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TEACHERS' WORKBOOK
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Communication in Action: Educating Graduate Teaching Assistants in At-Risk Pedagogy

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Abstract

I begin this paper with a glimpse into the literature concerning at-risk and antiracist

theory in order to understand the connections between the two bodies of literature. Next,

by combining two bodies of literature, I argue for the implementation of a pedagogy of

hope, culturally relevant teaching, and empowerment for students in the classroom.

Finally, I outline a course for graduate teaching assistants that explores the utility of a

pedagogy of hope, culturally relevant teaching, and empowerment for students in the

communication classroom.

If we are to successfully educate all of our children, we must work to remove the blinders built of

stereotypes, monocultural instructional methodologies, ignorance, social distance, biased

research, and racism. (Delpit, 1995, p. 182)

While researching antiracist pedagogical theory, I came across the above quotation from Delpit

(1995). After considering the call that Delpit puts forth in this statement, I began to consider the

ways in which educators could address academically at-risk students by incorporating both at-

risk theory and antiracist pedagogical theory. In this essay, I provide a design for a course for

graduate teaching assistants' that specifically addresses at-risk and antiracist theory as it applies

to communication pedagogy. I begin this paper with a glimpse into the literature concerning at-risk and antiracist theory in order to understand the connections between the two bodies of literature. Next, by combining two bodies of literature, I argue for the implementation of a pedagogy of hope, culturally relevant teaching, and empowerment for students in the classroom. Finally, I outline a course for graduate teaching assistants that explores the utility of a pedagogy of hope, culturally relevant teaching, and empowerment for students in the communication classroom.

Understanding the Connections: At-Risk and Antiracist Theory

The concern over students who have the potential to drop out of school has created an area of research called "at-risk." Several academic disciplines, including communication studies and education, focus on the dilemmas that "at-risk" students face in educational settings. According to Johnson (1994), *High Risk Students* first appeared in the Educational Resources Information Center's (ERIC) *Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors* in 1980 and is defined there as "students, with normal intelligence, whose academic background or prior performance may cause them to be perceived as candidates for future academic failure or early withdrawal." It is interesting to note that prior 1980 and since the ERIC database was created in 1966, the concept of *High Risk Students* was indexed under *Disadvantaged Students* and *Underachievement* (p. 35).

The discipline of communication has its own operational definition of what constitutes an at-risk student. According to the National Communication Association's Communication Needs of Students At-Risk Commission:

> Students at-risk are unprepared to function effectively in the formal educational process.
> These students often confront barriers due to educational deficiencies, diversity, and/or

external circumstances. While all of the barriers cannot be addressed in the

communication classroom, our discipline should continue to seek communication

strategies that will enhance their potential for success (as cited in Fassett, 1999).

For communication educators, studying the ways in which communication plays a role in a

student's academic risk is an integral part of understanding how to help these students succeed

academically. For instances, communication educators interested in helping students that are at-

risk have researched how students' use communication to become socialized into a particular

educational environment (Souza, 1999; Johnson, Staton, & Jorgensen-Earp, 1995) and why at-

risk students experience higher communication apprehension or high anxiety when interacting in

social situations. Communication researchers have also explored why at-risk students have

lower perceived communication competency–the ability to communicate effectively (Chesebro,

McCroskey, Atwater, Bahrenfuss, Cawelti, Gaudino, & Hodges, 1992; Garard & Hunt, 1998;

Rosenfeld, Grant, & McCroskey, 1995), and why they perceive themselves to have an external

locus of control or no control over what happens to them (Gorham & Self, 1986). These studies

have allowed communication researchers to pinpoint communicative strategies that would help

at-risk students overcome educational barriers to success.

Another body of research that is concerned with the academic success and failure of

students is antiracist pedagogy. Antiracist pedagogy, a relatively new perspective, emerged out

of the work of those interested in understanding and overcoming the marginalization of students

of color. These researchers were looking to alter what multicultural education proponents have

neglected to accomplish: "the life chances of minority students, the racialized attitudes of

majority students, the inherent monoculturalism of school practices, and the wider processes of

power relations and inequality that underpin all of these" (May, 1999, p. 1). Originally,

multicultural education grew out of the civil rights movement and was "grounded in democracy, social justice, and pluralism, and equality" (Sleeter & Montecinos, 1999, p. 115). While multicultural education was originally intended to empower members of minority races and create more cultural awareness, Sleeter (1991) contends that "many people approach[ed] multicultural education without thinking about social inequality or empowerment at all" (p. 2). Contemporary critics of multicultural education have argued for a multicultural approach that interrogates the power relations, inequalities, and racism that students of color have suffered at the hands of whiteness.

