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Volume 5

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Contents

Editorial Board v

Introduction

Editor's Note: The Year 2020: Crisis and Opportunity 1
Deanna D. Sellnow, University of Central Florida

Invited Forum: Pandemic Pedagogy

What COVID-19 Taught Us About Pedagogy and Social Justice—Pandemic or Not 4
Brandi Lawless, University of San Francisco
Yea-Wen Chen, San Diego State University

Community Colleges and COVID-19: An Exploration of Challenges and Inequities 11
Tammy L. Bosley, Lorain County Community College
Holly R. Custer, Lorain County Community College

Unpacking Privilege in Pandemic Pedagogy: Social Media Debates on Power Dynamics of Online Education 17
Roy Schwartzman, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The Other Side of 2020: Questioning Everything—Doing Something 25
Adam W. Tyma, University of Nebraska Omaha

Invited Forum: Social Justice

Connection Over Correction: Engaging Students in Conversational Commitments for Effective Communication Across Difference and Difficulty 31
Jennifer Sandoval, University of Central Florida

Pedagogy, Protests, and Moving Toward Progress 40
Nannetta Durnell-Uwechue, Florida Atlantic University
Deandre J. Poole, Florida Atlantic University
Felton O. Best, Central Connecticut State University

"No Justice, No Peace": Yard Signs as Public Pedagogy and Community Engagement at the Intersection of Public Health Crises 48
Brigitte Mussack, University of Minnesota

Invisibility as Modern Racism: Redressing the Experience of Indigenous Learners in Higher Education 55
Amy R. May, University of Alaska Fairbanks
Victoria McDermott, University of Maryland and University of Alaska Fairbanks

Original Research Studies

"It's Been a Good Reminder That Students Are Human Beings": An Exploratory Inquiry of Instructors' Rhetorical and Relational Goals During COVID-19 62
Victoria McDermott, University of Maryland
Drew T. Ashby-King, University of Maryland

Reflexivity and Practice in COVID-19: Qualitative Analysis of Student Responses to Improvisation in Their Research Methods Course 78
Elizabeth Spradley, Stephen F. Austin State University
R. Tyler Spradley, Stephen F. Austin State University

Pandemic Pedagogy: Elements of Online Supportive Course Design 95
Nate S. Brophy, George Mason University
Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post, George Mason University
Karin Nordin, George Mason University
Angela D. Miller, George Mason University
Michelle M. Buehl, George Mason University
Jeff Vomund, George Mason University

"Minor Setback, Major Comeback": A Multilevel Approach to the Development of Academic Resilience 115
Brandi N. Frisby, University of Kentucky
Jessalyn I. Vallade, University of Kentucky

Best Practices

Toward a New Community of Care: Best Practices for Educators and Administrators During the COVID-19 Pandemic 135
Cody M. Clemens, Marietta College
Tomeka M. Robinson, Hofstra University

Encouraging College Student Democratic Engagement Through a Collaborative Voter Mobilization Project 143
Angela M. McGowan-Kirsch, The State University of New York at Fredonia

Reflective Essays

Toward an Invitational Andragogy: Articulating a Teaching Philosophy for the Andragogic Classroom 156
Whitney Tipton, University of Indianapolis
Stephanie Wideman, University of Indianapolis

Lessons From the Pandemic: Engaging Wicked Problems With Transdisciplinary Deliberation **164**
Miles C. Coleman, Rowan University
Susana C. Santos, Rowan University
Joy M. Cypher, Rowan University
Claude Krummenacher, Rowan University
Robert Fleming, Rowan University

A Professing Parent's Reflection on the COVID Classroom and Research Illustrates the Full Utility of Communication Pedagogy **172**
Robin Smith Mathis, Kennesaw State University

Journal of Communication Pedagogy
2021, Vol. 5, 1–3
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Editor's Note to Volume 5 of the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*

The Year 2020: Crisis and Opportunity

Deanna D. Sellnow

On March 12, 2020, "America shut down" (McCaskill, 2020) in an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID-19. By the end of the month, President Trump had declared a national emergency and issued a travel ban, 32 of the 50 states had locked down, and nearly one million cases of coronavirus had been reported worldwide (Hollingsworth et al., 2020). For faculty, staff, and students in higher education, classes abruptly shifted to remote learning in a matter of days. Teachers that had never taught online were required to do so regardless of their experience or training. Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic also prompted a crisis in higher education.

