculty that offer some stability, contingent faculty employment is temporary by design and contingent faculty experience a different employment context from the typical new hire in other workplaces. As the weight of teaching these hybrid courses falls largely on the shoulders of our NTT faculty, there is a real challenge to long-term sustainability of these courses and in forming communities of practice, due to both the increased labor of hybrid instruction, as well as the temporary nature of contingent employment. Even when these challenges to sustainability are recognized, NTT faculty typically lack the agency to make the necessary structural changes; if more hybrid courses are needed to be taught by NTT, they will be assigned, regardless of perceived long-term sustainability.

Labor conditions affect how faculty interact with one another in a writing program. Contingent faculty may feel pressure to display an outward identity of "expert" and, therefore, may be reluctant to display any lack of knowledge or competence about teaching in a hybrid instructional mode, even if it is new to them. In their article, Stewart, Cohn, and Whithaus argue that involving faculty in the development of adaptable hybrid and online course shells is one way to try to create communities of practice among faculty teaching these courses. They claim that this strategy helps faculty "to progressively develop their own identities as online writing instructors" by "allowing instructors to share their ideas and strategies for modifying course shell material so that course materials do not feel statically standardized, but instead, are truly adaptable" (4). However, seventeen out of the twenty faculty they worked with were graduate students who they mention had already formed a different type of community with each

other. These participants were also able to engage voluntarily in activities such as biweekly meetings about teaching, mentoring programs, and collaborative teaching journals in ways that contingent faculty in other writing programs such as ours may not be able to because of labor constraints and a lack of institutional support. Our interviews paint a more complicated picture of the ways contingent faculty in our program tried to adapt to a new instructional mode without being able to rely on already-existing communities, without giving up their assumed expertise, and without much time to participate in uncompensated labor.

If WPAs assume communities of practice exist in their programs when they do not, this can have consequences for the ways instructors adapt to new instructional modes and relate to each other (or not). As will be seen in our study, contingent faculty in particular can struggle to balance the authority and expertise they feel is integral to their positions as faculty members with the lack of experience they have in teaching hybrid courses. In the rest of this article, we examine these tensions and how writing programs can try to foster and support communities of practice among their faculty, especially those faculty in situations where they may be "newcomers" to an instructional mode but feel compelled to act as if they are "old-timers" (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 182).

Study Design and Methodology

During fall 2019, the task force designed a survey and interview protocol to gather data, which was approved by our institution's IRB (No. 1514418). In January 2020, we emailed a Qualtrics survey to 17 faculty in our program with experience teaching hybrid courses. The survey asked basic questions about faculty experience teaching hybrid courses, including when these faculty taught hybrid courses, where they taught these courses, and for how long. The final question in the survey asked faculty if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview.

Fourteen faculty responded to the survey and all agreed to be interviewed. Of the 14 participants, 13 had taught mostly composition courses; one had never taught composition but had taught hybrid technical communication courses. The faculty included two adjuncts, one teaching assistant who was formerly an adjunct, and 11 NTT, full-time faculty. Two participants had taught hybrid courses at different institutions, and one had developed training for faculty about how to teach hybrid courses at a former institution. There was a mix of experience from faculty who had taught mostly online, mostly face-to-face, or both. Members of the task force were also part of the faculty who were interviewed.

The interview protocol was designed to focus on how faculty describe their preparation and transition to teaching hybrid courses, and it also included questions specific to lessons learned, professional development, and feedback and student engagement practices. While the interview protocol was designed prior to the pandemic and explicitly referred to face-to-face classes, by the time faculty were interviewed in spring 2020, all of our institution's courses had moved online, and faculty frequently referred to synchronous and asynchronous online learning modalities. These semi-structured interviews lasted between 30–90 minutes and were conducted and recorded using Zoom. After transcription, we began coding.