A central tenet in the work of antiracist pedagogy is deconstructing the invisibility and power of whiteness. As Apple (1997) contends, for white people "whiteness is something that you don't have to think about. It is just <u>there</u>. It is a naturalized state of being. It is 'normal.' Anything else is 'other.' It is the there that is never there" (p. 127). Frankenberg (1997) illustrates the power that whiteness possesses in our schools and wider society. According to Frankenberg, "whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, and politically and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination" (p. 6). Antiracist pedagogues work to reposition whiteness in order to shift the cultural center of power and privilege.

An antiracist pedagogy moves beyond the superficial approaches to diversity, such as the food, fun, and festivals that are often associated with multicultural educational strategies. Instead, antiracist pedagogy focuses on what these "expressions of culture means: the values, the power relationships that shape the culture" (Lee, 1995, p. 10). One important goal of antiracist pedagogues is the investigation of "the impact that historic discrimination has on people of color, or the institutional racism that affect the lives of people of color" (O'Grady, 1998, p. 217) in

order to create "equality, justice, and emancipation for minorities students" (Rezai-Reshati, 1995, p. 7).

Antiracist pedagogues work to reposition the power and privilege of whiteness through an examination of the curriculum and methods employed in our classrooms. For instance, in the speech communication classroom, educators might engage students in a critique of the ways in which Eurocentric perspectives are dominant in the speaking styles that are privileged in public speaking. Racism is perpetuated in the classroom by a Eurocentric curriculum. Derman-Sparks (1995) argues that "by implicitly setting up the dominant culture as the norm, we end up equating 'We are all the same,' with 'We are all white'" (p. 19). A Eurocentric curriculum reflects the experiences, ideologies, and practices of white, male, middle-class perspectives. For instance, Churchill (1995) contends that "most introductory courses in American History still begin for all practical purposes in 1492, with only the most perfunctory acknowledgment that people existed in the Americas in pre-Columbian times" (p. 19). Antiracist pedagogues that are concerned with teachers and teaching effectiveness work to change the curriculum to include the histories and cultures of marginalized people. They move beyond an additive approach (a unit here or there) to implementing structural changes in order to alter that which is at the center of the curriculum.

Antiracist pedagogical researchers work to create more space in the classroom for the experience and cultural backgrounds of students who have been systematically oppressed by the current structure of our schools. An antiracist pedagogy attempts to reposition *whose* knowledge and *whose* experiences are legitimate in order to create more accurate representations of all students in the classroom. Through work in whiteness studies, educators are able to begin to mark the unmarked and make the invisible visible.

A New Approach to Teaching Academically At-Risk Students

Working through the problems of students "at-risk" in our schools has led me to propose three alternative educational practices that might ensure that more students are receiving what they need to succeed academically. I believe the problems that many students face are due to the systemic nature of racism in our classrooms and because of this, I do not want to minimize the complexities of these problems. However, if we educators begin to work on solutions to these issues and also work to reflect upon their classroom strategies, we might begin to see a change in the drop-out rates of all students, especially the dropout rate of students of color. I propose that to start systematically attacking the problems in our schools, we must begin to incorporate "culturally relevant teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Next, in order to reassign the problems that children face in the classroom as innate, we need to begin using what Macedo (1998) calls a pedagogy of hope or a humanizing pedagogy (p. xxi). Finally, empowering students to have a claim in their education may start when we begin to share decisions with our students.

Educators must begin altering the current educational structures by incorporating culturally relevant teaching; teachers need to bring in materials that reflect the lives of all students. In Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) book, <u>Dreamkeepers</u>, she suggests that "we must not legitimate the inequity that exists in the nation's schools, but attempt to delegitimate it by placing it under scrutiny" (p. 130). Culturally relevant teaching involves using parts of the students' home and school culture, including language, to "transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (p. 17). For instance, rectifying the lack of representation of students of colors' cultures, histories, and backgrounds in textbooks, school staffing choices and classroom methodologies is an important start.