On May 25, 2020, a Minneapolis police officer (Derek Chauvin) murdered George Floyd (a 46-year-old Black man) by pinning him to the ground and kneeling on his neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. Recordings of the murder captured by bystanders went viral on social media and protests promoting "Black Lives Matter" erupted worldwide. The event exposed the ugly reality of ongoing and pervasive racial injustice in the United States.

On July 17, 2020, U.S. Congressman and civil rights activist John Lewis (one of the original 13 Freedom Riders) died. Just before he died, he issued a call to action in a statement he made on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama: "get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and redeem the soul of America" (Ray, 2020, para. 1). These events compelled many instructional communication scholar-teachers to revisit what and how we teach. What can we, should we, and must we do to right the wrongs of systemic racism and social injustice via our places of privilege in the professoriate? Clearly, this series of events signaled another crisis point and opportunity in higher education.

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This special issue of the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy* reflects our attempt to turn these crises points into catalysts for positive change. Thus, we open with two sets of invited reflective essays, one on “pandemic pedagogy” and the other on “social justice pedagogy.”

Regarding pandemic pedagogy, for example, Lawless and Chen highlight how the pandemic exposed pervasive inequities as a foundation for pedagogical best practices for addressing social justice issues in our classes. Bosley and Custer focus more specifically on the inequities exposed by the pandemic for community college instructors and students. Next, Schwartzman, creator of the “Pandemic Pedagogy” Facebook mega-group, exposes disparities brought to light during the pandemic and cautions us to learn from the experience and not revert to *business as usual* once the crisis abates. Finally, Tyma pushes this call to action further in his essay aptly titled, “The other side of 2020: Questioning everything—doing something.”

The essays on social justice begin with a thoughtful commentary by Sandoval focused on engaging students across difference and difficulty. Durnell-Uwechue and colleagues follow with their essay exploring humanistic and pragmatic approaches for addressing race and social justice in classroom discussions, and Mussack examines the potential role of yard signs as a form of community engagement during a public health crisis. Finally, May and McDermott highlight institutional inequities force on First Nation Peoples and how we might adjust our curricula and pedagogy to better reflect intercultural communication competence.

In this particular issue, we also offer four thought-provoking original research studies, two best practices essays, and three reflective essays challenging our taken-for-granted assumptions about instructional communication, communication pedagogy, and the realities of students’ lived experiences. The research studies range from exploring instructors’ rhetorical and relational goals during COVID-19 (McDermott et al.) to reflexivity in research methods courses (Spradley et al.) to online course design (Brophy et al.) to academic resilience (Frisby & Vallade). Best practices focus on creating communities of care (Clemens) and encouraging voter mobilization (McGowan-Krisch). We end with three reflective essays that challenge us to consider transforming our teaching philosophies toward invitational andragogy (Tipton), transdisciplinary deliberation (Coleman), and a reflexive examination of a professing parent navigating the pandemic as an academic and a parent (Mathis).

Together, these articles promote a call to be allies for social justice in our roles as communication teachers and instructional communication scholars. In that sense, perhaps this is a small silver lining in the series of crises we will remember forever as “the year of COVID.” As Tyma, professor at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, aptly put it:

> We should never tell our students what to think—but we definitely can and should be helping them figure out what to think about, talk about, and do something about . . . [we] damn well better, otherwise what is it all for?

I agree. Because we *can* do something, we *must* do something . . . because doing nothing is simply not an option.