Due to its utility in analyzing qualitative data (Lindlof and Taylor), we elected to leverage grounded theory as our coding approach. Therefore, all interview transcripts were interrogated using no prescribed constraints (e.g., open coded) as we permitted each team member to naturally code against what she or he felt was most salient in the text. Because we were a relatively large team, we first coded in pairs. Upon completing our first round of coding, each pair met internally within their group to normalize codes and methods. For example, we worked to ensure harmony among coding definitions. What one researcher might have coded as "teacher engagement," another researcher coded as "relationship" or "mentoring." Through normalization exercises, we were able to agree to a code like "mentoring" as the broad, multidimensional taxonomy.

After the coding pairs had completed their normalization of codes, we reconvened as the larger project team to discuss our main observations, emerging themes, and final list of normalized codes. In order to allow flexibility in the process, we agreed to allow the codes to expand or narrow as needed, and we met routinely throughout the remainder of the coding process, continuing to use a shared folder for codes, memos, and notes. Overall, we found over 75 codes, including codes related to feedback, students, course design, and mentoring. In this article we focus on the following codes: professional development, mentoring, peer, course design, problem solving, and adapting/adaptation.

Peer Relationships: Modes of Identification, Engagement, and Competence

As we focused on codes related to professional development, mentoring, and course design, we noticed that faculty were not describing interactions with peers as they engaged with an unfamiliar instructional mode (hybrid). When we focused on faculty-centered codes, we realized that faculty did not discuss working with others to solve problems, learn about tools,

address concerns with the design of the course, or to make revisions to the course. While faculty mentioned that they valued professional development and would appreciate programming focused on hybrid courses, several faculty wanted less formal, more rapid interventions. This need is understandable when considering what is gained from highly-structured, formal versus more frequent, informal learning experiences (Billett 318).

In short, we anticipated learning more about what our program could do in order to support faculty new to teaching hybrid courses. We found that faculty were failing to create communities of practice in our program that would support them through more informal learning experiences. While writing programs can support faculty in formal professional development opportunities, in order for learning and eventually an identity of expertise to develop, there is a need for ongoing and "organic" faculty engagement to develop coherent practices outside of sporadic, formal programmatic professional development (Wenger, "Conceptual Tools" 131). In the data, we found faculty addressing multiple problems with course design in two main ways:

1. Drawing from membership in other communities, and
2. Relying on prior knowledge and sources outside of the program community.

We also found that faculty networks were limited:

1. Faculty rely repeatedly on the same administrative staff, usually one long-term faculty member;
2. Faculty who have been in the program for a while have very small, but very strong networks; and
3. Faculty solve problems on their own and want more access to informal networks, but the need is not currently well-addressed by the program.

The combination of having limited opportunities to interact with people while also adapting prior knowledge and seeking resources outside of the community impacts participation and non-participation in a community of practice. Competence and therefore confidence come from our successful participation in the practices of our communities. As Wenger notes, "Engagement gives us direct experience of regimes of competence, whether this experience is one of competence or incompetence and whether we develop an identity of participation or non-participation" ("Career of a Concept" 184). While many faculty do seek peer feedback in improving their expertise, most faculty interviewed identified a single administrator or a small pool of static colleagues with whom they share practices.

While certainly serving as kinds of resources for faculty, these two limited avenues fall short in qualifying as clear communities of practice. A community of practice, according to Wenger, requires "mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire" ("Communities" 152). In the case of the single administrator, the interaction tended to be asymmetrical, a mentor-mentee relationship, rather than an equal one. As for the pool of colleagues, there are two issues: first, the colleagues had pre-existing relationships from attending a graduate program together—the writing program itself was not generating their connection, so they tended not to be bound by the joint enterprise of their teaching experiences in the writing program (Wenger's "domain"), but rather by being friends beforehand; and second, the impermanent nature of contingent employment combined with ever-changing course assignments make the sustained mutual interactions required to develop a "shared repertoire" challenging (82). These colleagues may continue to meet as friends to trade stories of their struggles, but as some of them move on to other institutions, or as they are assigned different courses than their colleagues, the shared competencies become incompatible. The lack of any clear and sustained community of practice in the program seems to contribute to the overall lack of relationship building between faculty as well as confidence in expertise among faculty.