Ladson-Billings (1994) explains that

culturally relevant teaching is about questioning (and preparing students to question) the

structural inequality, the racism, and injustice that exist in society. The teachers I studied

work in opposition to the system that employs them. They are critical of the way that the

school system treats employees, students, parents, and activities in the community.

However, they cannot let their critique reside solely in words. They must turn it into

action by challenging the system. What they do is both their lives and their livelihoods.

In their classrooms, they practice a subversive pedagogy. (p. 128)

An educator interested in helping all students succeed, especially those oppressed under the

current conditions of our schools, must move to praxis -- from theory to practice. This is not

simply to suggest that an educator must have access to entirely new curricular materials in a

classroom. Assignments, activities, and class discussions can be shaped around a critique of the

existing curriculum and administrative limitations. For instance, an instructor of a

communication course might engage students in a critique of the assumptions embedded in the

textbook that is currently being used, or the communication styles that are privileged by the way

public speaking is taught in the college classroom.

The contributors to the book *Speaking the Unpleasant: The Politics of (non) Engagement

in the Multicultural Education Terrain* (1998) call for a pedagogy of hope. Macedo explains that

a pedagogy of hope moves beyond "a facile pedagogy of tolerance" which proposes veiling new

forms of racism. Instead, a pedagogy of hope or humanization "rejects the social construction of

images that dehumanize the 'other'; a pedagogy of hope that points out that in our construction

of the 'other' we become intimately tied to the 'other'; a pedagogy that teaches us that by

dehumanizing the 'other' we become dehumanizing ourselves" (p. xxi). A pedagogy of hope

begins with respect, honesty, and solidarity (p. xxi). Educators engaged in pedagogy of hope help

students to recognize that positioning people of color as the "other" only serves to perpetuate ignorance and the denial that difference is to be valued. For instance, educators that continue to treat all students as if they are the *same*, as if their race does not matter, are engaged in colorblindness. Engaging in colorblindness ignores difference and the acknowledgment that we bring our cultural differences with us to the classroom in the form of prior knowledge, experience, and learning styles. Colorblindness, or the claim that one does not see their students' race, is nearly impossible. As Nieto (1998) contends, "racial differences and attitudes about them figure prominently in teachers attitudes and beliefs about why some students succeed and others do not, about their notions of intelligence, and about definitions of students from culturally and politically subordinated background primarily in terms of deficits" (p. 18).

Through implementing culturally relevant teaching practices, and a pedagogy of hope/humanization, educators might begin to help students empower themselves in the classroom. Empowerment has been defined in several different ways. For the purpose of this essay, I have selected McLaren's definition of empowerment. He states that empowerment is "the process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live" (as cited in Sleeter, 1991, p. 3). This is not to imply that the way we currently structure our classrooms is appropriate for all students, instead, white educators and white students must begin to step out of their own experiences to help transform the educational experiences of students oppressed by the current structure of our schools. Sleeter (1991) argues that "empowerment for social change is an inextricable component of multicultural education" (p. 1-2). However, as I cautioned before, multicultural education without social justice and democracy for all students

only acts as a way to promote the "otherizing" of students of color and the recentering of whiteness in the curriculum.

Sleeter (1991) argues that students of color may be empowered in the classroom in the following ways: 1) incorporating students' culture and language in educational programs; 2) collaborative community participation; and 3) a pedagogy oriented toward reciprocal interaction (p. 5). An empowering educational setting incorporates the experiences of the students and the students' home communities to "build on what they bring; disabling programs ignore and attempt to eradicate knowledge and strengths students bring, and replace them with those of the dominant society" (Sleeter, 1991, p.5).   For instance, educators might begin empowering students in the classroom by allowing them to have several different choices when it comes to completing assignments. Students then may be able to find a version of the assignment that reflects the way they learn best, their cultural backgrounds, and their experiences.

An empowering education does not include the use of the banking model of teaching – teachers transmitting information to passive students. Instead an education of empowerment "demands taking seriously the strengths, experiences, strategies, and goals members of oppressed groups have" (Sleeter, 1991, p. 6). An educator working to help empower his/her students would ask students to help him/her identify the ways in which racism is evident in our schools. An empowering education should recognize that the experiences and knowledge that students possess should be taken seriously as legitimate.

An empowering education also helps students see themselves as part of a collective community that can help them achieve as individuals while engaging in activities collectively. Sleeter (1991) provides the example of people with disabilities. She explains that "people with disabilities often do not see themselves as part of a potentially powerful collective" (p. 7). Also,

oppressed groups must be able to define what empowerment means for them. Educators should not decide for students that have been traditionally "at-risk" what their agenda is or how they should go about becoming empowered. Educators do not empower students; instead, educators create the conditions necessary to empower students.