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What COVID-19 Taught Us About Pedagogy and Social Justice—Pandemic or Not

Brandi Lawless and Yea-Wen Chen

Keywords: instructional communication, crisis communication, social justice, pandemic pedagogy, critical pedagogy

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic (in conjunction with the Black Lives Matter Movement) exposed pervasive inequities, challenges, and opportunities to explore and implement "best" pedagogical practices to improve how we address social justice issues. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified intergenerational gaps for the already vulnerable, under-resourced, and marginalized in our society. In response, we propose four "best practices" to embrace in our classrooms. These are: (a) fostering flexibility to bridge equity gaps; (b) rethinking the pedagogical panopticon; (c) emphasizing listening to and affirming students' struggles; and (d) employing student-centered accountability. The authors detail some specific inequalities that were brought to the surface during the Spring and Summer of 2020, offer "best practices" in response to such inequities, and stress the need for a student-centered pedagogy that serves to improve teaching and learning not just during a crisis, but also in semesters and years to come.

With the onset of school shutdowns in March 2020, social media groups such as "Pandemic Pedagogy" and "Comm Studies Online Pedagogy" emerged to discuss "best practice" pedagogies in remote instruction. Essentially, these groups provided a forum to debate best practices in terms of delivery (e.g., should classes be synchronous or asynchronous) and content, particularly in response to the social justice issues exposed during the wave of Black Lives Matter protests. These conversations tend to be grounded in an assumption that pandemic pedagogy is a temporary solution to managing education during a unique crisis situation. In this essay, we argue that the COVID-19 crisis exposed and perpetuated inequities that

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already pervade the landscape of higher education. Consequently, we propose "best practices" that are not only ideal for improving higher education pedagogies during this crisis event, but also post-crisis. These include: (a) fostering flexibility to bridge equity gaps; (b) rethinking the pedagogical panopticon; (c) listening to and affirming student struggles; and (d) employing student-centered accountability. In doing so, we provide a framework for fostering resilience during the current crisis and permanently shifting our pedagogies toward social justice pedagogies long after the crisis has been resolved.

Fostering Flexibility to Bridge Equity Gaps

Although the COVID-19 pandemic made systemic inequities in higher education more visible, these inequities undoubtedly existed long before the pandemic. In fact, more than 19 million U.S. Americans lack basic access to broadband internet and many more lack *reliable* access (Federal Communications Commission, 2019). Rural communities are hit the hardest, and rising unemployment rates will likely lead to loss of internet as an essential service for low-income and unemployed U.S. Americans.[1] Findings from the Pew Research Center also report that Blacks and Hispanics are far less likely than Whites to have a computer at home, forcing them to rely on smartphones to fill the digital divide (Atske & Perrin, 2021). As a California State Representative explained in her arguments for a bill that would help close the digital divide among college students:

> Even before the pandemic, access to the internet was a necessity for students to enroll in classes, research, write papers, and communicate with professors and peers. Now, high-speed internet is a requirement for attending lectures, reviewing class materials, and submitting assignments. If you lack a strong internet connection, you can't participate in a class conducted on Zoom. (Eshoo, 2020, para. 7)

Put simply, students at colleges and universities are facing wage reductions and rising tuition costs without guaranteed access to the tools necessary to level the educational playing field. These inequities have historically impacted graduation rates for students of color and those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Stout et al., 2018). Moreover, "COVID-19's impact on students from low-income families and underrepresented minorities will continue to resound at universities for a decade or more because of its effects on K-12 students" (Levander & Decherney, 2020, para. 7). For the foreseeable future, we must rethink our policies and practices in light of accessibility and economic disparities, as well as mental health implications made transparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

One way to address social inequities is to be flexible when, for instance, (a) designing assignments, (b) setting deadlines, and (c) requiring educational reading materials.

First, instructors need to think outside the (in)box when it comes to assignments. For example, using Google Voice would allow students without access to a computer (or a smartphone) and/or reliable internet to write rather than type their assignments then audio record them for their instructors. Such an approach would increase access for a group of students who may not consistently have access to a computer. Moreover, creating multiple assignment option platforms (e.g., electronically submitted papers, video recorded performances, web form submissions, voice recorded oral histories, etc.) and flexible assignment deadlines would also address inequities based on computer and internet access.