Those faculty who do report confidence in their own practices tend to derive their expertise and identity via membership in other communities. For example, an instructor who spent the majority of their career in editing and technical communication rather than composition pedagogy shows a swiftness in their willingness to pivot from one mode to another:

> So, if people come to my course and what I've prepared is something that they already know, then I'll pivot and adjust it over time so that I can give them something new, something useful. And then obviously, in the reverse, if they come to my course and they really don't understand what I'm talking about, then I need to pivot . . . give them something new . . . I like it when they reach a point where they get confused . . . so I like shaking things up and getting them to think about the theory behind all of this by making them uncomfortable [laughter]. (Participant 2)

Similarly, a faculty member who had previously worked as a curriculum designer in a faculty development position explicitly stated not needing professional development but rather a need for better course design practices:

> I'm a pretty experienced teacher. I used to give professional development as my job before this. So, I mean, in some ways I'm like, "I don't really need it." I know what I need to do. But I can also think

> about it with my hat of designing professional development of what I would do for others. And I think—I mean, in some ways, what we always said . . . was that good course design is good course design. It doesn't really, in some ways, matter the modality. You make changes in the modality. But the fundamental course design is what's important in terms of having good objectives, having good activities. (Participant 11)

While neither of these faculty took part in formal training or professional development for hybrid course design, they move confidently in their teaching based on their secure identities in other communities. Their ability to uphold "an identity across boundaries" offsets the lack of formal professional development and a lack of a unified community of practice from which they would otherwise gain expertise (Wenger, "Conceptual Tools" 139).

However, those faculty without this confidence seek the benefits of community elsewhere. For example, Participant One reaches out to internet communities:

> So, I use Twitter a lot for that, in particular. And if I see a resource that I think might be useful, I grab the link and I pull it into Pocket or Google Keep and then, at the end of the semester, I go through those and save the ones or read/save or annotate the ones that I'm thinking about implementing later.

Another way faculty participate in the margins of the community is by building bridges across boundary practices (Wenger, "Conceptual Tools" 127), drawing on knowledge from other instructional modes. Those might include use of freewriting activities, low-stakes peer reviews, and think/pair/shares. As they bring in those practices, faculty also describe how the hybrid format forces adaptations to the scaffolding activities. As one participant describes,

> What I've been trying to do is make sure they've done the reading beforehand. So, at the beginning of every hybrid class, make sure they've posted about their reading so they can sort of digest it. But I also do this freewriting at the beginning of the class, where it's a knowledge check that they've really done the reading. So, they can sort of apply that. And I do five questions and they're open-ended. But they're really simple. (Participant 10)

Another faculty member describes how they allocate activities according to instructional mode—the activity is a familiar activity, but it accounts for the different modality:

> So, the thing that I do most often is that the very, very first thing we do in our face-to-face day asks them to open up the work that they did for the online course day and work with it in some way. It might be, if they wrote a sample summary paragraph, to then review their sample summary paragraph or review a peer's. It might be a think/pair/share. (Participant 7)

Faculty describe their engagement with the course primarily in terms of design practices across multiple learning environments, but rarely in terms of people. The interviewees frequently pointed to trial-and-error, self-note keeping, and on-the-fly revision as means of their growth and development of expertise.

Yet without greater relationship building in the program (coupled with a dearth of hybrid pedagogy–specific scholarship available), faculty are often unsure of the expected competencies and practices of the program. Faculty generally report viewing one or two specific administrators as their "go-to experts" and typically only seek those administrators out. This leads to minimal sharing of experiences and practices among the larger faculty and thus less relationship building and development of expertise across the program. The creative tension between experience and competence that maximizes learning is not happening when faculty are learning mostly on the periphery and in close contact with only one or two members of that community (Wenger, "Conceptual Tools" 126).