In light of the discourse of at-risk literature and antiracist pedagogy, educators have several different ways to approach teaching student who have been traditionally disadvantaged by our educational system. An implementation of culturally relevant teaching practices is a starting point for creating educational experiences that allow all students succeed in school. A pedagogy of hope is also an alternative educational practice that will help legitimate all students' experiences and backgrounds. Finally, creating the conditions for an empowering education increase the chances of academic success for all students.

The Course Curriculum

What would a course in communication and the at-risk student for graduate students look like? The course outlined in the remainder of this paper presents several areas of study that I argue are essential for improving the pedagogy in the communication classroom. While this course will focus on the theoretical background, there will also be practical application of these theories in order to help the graduate students begin to work on their pedagogical practice.

Course Description

This course is designed to enhance the pedagogical skills of graduate teaching assistants and prospective teachers. The course explores and critically examines the at-risk theory in the discipline of communication. The course also introduces critical pedagogical theories for potential application in the communication classroom. Students will develop skills and strategies

necessary to enhance the learning environment for at-risk students in the communication classroom through the use of antiracist and critical pedagogical practice.

Course Objectives and Goals

- Students will articulate the connections between at-risk theory and communication education

- Student will identify the ways in which communication is important to the success of academically at-risk students.

- Students will articulate the goals of incorporating antiracist pedagogy in the communication classroom

- Students will identify the connection between antiracist pedagogy and the at-risk literature.

- Students will articulate ways to implement strategies that incorporate at-risk and antiracist theory in their classrooms.

Course Units of Study

This course has been divided into four units of study that will provide graduate teaching assistants with a solid foundation for addressing the needs of at-risk students.

Unit I: Communication Needs of At-Risk Students [Week 1-4]

In order to conceptualize the communication needs of at-risk students, graduate teaching assistants (and other students enrolled in the course) must understand the obstacles that academically at-risk students encounter (both in our schools and in society). This unit consists of two major topics: 1) epidemiological models of at-risk, and 2) ecological models of at-risk. Epidemiological models of academic failure can provide educators with specific identifiers within the student that may doom him/her for academic failure. These models also provide educators with cures or prescribe solutions for schools to help improve the academic success of these students. Critics of these models argue that there is more to educational failure than a

child's innate deficiencies. Researchers interested in analyzing the impact a student's environment has on their chances of academic success or failure have adapted Bronfenbrenner's ecological network. Through an examination of the systems that affect a student's life, educators hope to improve the parts of the system that may cause a student to drop out of school. Under this logic, a child that is having problem at home may bring these problems to the school in the form of late homework assignments or missed school days. In this unit, students will become aware of the problems that those defined as academically at-risk face, and investigate solutions that would help a student find answers to the problems that hinder him/her from being productive in schools.

Tentative Reading.

Gorham, J., & Self, L. (1986). Developing communication skills: Learning style and the educationally disadvantaged student. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Conference, Chicago.

Peart, N. A. & Campbell, F. A. (1999). At-risk students' perceptions of teacher effectiveness. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education, 5*, 269-284.

Nunn, G., & Parish, T. (1992). The psychosocial characteristics of at-risk high school students. *Adolescence, 27*, 435-439

McMillan, J., & Reed, D. (1994). At-risk students and resiliency: Factors Contributing to academic success. *The Clearing House*, 137-140.

Johnson, G. M. (1994). An ecological framework for conceptualizing educational risk. *Urban Education, 29*, 34-49.

Johnson, G., Staton, A., & Jorgensen-Earp, C. (1995). An ecological perspective on the transition of new university freshmen. *Communication Education, 44*, 336-352.

Souza, T. J. (1999). Communication and alternative student socialization.

Communication Education, 48, p. 91-108.

Rosow, L. (1989). Arthur: A tale of disempowerment. *Phi Delta Kappan, 71*, 194-199.

Mirman, J., Swartz, R., & Barell, J. (1988). Strategies to help teachers empower at-risk

students. In B. Presseisen, (Ed.), *At-risk students and thinking: Perspectives from

research*, (pp. 138-156). Washington, DC: NEA/RBS.