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[1] Chief Data Analytics Officer for Microsoft, Kahan (2019) found that "counties with the highest unemployment also have the lowest broadband usage (and broadband access)" (para. 2).

Second, the collective trauma experienced as a result of this prolonged crisis event (Watson et al., 2020) will have long-lasting effects on students and faculty. The rigidity with which we implement policies such as deadlines needs to be reconsidered. While setting and achieving deadlines is an important skill, so is balancing mental health, supplementing income with (sometimes multiple) jobs, and general self-care.

Third, it would behoove us to consider flexibility with our expectations for purchasing texts. For example, students can use open-access resources at no cost. As we plunge into a recession, more underserved and underrepresented populations will return to higher education as a stop gap or as a place to increase their human capital. We have a very real opportunity to increase access to education for these students by using our college or university resources and tapping into collective knowledge. For those students who have less reliable internet, holding extra copies of print texts at the library and in the instructor's office for loan can alleviate financial and mental strain, as well.

Rethinking the Pedagogical Panopticon

Another way to address social inequities is rooted in the current pedagogical panopticon—a system of strategies that allow instructors to oversee what their students are doing as participants in the classroom. At deeper ideological levels, taken-for-granted beliefs and hidden ideologies shape how the pedagogical panopticon functions at any given time. Some examples are White supremacy, institutionalized racism, and neoliberal multiculturalism. To illustrate, under the patterns of White supremacy and institutionalized racism, Smith (2004) describes the college classroom as "a racial theater of contentious, racially primed, White students positioned to unleash their racial weapons (read: discourse and attitudes) of destruction" against Black and other instructors of color (p. 180). The panopticon, a concept originally theorized by Jeremy Bentham, was later used by Foucault (1977) to describe systems of power and discipline. Like a watchtower in a prison yard, the prisoners always assume that they are being watched and should act accordingly. When applied to the classroom, certain practices and policies are implemented simply to enforce power and discipline. Longstanding practices might include Turnitin plagiarism checkers, student usage reports on learning management systems, and physical exam proctors. It has even been suggested that facial recognition software can be used to monitor students' level of engagement (Andrejevic & Selwyn, 2019).

The panopticon has been blown out of proportion in remote learning settings. First, many educators have been encouraged to use lockdown browsers, such as Respondus or Proctorio, to record students with a webcam while taking their exam in real time. However, ongoing research about facial recognition software has found extreme racial and gender bias. One such study found a .8% error rate for light-skinned males compared to 34.7% for dark-skinned females (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018). Additionally, the privacy implications for a program that records suspicious noises and movement disproportionately affects already marginalized groups. As Swauger (2020) explains, settings that flag loud noises or leaving a room, "disproportionately impact women who typically take on the majority of childcare, breastfeeding, lactation, and caretaking roles for their families" (p. 55). Swauger also notes that students with physical injuries, visual impairment, and non-neurotypical behaviors are also likely to be flagged as suspicious based on the tool's algorithm.

These same privacy issues call into question the practice of asking remote, synchronous learners to turn their cameras on for the duration of class. While the expectation may be to treat students as if they were attending class in person, the aforementioned economic challenges, exacerbated by the fact that many students have been sent to unsafe homes (e.g., domestic violence, food insecurity, lack of sanitation), make this policy a social justice issue. Student access to education should not come at the cost of privacy and safety.

To counter these panoptical pedagogies, we must rethink ways to assess what we are teaching students that can persist beyond the era of remote education. Darby (2020) suggests that a simple discussion forum may be a great equalizer. As Darby explains, this space allows students to submit their contribution at any time, not requiring them to show their physical space, and still creates a way for students to stay engaged in the process. Darby further notes that it is important to have a structure and a presence in these online discussions. Discussion forums address the question of engagement without requiring optical presence in synchronous spaces or exam proctoring software. In addition to discussion forums, instructors can offer multiple options for assignments. For example, students might choose to write a short reflection paper or create an analytical podcast. Creating multiple options limits the likelihood of plagiarism, while eliminating the virtual panopticon described above.