One participant approaches the tension between prior experience and acquiring new competencies by relying on their prior experience in online course design:

> I decided to design my fully online class first and sort of keep them together somewhat. And then from there, I designed my hybrid sort of based off of the fully online course and sort of decided which activities would most benefit from kind of the interaction of a face-to-face meeting and making it more of sort of a flipped model so that all of the content and readings and that sort of thing was done online. (Participant 11)

In other instances, faculty show that the tension between competence and experience, while potentially productive, also results in uncertainty about the degree of expertise acquired. Expertise acquired in the absence of full participation in the community limits how the faculty understands their own development and learning. As Participant Five explains,

> I thought I was figuring it out as I was doing it. . . . They just said, "Here, you're going to teach this online." And so there was absolutely no faculty development, no resources, nothing for that. So, I

> never had a comp pedagogy course in graduate school. Everybody has always just thrown me into the deep end and said, "Okay. You figure it out, and try not to drown." But in the end, you do drown a little bit all the time.

Faculty also note instances where interactions with other faculty were less formal and directed by administrators. Participant Thirteen expresses a desire for the type of interaction that would allow for expertise and competence to be displayed across members of the community, rather than only by administrative staff:

> Two or three years ago, we had a panel rotating where we had faculty presenting on the assignments we were teaching, and you could choose what you would do, and I loved that because it was actually helpful to hear from people who are teaching how they approach these kinds of things. So, it would be helpful to go to a workshop on that. . . . Any resources really would be great.

For newcomers to hybrid course design, even if not newcomers to teaching or to the program, attaining membership in the community is difficult because there is no easy access to informal networks. Though resources, including administrators, are available, faculty are often redefining their own competence, but without full participation in the community. Wenger claims that realignment to a new regime of expertise and a new community is a necessary part of learning and becoming, along with the knowledge a person gains. Eventually, a person is transformed by the community: "When a newcomer is entering a community, it is mostly the competence that is pulling the experience along, until the learner's experience reflects the competence of the community" (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 181). This learning process, however, is inhibited when faculty only have peripheral connections to the community and, therefore, access to the full community's regimes of competence is unavailable.

Participant Thirteen, an experienced faculty member who has been teaching hybrids for several semesters, sums up the strength of the administrative support, drawing on prior knowledge, and the limitations of that support in the context of gaining competence in a new instructional mode when informal networks might best provide avenues for supporting learning:

> I like to feel like I have a model that I'm working toward that I know works. And so I feel like as an instructor, I felt a little more blind than I would have maybe liked to. Even though . . . everyone was very helpful and [I got] resources. [That] actually really helped me to be like, "Oh, this is what a hybrid could look like." I feel like just seeing

> more models of, "Here's a hybrid class and how it works and how it's structured," would be super helpful. Because right now, I feel like the challenge for us is that we're kind of flying a little blind.

As Wenger describes, "Gaining a competence entails becoming someone for whom the competence is a meaningful way of living in the world. . . . The history of practice, the significance of what drives the community, the relationships that shape it, and the identities of members all provide resources for learning—for newcomers and oldtimers alike" (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 182). Without an integrated experience with other faculty and in an environment where resources are scarce, faculty might not reach this stage of fully becoming, even in supportive programs with professional development initiatives.

Obstacles to Communities of Practice Formation in Writing Programs

There are several obstacles that prevent contingent faculty in our program from organically forming the networks or communities of practice that would better support their transition into teaching in the hybrid instructional mode. Many of these relate to the labor conditions described earlier in the article:

1. The overall temporary and insecure nature of contingent faculty life;
2. New faculty coming from other writing programs with their own distinct practices and competencies;
3. A lack of time between hiring new faculty and their beginning to teach in our program;
4. A lack of networks between contingent faculty and limited access to colleagues, exacerbated at our institution because of the size of the program and the spread of faculty across our geographical location;
5. The pressure to teach hybrid courses out of institutional need rather than preference; and
6. Less availability of hybrid courses (before the pandemic, fewer than 10% of our courses were taught in a hybrid mode).