Blount, H., & Wells, M. (1992). Battering children educationally. *Contemporary

Education, 64*, 21-24.

Activities

- Draw your interpretation of an epidemiological model of at-risk. Discuss your ideas with the class. What are the educational implications of your model?

- Draw your interpretation of the ecological model of at-risk. Discuss w/the class your rationale for this model. How is it similar to Brofenbrenner's model? How is it different from Brofenbrenner's model?

- In small groups, discuss how you can address the communication needs of at-risk students in your classroom. Identify three specific ways that you could meet at-risk students' needs in your classroom.

Unit II: Critical Pedagogy: Empowering Students in the Classroom [Week 5-8]

In order to change the educational experiences of at-risk students, students must understand the role of critical pedagogy as a way to address the problems that these students face in the traditional classroom. The first section of this unit will include an examination of the theory proposed by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Freire is believed by many to have inspired the work

of critical educators in America. In light of Freire's research, the role of the teacher, the role of the students, and democratic power-sharing will be explored.

Tentative Reading.

Freire, P. (2001). *Pedagogy of the oppressed; 30th anniversary edition*. New York:

Continuum.

Shor, I. (1996). *When students have power: Negotiating authority in a critical pedagogy*.

University of Chicago Press. [Chps. 1-3]

Activities.

- Create an activity influenced by Freire's work. For instance, you could design a liberatory activity, or redesign a course that you believe could benefit from Freire's ideas.

- Bring in a sample activity that you use or an instructor you have had used in class.

- Identify whether this activity is empowering for you/your students.

- Adapt the above mentioned activity to be more empowering for the students in the class. Share this activity with the class in order to obtain feedback on how to improve your activity.

Unit III: Antiracist Pedagogy: Encouraging a Pedagogy of Hope [Week 9-12]

This unit consists of introducing students to the basic tenets of antiracist pedagogy. For instance, students will examine the nature of racism in educational institutions. The students will also explore what antiracist pedagogues believe is at the core of racism: whiteness. The unquestioned normality of whiteness and white privilege in educational institutions and wider

society will also be investigated. Finally, students will be asked to consider how a pedagogy of hope relates to the work of antiracist pedagogues in the communication classroom.

Tentative Readings.

Churchill, W. (1995). White studies: The intellectual imperialism of U.S. higher
> education. In S. Jackson & J. Solis (Eds.), *Beyond comfort zones in*
> *multiculturalism: confronting the politics of privilege*. Westport, CT: Bergin and
> Garvey.

McIntosh, P. White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see
> correspondences through work in women's studies. In K. Rousmaniere, & K. Abowitz
> (Eds.), *Readings in sociocultural studies in education* (2nd ed.) (pp. 189-195). New York,
> NY: McGraw-Hill.

hooks, b. (2000). Overcoming white supremacy: A comment. In E. M. Duarte & S. Smith
> (Eds.), *Foundational perspectives in multicultural education* (pp. 178-111-117).
> New York: Longman

Thompson, A. (1997). For: Anti-racist education. *Curriculum Inquiry, 27* (1), p. 7-44.

Derman-Sparks, L. (1995). How well are we nurturing racial and ethnic diversity? In D.
> Levine, R. Lowe, B. Peterson, & R. Tenorio (Eds.), *Rethinking schools: An*
> *agenda for change* (pp. 52-60). New York: The New Press.

Chavez Chavez, R. & O'Donnell, J. (Eds.) (1998). *Speaking the unpleasant: The politics*
> *of (non) engagement in the multicultural education terrain*. Albany: SUNY
> Press.[selected chapters]

Nieto, S. (1998). From claiming hegemony to sharing space: Creating community in
> multicultural courses. In R. Chavez Chavez & J. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Speaking the*

unpleasant: The politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education

terrain (pp. 16-31). Albany: SUNY Press.

O'Grady, C. R. (1998). Moving off center: Engaging white students in multicultural field

experiences. In R. Chavez Chavez & J. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Speaking the*

unpleasant: The politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education

terrain (pp. 211-228). Albany: SUNY Press.

Jackson, R. L. (1999). White space, white privilege: Mapping discursive inquiry into the

self. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 85*, 38-54.

Johnson, P. C. (1999). Reflections on critical white(ness) studies. In T. K. Nakayama &

J. N. Martin (Eds.), *Whiteness: The communication of social* identity (pp. 1-9).

Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Treinen, K. P., & Warren, J. T. (2001). Antiracist pedagogy in the basic course: Teaching

cultural communication as if whiteness matters. *Basic Course Annual, 13*, 46-75.