Listening to and Affirming Student Struggles

A third way to improve best practices that was exposed as a result of the pandemic is rooted in mental health issues that pervade experiences of students and faculty. These issues are exacerbated for people and groups facing the multifaceted implications of this pandemic ranging from food scarcity and health disparity to employment inequities (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). Moreover, while COVID-19 has shone a spotlight on some struggles, many of them are *unseen* ones that do not necessarily present themselves on Zoom. Furthermore, underrepresented and marginalized students often do not feel comfortable voicing their concerns, needs, or struggles. Perhaps the most looming contributor to ongoing stress is mental wellness, which becomes even more challenging for those already fighting racial battle fatigue—unpacking "the physiological, psychological, and behavioral strain exacted on racially marginalized and stigmatized groups that the amount of energy they expend coping with and fighting against racism" (Smith, 2008, p. 617).

Depression and anxiety have been steadily increasing for college students worldwide (Auerbach et al., 2018) and U.S. Americans more generally (American College Health Association, 2018). The pandemic has added social isolation and trauma to the list of mental health concerns afflicting students. Campus services for students with disabilities have long encouraged faculty to have flexible attendance policies, alternative assignments, and moving due dates to accommodate the impact of mental health on students' studies. However, a growing tendency to disbelieve and even stigmatize student mental health issues had led to under-reporting by students (Greenbaum et al., 1995; Lawless, 2020; Quick et al., 2003). We argue that this under-reporting has been exacerbated by the pandemic. As Williams and Reetz (2020) explain:

> Demands for mental-health care already overmatched campus counseling services and structures, long before anyone heard the word 'coronavirus.' Students with anxiety, depression, and grief—in the wake of months of loss and uncertainty—will present both clinical and capacity challenges for institutions. Some students who have never sought counseling before may be in desperate need of support in the Fall [2020]. (para. 3)

Given the undeniable impact of mental health issues on entire academic communities, we must reflect on and modify our general communication about mental illness, immediacy behaviors, and trust-building techniques. Even in the wake of our own traumas, our power-ridden instinct might be to suggest that everyone pull together and accomplish a list of tasks. This approach is inherently privileged and can result in *epistemological incongruence* for students struggling with mental health and illness (Lawless, 2020). We have a responsibility, in the wake of inequitable access to resources, to listen to our students' needs, accommodate when we can, and engage in critical reflexivity about our own assumptions and biases around mental illness.

Employing Student-Centered Accountability

Even though universities are often *imagined* as liberal spaces where faculty and students support diversity and engage in intellectually stimulating activities with respect, the reality—especially for faculty, staff, and students from minoritized groups—is that "universities may be the last bastion of elitism and sanctioned racism in the United States" (Niemann et al., 2020, p. 3). As disheartening as this may sound, it is sobering to understand this as the context in which we promote social justice within U.S. colleges and universities, particularly during a time of both the COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter protests.

When thinking about social justice as a co-created goal and process in the moment of pandemic pedagogy with widening equity gaps and looming austerity, we wonder specifically what it means to promote and advocate for social justice within our classes without it becoming "rhetoric without accountability that ends up being meaningless" (Niemann et al., 2020, p. 4). In spring and summer of 2020, we observed a popular move by those running centers for teaching and learning to offer a collection of diversity reading resources for instructors to consider as a means to address social justice issues. Yet, we both recall feeling overwhelmed as we juggled work, childcare, homeschooling, and mental health self-care. To be honest, we were so overwhelmed that finding time to browse the resources and links provided was not realistic. What can providing lists, links, or collections of resources do for social justice at an uncertain time? Moreover, list-making strategies that prioritize certain options and resources over others might function to demystify the struggles rather than shine a spotlight on critical issues that require attention, conversation, and critical engagement. Similarly, Fujiwara (2020) describes her experience with administrators engaging in "*a diversity shuffle* whereby they created overly complex, meaningless diversity plans with lots of pages, categories, tables, and charts . . . Because they knew so little about institutional racism, they thought those efforts were sufficient, that their diversity work was done" (p. 113). This COVID-19 moment serves a critical reminder that we ought to work with our students to dismantle institutional and structural racism.