The result is that faculty are often experienced writing instructors with limited hybrid course design training, or faculty are fairly new to both the design and the course. For these faculty, participation in writing programs should be more than just imitating or enacting practices: "participation

involves 'hearts and minds': a sense of belonging (or a desire to belong), mutual responsibilities, and an understanding of the meaning of behaviors and relationships" (Handley, Clark, Fincham, and Sturdy 181). Without further attention to the development of communities of practice, writing programs can overlook this central piece of faculty participation.

The hope of our program is that all faculty are on an inbound trajectory toward full membership into a community of practice; that is, that faculty engage with one another and with programmatic practices for hybrid courses, adapting them to fit their own teacherly identities as they gain expertise in this instructional mode and share these adaptations with others. However, the obstacles recounted above and seen in the interviews often interfere with this goal. Faculty accumulate disparate practices and perceptions of expertise and competence that result in problem-solving on their own, inconsistent conceptions of hybrid teaching/course structures, feeling overwhelmed/lost/drowning, etc. The result is often lack of faculty participation in a community of practice which leads to their remaining on the periphery of our program, which, as Wenger argues, can either lead to "peripherality or marginality depend[ing] on relations of participation that render non-participation either enabling or problematic" ("Conceptual Tools" 141). Thus, while peripheral participation is not necessarily bad, as it can lead eventually to full membership in our program, it can also lead to long-term marginality when such non-participation becomes ingrained and faculty never access programmatic "regimes of competence" (Wenger, "Career of a Concept" 184).

Because of the rapidity with which new contingent faculty are asked to perform as experts, there is no time for peripheral participation or peripheral observation, a productive kind of non-participation. Faculty are then in a position to either engrain practices outside of the regime of competence, which can include getting into bad habits, never seeing expected practices enacted and being afraid to ask about them, or to seek outside help or fix it themselves without reliance on networks in a community of practice. This issue can continue long-term if faculty continue to be in a peripheral position; as Wenger claims, "the very maintenance of that position may have become so integrated in the practice that it closes the future" ("Conceptual Tools" 141). The question for writing programs then becomes how to encourage faculty with full membership in a community of practice, if one exists, to reach out and form networks with others and how to encourage faculty on the periphery to reach in and link into the community of practice; or, if such a community of practice does not yet exist, how to encourage its development.

Supporting Communities of Practice in Writing Programs

Although we began our interviews thinking that faculty in our program who were teaching hybrid courses were already involved in communities of practice, we discovered that as faculty developed hybrid courses, their sharing of experiences and practices with other faculty was rare. They generally lacked opportunities for engagement with programmatic practices that Wenger states can give practitioners "direct experience of regimes of competence" ("Career of a Concept" 184), and thus struggled with gaining community membership because, as Wenger argues, "membership is not defined by institutional categories" but rather through participation in practices ("Conceptual Tools" 131). In the end, then, we recognized that structures have to be set up to foster the growth of communities of practice instead of assuming that they will form on their own. For our own writing program, and for other writing programs where this may also be the case, writing programs need to pay deliberate attention to the development and encouragement of avenues of consistent shared practices that allow for learning and engagement in the practices of the program. In our program, this community is open to faculty regardless of their institutional position (contingent faculty, TAs, etc.), and we believe that communities of practice ideally would include everyone engaged in that practice in order to be sustainable. WPAs must understand that while programmatic initiatives and opportunities are needed resources for faculty, faculty with different levels of experience and in different institutional positions benefit from informal relationships that support identity and membership building beyond such programmatic efforts.

While our writing program is still trying to balance the tension between how to foster and support communities of practice among faculty with the labor conditions and lack of support contingent faculty face (course release time, stipends, etc.), we have begun the work of addressing some of the obstacles to communities of practice forming in our program, while recognizing some limitations we cannot adequately address. We have built course templates for faculty to use the first time they teach a course so that they can be enculturated into our program's distinct practices and curricular approach; for new faculty in particular, we have also structured an orientation to our program alongside workshops, previously only offered to new TAs, so that they are particularly supported in the transition to our program (alongside institutional orientations for new faculty). These can create a kind of buffer zone in which faculty can become peripheral participants and start to identify with our program's faculty as a community of practice.