Activities

- In dyads, discuss your reaction to Churchill's and McIntosh's arguments. In what ways do you agree with these two researchers? In what ways do you disagree with these researchers?

- In small groups of three, discuss antiracist pedagogy. What is antiracist pedagogy? What are the goals of antiracist pedagogy? How can you implement antiracist pedagogy in your classroom?

- In small groups of three, discuss the implications of antiracist pedagogy for the basic oral communication course/ another communication course you have taught/taken.

Unit IV: Culturally Relevant Teaching [Week 13-16]

This unit will consist of synthesizing the at-risk theory, the critical pedagogical research and antiracist research together. Culturally relevant teaching will be the theme for this unit. In other words, this unit will act as a summary for the course. A major influence for this unit will be Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) book, *Dreamkeepers*. In the book, she suggests that "we must not legitimate the inequity that exists in the nation's schools, but attempt to delegitimate it by placing it under scrutiny" (p. 130). Students will explore the connections between critical pedagogy and antiracist pedagogy as sources for systematic change in the lives of those students who have been labeled "at-risk."

Tentative Readings.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom.* (pp. 167-183). New York: The New Press.

Darder, A. (1995). Buscando America: The contributions of critical Latino educators to the academic development and empowerment of Latino students in the U.S. In C.E. Sleeter & P. L. McLaren (Eds.), *Multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and the politics of difference* (pp. 319-347). Albany: SUNY Press.

Activities.

- In groups, discuss Ladson-Billings' definition of culturally relevant teaching.

- Explain the educational implications of her argument. How does Delpit's argument reflect Ladson-Billings' idea of culturally relevant teaching?

- Analyze the SPEE 100/SPEE 102 courses taught at MSU, M. What communication style is privileged? Indicate four reasons for your assertion. What are the implications for students of your findings?

Course Assignments

1. Online Discussions: Students will be required to enroll in the course management system, such as Desire2Learn (which is free of charge and used to administer classes online). After enrolled, students will be required to take part in online discussions twice weekly where they can ask and answer questions about the readings for the week.

2. At-Risk Project: Students will be placed in groups of three. They will be asked to identify and research the resources on campus that are designed to help the academically at-risk student. Each student in the group should collect literature, brochures, and statements in the university literature about the program. Students will be asked to analyze the material and determine if the service provided is based out of the epidemiological models of at-risk or the ecological models of at-risk.

3. Discussion Facilitation: Each student will be responsible for leading the class discussion on the material presented in class. The majority of the students that might enroll in this course are teachers, or will be teachers in the near future, one skill that all teachers need to develop is group discussion facilitation. Therefore, each student in the course will be asked to present an article or chapter that we are reading and construct an activity, discussion, or lecture that will give us a clearer understanding of the material.

4. Reaction Papers: Students will complete four reaction papers during the course of the semester. Each paper will be due following the completion of a unit in order to help students

synthesize the material for each unit. For instance, the first reaction paper will ask students to articulate their teaching philosophy in light of the at-risk research.

Conclusion

The course described in this paper fills a gap that is needed in the field of communication – that of exploring the ways in which at-risk students could benefit from a critical approach to classroom teaching. The lack of meaningful representations of non-white students in our schools causes many students to be placed academically at risk in our classrooms. The plight of these students has prompted me to engage in research that crosses theoretical boundaries in order to provide students with the most effective education. My past research has suggested that students labeled as academically at-risk would benefit from combining the at-risk and antiracist theory. The course described in this paper is not an end; rather, it is a means to continuing the dialogue concerning new approaches to educating graduate teaching assistants as well as new approaches to teaching students who have been labeled academically at-risk.

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Chesebro, J., McCroskey, J. C., Atwater, D. F., Bahrenfuss, R. M., Cawelti, G., Gaudino,

J. L., & Hodges, H. (1992). Communication apprehension and self-perceived

communication competence of at-risk students. *Communication Education, 41*,

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education. In S. Jackson & J. Solis (Eds.), *Beyond comfort zones in*

multiculturalism: confronting the politics of privilege. Westport, CT: Bergin and

Garvey.

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the academic development and empowerment of Latino students in the U.S. In

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and the politics of difference (pp. 319-347). Albany: SUNY Press.

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183). New York: The New Press.

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