At a time of political polarization, division, and toxicity under the Trump Administration, we realize that collaboration might be the best antidote. Thus, we advocate for collaborative approaches to social justice that underscores the *social* in social justice. In addition to social justice being a co-created goal and process, *social* justice amplifies that a *social* and *justice-governed* process requires community building to sustain ourselves through (un)anticipated battle fatigues. Pedagogically, a social and justice-governed process in the classroom considers participants' salient social identities, attends to how power circulates and organizes social dynamics within the classroom, and works toward challenging inequalities enabled/constrained by unequal social systems, particularly (anti-Black) racism.

Manzo (2020) states that "advocacy for racial equity cannot be done without the support of Faculty of Color, and without supporting them in return" (p. 290). One way of ensuring that social justice in the classroom is not just empty or meaningless rhetoric, or becoming "a diversity shuffle" (Fujiwara, 2020, p. 113), is to co-create realistic goals, processes, and practices with the voices and struggles of minoritized students at the center. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this could mean surveying students' needs and concerns prior to the start of the term, designing the course with such needs and concerns in mind, and frequently checking in with students in more precarious, unstable, and insecure positions. Such practices can pave the way for greater accountability and more equity-minded practices in a post-pandemic academia.

Conclusion

The practices we propose here are not necessarily novel. However, the events and implications of COVID-19 serve as reminders regarding what is truly important in our classrooms. Rather than submitting to a mode of pandemic thinking that encourages reactionary decision-making, we argue that the current political and social moment creates an opportunity for us to pause, re-evaluate, and re-center our teaching practices with realistic accountability for social justice. The COVID-19 pandemic in conjunction with the Black Lives Matter Movement has exacerbated issues that were already present and will persist long after a turn toward normalcy. As such, we offer these "best practices" in hopes that they will inform long-term pedagogical practices in ways that reduce disparities and promote equity and inclusion.

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INVITED FORUM: PANDEMIC PEDAGOGY

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Community Colleges and COVID-19: An Exploration of Challenges and Inequities

Tammy L. Bosley and Holly R. Custer

Keywords: community colleges, instructional communication, online learning, inequities, COVID-19, adjunct faculty

Abstract: COVID-19 drastically changed many aspects of life in the U.S. and most certainly changed standard operating procedures in higher education. Moving all classes completely online created numerous challenges not only for students, but also for faculty. For students, these challenges included issues related to physical and mental health, job loss, and caregiving, as well as access to internet and even access to a home computer. Faculty also faced challenges. For example, many colleges and universities rely on adjunct faculty who are compensated on a course-by-course basis. Although most institutions provided faculty development sessions to make a smooth transition to online teaching, adjunct faculty were not necessarily invited to participate and, when they were, they were not compensated for time spent in these sessions or the additional work incurred to transition and teach in the online environment. This essay explores how community college students and faculty in the basic course responded to the COVID-19 crisis. Specifically, we discuss issues of employment, family responsibilities, and the digital divide as they reveal systemic inequities in the college setting, as well as in society.

Community colleges provide two key professional development opportunities for students: (1) occupational training to advance career opportunities and (2) academic education in preparation for transferring to a 4-year institution. These opportunities fill an essential need for students who lack financial resources and/or academic credentials to attend a public or private university for 4+ years. Harbour and Smith (2016) explain that community colleges exist to serve these key demands of society.

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In this sense, they are the bedrock of their communities as administration, faculty, and staff respond to the needs of the time.

COVID-19 introduced a need that community colleges had not previously faced. As was the case in most if not all higher education institutions, all instructors were forced to transition their classes quickly to online delivery in March 2020. Although online teaching and learning was not new to our institution, we had never faced the challenge of offering all of our courses fully online, not to mention all student services, administrative needs, and staff roles. Furthermore, this monumental transition took place in under 14 days.

In this essay, we explore some of the ways COVID-19 affected community college students and faculty. More specifically, we examine challenges faced by students and adjunct faculty members, especially those that perpetuated inequities. Because both authors are faculty at this community college, we were afforded the unique opportunity to be participant observers as problems unfolded during the crisis. We arrange our account in two main areas: community college student challenges and community college faculty challenges.