Our program has also worked intentionally to foster informal, peer-to-peer networks in our program both around hybrid course instruction specifically and teaching writing more broadly, rather than assuming these will naturally form on their own as we had before. This semester, we have planned short, faculty-facilitated workshops about providing low stakes feedback to students online and teaching synchronous class sessions. Rather than formal presentations, these have been more loosely formed around faculty leading discussions, sharing resources, and generating ideas with faculty groups to help all participants identify as a community of practice with expertise to build and share together. For the past two years, we have also held monthly "Teachers Need Teachers" meetings where, similarly, faculty present assignments they are teaching, activities they are using with their classes, etc. in a more informal way. These also seek to build community knowledge and form networks of faculty, regardless of faculty status, who can depend on each other in addition to our program's administrative team and/or the smaller networks faculty may already have.

In the long term, we may find that there will be more flexibility in terms of how many hybrid courses are available for faculty to teach and more flexibility in instructors choosing what types of classes they want to teach. During the pandemic, many more faculty have taught hybrid classes and may in the future want to opt into teaching this type of course because they have built these skills. Because of the flexibility in instructional modes our institution has embraced during the pandemic, it is also possible that the institution as a whole will be more open to offering hybrid courses in a variety of formats that further expand what hybrid courses look like at our institution. However, some obstacles are more difficult or even impossible to address. Although our institution is actively working on changing how contingent faculty are situated, the ultimately temporary and insecure nature of these positions is not something that our program can on its own address, and this is not something that building a community of practice will necessarily change. Building a community of practice, therefore, will always be constrained in some way by the labor conditions of the faculty teaching hybrid courses in our program.

While a fully formed community of practice might be difficult to achieve because of the labor conditions in our program, sustained community engagement between all faculty through these types of more informal, collective spaces for sharing, question asking, and problem solving provides faculty with an opportunity to learn more about the tools and practices of our program without having to appear to lack experience or competence as they identify how everyone has gaps in their knowledge and resources to share with each other. As faculty design hybrid courses in particular, they

encounter a boundary practice where competence and experience are in creative tension. Writing programs can more intentionally and deliberately support faculty as they engage in boundary practices that create meaningful identity forming and learning opportunities for faculty, including opportunities for informal relationship building with peers and other members of the community of practice.

Notes

1. We recognize the ableist language use in this term but we also recognize the importance of staying true to the voices of our participants. This phrasing replicates wording used by one of our participants that is quoted in full context later in our article.

Acknowledgements

We want to acknowledge Kerry Folan and Sheri Sorvillo, faculty members of the original hybrid task force. Their contributions to the task force continue to impact the teaching resources and the study.

Works Cited

ADE Guidelines for Class Size and Workload for College and University Instructors of English: A Statement of Policy. Association of Departments of English, 2020, maps.mla.org/Resources/Policy-Statements/ADE-Guidelines-for-Class-Size-and-Workload-for-College-and-University-Instructors-of-English-A-Statement-of-Policy. Accessed 9 Oct. 2022.

Billett, Stephen. "Workplace Participatory Practices: Conceptualising Workplaces as Learning Environments." *Journal of Workplace Learning*, vol. 16, no. 5/6, 2004, pp. 312–24, doi:10.1108/13665620410550295.

Blackmore, Chris, editor. Social Learning Systems and Communities of Practice. E-book, Springer, 2010, doi:10.1007/978-1-84996-133-2_11.

Caulfield, Jay. *How to Design and Teach a Hybrid Course: Achieving Student-Centered Learning through Blended Classroom, Online and Experiential Activities*. Stylus, 2011.

CCCC Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure-Track Writing Faculty. CCCC, 2016, cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/working-conditions-ntt.