Community College Student Challenges

As Fong et al. (2017) reported, compared to their 4-year college counterparts, community college students are more likely to be first-generation, non-White, lower income, working (full- or part-time), and generally non-traditional (i.e., age 28 and older). This is particularly important since statistics show that students in these demographics are at higher risk for contracting and spreading COVID-19 than the majority of 4-year college and university students. To clarify, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2020) reported that people of color and lower socioeconomic status (SES), as well as essential workers were disproportionately affected by the virus.

Certainly, these higher risk factors increased anxiety among community college students attending our institution. For example, some students feared exposing their grandparents to the virus since they live in the same house. Unfortunately, many of these same students were also employed as essential workers (e.g., grocery store checkers, baggers), which increased the chances that they could infect their grandparents.

Moreover, these community college students also faced financial challenges. Whereas some students expressed anxiety about being essential workers, others worked in service professions (e.g., restaurant workers, retail clerks) and were furloughed or terminated as a result of health and safety restrictions imposed on small businesses. Another challenge imposed on many community college students was access to computers and reliable internet at home (Barzilai-Nahon, 2006, p. 269). To clarify, because the computer labs were closed, students that relied on lab computers with reliable internet, many could not complete assignments. Furthermore, many of the students that reported having a computer and internet access in their homes explained that the entire family had to share a single device. Imagine the complications of working from home, managing children's K-12 online learning, and completing online college courses on a single personal computer. Certainly, the digital divide was felt acutely among students at our community college during COVID-19.

Our institution responded to the digital divide challenges associated with computer and internet accessibility in two important ways. First, the college's Advocacy and Resource Center (ARC) made small grants available to purchase digital equipment. Second, the IT department loaned refurbished computers to students to use at home. Not all students took advantage of these affordances and, instead, relied on their smartphones to complete online assignments. Although simple assignments (e.g., discussion posts) can be completed via most smartphones, other assignments (e.g., papers, tests, recorded speeches) are not a good fit for this platform. Editing features are limited on smartphones, small screen size makes it difficult to read test questions, and slow processing speeds and battery life make extended use nearly impossible. Consequently, students that relied on smartphones were put at a disadvantage that resulted in much lower scores than their classmates with computer and internet access.

In addition to these aforementioned problems, even when computer and internet access was available, many students had never used the college's learning management system (LMS). To clarify, colleges and universities have been offering online classes for years (Kentnor, 2015). However, many students at our community college had never participated in online learning prior to the pandemic. To address this challenge, our community college offered student training sessions through the eLearning Department. They offered these opportunities in a number of formats (e.g., drop-in labs, traditional staff-led workshops, one-on-one appointments, and both synchronous and asynchronous online training videos).

These institutional level affordances were helpful to some extent; however, students also faced challenges on a course-by-course basis. One particularly difficult transition occurred in the skills-based Basic Communication course. Based on guaranteed transfer agreements by the State, this course must include teaching and learning in communication theory; interpersonal communication; researched informative, persuasive, and group speeches; as well as an impromptu speech and two exams.

In the year prior to the transition to online learning brought about during COVID-19, the Communication Studies Program Coordinator (also one of the authors of this essay), developed a fully online version of the Basic Course. Through a partnership with the college's eLearning Division and Quality Matters (QM), the online version of the Basic Course went through a rigorous process to provide a class that students could successfully complete while remaining engaged with their peers and audience members to fulfill the standards of the class. The final version of the online class was offered for three semesters prior to the pandemic. The original plan was to train adjunct faculty how to teach the Basic Course online using this class as a model. However, the pandemic accelerated that process not just for adjuncts but for all faculty.

Having a fully online Basic Course available as a model for all instructors certainly helped eased some of the difficulties involved in transitioning face-to-face courses into fully online ones. For instance, the class included a recording platform for presentations that worked on smartphones and computers. This platform also allowed students to complete a group project in the same online space, eliminating the need to meet face-to-face. Additionally, all assignments, rubrics, audio lectures, and exams were already in place for students to access. Moreover, the college embedded WebEx into the LMS for all classes so that students could meet with their instructors as needed.