CWPA Labor Resource Center. Council of Writing Program Administrators, https://csal.colostate.edu/resources/cwpa/. Accessed 9 Oct. 2022.

Devitt, Amy J., Angela Jones, and Mary Jo Reiff. "Creating Community, Collaboration and Consistency: The Use of Teaching Teams in Writing Program Administration." *Issues in Writing*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2000, pp. 28–63.

Donahue, Christiane. "Writing and Global Transfer Narratives: Situating the Knowledge Transformation Conversation." *Critical Transitions: Writing and the Question of Transfer*, edited by Chris M. Anson and Jessie L. Moore, The

WAC Clearinghouse and UP of Colorado, 2016, pp. 107–36, wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/ansonmoore/chapter4.pdf.

Droz, Patricia Welsh, and Lorie Stagg Jacobs. "Genre Chameleon: Email, Professional Writing Curriculum, and Workplace Writing Expectations." *Technical Communication*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2019, pp. 68–92.

Garrison, D. Randy, and Norman D. Vaughan. *Blended Learning in Higher Education: Framework, Principles, and Guidelines*. Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Handley, Karen, Timothy Clark, Robin Fincham, and Andrew Sturdy. "Researching Situated Learning: Participation, Identity and Practices in Client—Consultant Relationships." *Management Learning*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2007, pp. 173–91, doi:10.1177/1350507607075774.

Haneda, Mari. "Classrooms as Communities of Practice: A Reevaluation." *TESOL Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2006, pp. 807–17, doi:10.2307/40264309.

Kahn, Seth, William B. Lalicker, and Amy Lynch-Biniek, editors. *Contingency, Exploitation, and Solidarity: Labor and Action in English Composition*. The WAC Clearinghouse and UP of Colorado, 2017, wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/contingency.

Kinney, Tiffany, Julie Snyder-Yuly, and Sumiko Martinez. "Cultivating Graduate Writing Groups as Communities of Practice: A Call to Action for the Writing Center." *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2019, pp. 16–24.

Kline, Joel, and Konstanze Alex-Brown. "The Social Body of Knowledge: Nurturing Organizational Social Capital via Social Media Based Communities of Practice." *Technical Communication*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2013, pp. 279–92.

Kline, Joel, and Thomas Barker. "Negotiating Professional Consciousness in Technical Communication: A Community of Practice Approach." *Technical Communication*, vol. 59, no.1, 2012, pp. 32–48.

Lindlof, Thomas R., and Bryan C. Taylor. *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. 4th ed., SAGE, 2017.

Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger. *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge UP, 1991.

McClure, Randall, Dayna V. Goldstein, and Michael A. Pemberton, editors. *Labored: The State(ment) and Future of Work in Composition*. Parlor, 2017.

McGrath, Laura, and Letizia Guglielmo. "Communities of Practice and Makerspaces: DMAC's Influence on Technological Professional Development and Teaching Multimodal Composing." *CIWIC, DMAC, and Technology Professional Development in Rhetoric and Composition*, special issue of *Computers and Composition*, vol. 36, 2015, pp. 44–53, doi:10.1016/j.compcom.2015.04.005.

Statement on the Status and Working Conditions of Contingent Faculty. NCTE, 2010, https://ncte.org/statement/contingent_faculty/. Accessed 9 Oct. 2022.

Paull, Joanna N., and Jason Allen Snart. *Making Hybrids Work: An Institutional Framework for Blending Online and Face-to-Face Instruction in Higher Education*. NCTE, 2016.

Penrose, Ann M. "Professional Identity in a Contingent-Labor Profession: Expertise, Autonomy, Community in Composition Teaching." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2012, pp. 108–26.

Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members: Recommendations and Evaluative Questions. MLA, 2011, www.mla.org/content/download/3368/81826/clip_stmt_final_may11.pdf.

Rutz, Carol, and Stephen Wilhoit. "What is Faculty Development?" *A Rhetoric for Writing Program Administrators*, 2nd ed., edited by Rita Malenczyk, Parlor, 2016, pp. 233–44.

Schell, Eileen E., and Patricia Lambert Stock, editors. *Moving a Mountain: Transforming the Role of Contingent Faculty in Composition Studies and Higher Education*. NCTE, 2001.

Snart, Jason Allen. *Hybrid Learning: The Perils and Promise of Blending Online and Face-to-Face Instruction in Higher Education*. Praeger, 2010.

Stewart, Mary K., Jenae Cohn, and Carl Whithaus. "Collaborative Course Design and Communities of Practice: Strategies for Adaptable Course Shells in Hybrid and Online Writing." *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal,* vol. 9, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1–20, www.kpu.ca/sites/default/files/Transformative%20Dialogues/TD.9.1.9_Stewart_et_al_Collaborative_Course_Design.pdf.

Toth, Christie, and Patrick Sullivan. "Toward Local Teacher-Scholar Communities of Practice: Findings from a National TYCA Survey." *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2016, pp. 247–73.

Wardle, Elizabeth. "Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces." *Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2004, enculturation.net/5_2/index52.html.

Welch, Nancy, and Tony Scott, editors. *Composition in the Age of Austerity*. Utah State UP, 2016.

Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. 1st ed., Cambridge UP, 1999.

—. "Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems: The Career of a Concept." Blackmore, pp. 179–98.

—. "Conceptual Tools for CoPs as Social Learning Systems: Boundaries, Identity, Trajectories and Participation." Blackmore, pp. 125–43.

Willard-Traub, Margaret K. "Writing Program Administration and Faculty Professional Development: What Faculty? What Development?" *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2008, pp. 433–45, doi:10.1215/15314200-2008-004.

Wittenbrink, Heinz, and Jutta Pauschenwein. "Content Strategy as Practical Knowledge." *Technical Communication*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2019, pp. 177–86.

Brian Fitzpatrick is associate professor at George Mason University where he teaches composition. His research is focused on workplace and professional writing as well as digital and hybrid pedagogies. He is the co-founder of the Archive of Workplace Writing Experiences, a digital archive project seeking to help teachers better prepare students for real-world writing. His work has appeared in *Effective Teaching of Technical Communication: Theory, Practice, and Application* by WAC Clearinghouse, as well as *Performance Improvement Quarterly* and *Double Helix*.

Lourdes Fernandez is a survey researcher at Mathematica, a policy research company. She served as assistant director for composition at George Mason University until May 2022. Her research interests include hybrid pedagogy, hybrid course design, and rhetorics of sexual assault. Her work has been published in *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *Rhetoric Review*, *Programmatic Perspectives*, *and Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*.

Ariel M. Goldenthal is assistant professor of composition at George Mason University. Her research interests include community-engaged courses and hybrid first-year composition, which she has taught since the university pilot of the course in fall 2017. Her recent and upcoming presentations at the CCCC and EDUCAUSE share findings on hybrid course design and implementation. She has also developed resources and led professional development opportunities for faculty new to teaching hybrid courses in the English department.

Jessica Matthews is associate director of composition for George Mason University. From 2019 to 2021, she served as the faculty fellow for the George Mason Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning where she provides professional development for online course design and pedagogy. Her recent presentations at EDUCAUSE, the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, and the CCCC focus on how students and faculty evaluate the quality of learning in online writing courses.

Brandon Biller is a writing and rhetoric PhD student at George Mason University where he also teaches composition. His research interests include writing pedagogy, technical writing, first-year composition, online writing instruction, and the rhetorical elements of student engagement, relationships, and transfer in the classroom. Brandon holds a BA in English literature, an MBA in IT management, and an MA in language and literature.

Courtney Adams Wooten is director of composition at George Mason University. She is a coeditor of *WPAs in Transition* (2018) and *The Things We Carry: Strategies for Recognizing and Negotiating Emotional Labor in Writing Program Administration (2020)*, and her work has been published in *Composition Studies*, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, *Peitho*, and *Harlot* as well as in several edited collections.