Although helpful, this preparedness did not yield a seamless transition for students. As previously mentioned, not all students had access (or only had limited access) to computers and the internet. Digital fatigue was also an issue. Living life fully online 24/7 proved to be overwhelming for students. Some students claimed it was too difficult to schedule a virtual out-of-class meeting with the instructor or their classmates. Thus, many students relied on the telephone to keep them connected and moving forward successfully.

Another problem with transitioning the Basic Communication course to an online one was the need to have an audience when giving speeches. Given State mandates, COVID-19 risk factors, employment issues, and family responsibilities, it simply was not possible to require students to gather a face-to-face audience for their presentations. Although students did learn important skills about developing and delivering speeches on-camera, they were not afforded an opportunity to practice skills that are easily incorporated into a face-to-face speech event (e.g., answering questions, managing feedback, connecting with the people). Arguably, most students did complete the Basic Communication course; however, doing so did come at the expense of some student learning outcomes.

Community College Faculty Challenges

It is no secret that many institutions rely on adjunct faculty to keep tuition rates low. Although the practice of hiring part-time faculty occurs in both 2-year and 4-year colleges, this practice is arguably more pronounced at community colleges. For example, adjunct hiring rates rose over 104% across institutions between 1993–2013, bringing the full-time to part-time ratio at community colleges to 1:2 (National Education Statistics as cited in Xu, 2019). Unlike their full-time cohorts, “part-time faculty are less knowledgeable about college services and resources; frequently lack access to an office space, phone line, or computer; have fewer professional relationships with colleagues; and often struggle financially as a result of low pay” (Bickerstaff & Ran, 2020, p. 3). Furthermore, in the authors’ region, many adjuncts teach at multiple colleges with an average course load ranging from 12–27 ILUs. This disparity is further extended by minimal to no access to health-care benefits.

For adjunct instructors, the landscape of their career in higher education consists of teaching multiple courses at multiple institutions for much less than that of their full-time faculty colleagues. When COVID-19 forced higher learning institutions to transition immediately to online coursework only, adjunct faculty felt a burden perhaps higher than traditional faculty. This added workload meant more work for no additional pay, learning multiple online course management tools used at the different institutions where they were employed, and trying to work with administrations who struggled to aid even their full-time employees.

Adjunct faculty are paid less than minimum wage per course taught when preparation and grading time are included. Moreover, many institutions limit the number of courses one adjunct may teach to avoid paying for health care. Consequently, many adjunct faculty teach at multiple institutions simultaneously simply to earn enough to make ends meet. One author of this essay often teaches five courses per semester at multiple institutions that amounts to 100+ students in these speaking and writing intensive courses. A typical workweek (including preparation and grading time) ranges from 60–70 hours.

When the pandemic caused all coursework to transition to online delivery, all faculty including adjuncts had to learn quickly to teach online. Although some had some training, not all did. Moreover, the colleges did not offer additional pay for adjuncts that had to add training to their schedules. Essentially, all faculty including adjuncts were trying to learn to use the digital tools to teach online, as well as the new digital resources students would be using. For adjuncts, this came with limited to no training in how to teach online, how to use the new student tools, and what affordances those tools offered. Unfortunately, with COVID-19, all faculty, staff, and administrators were overwhelmed. Consequently, when adjuncts reached out for help regarding how to access and use these new tools, they often waited days or even weeks for a response. Meanwhile, when students rightly looked to their instructors for guidance, many adjuncts felt ill-prepared to meet their needs even though they wanted to do so.

To this end, students were having a difficult time managing challenges brought on with the pandemic. Thus, they begged for deadline extensions, offered multiple excuses for late work, and sought numerous exceptions to classroom rules. Admittedly, their lives had been turned upside down. However, these requests by so many students undoubtedly took a toll on the instructors. For instructors with policies not to accept late work, it was difficult to do so even when mandated by the institution. For instructors, the goal shifted from achieving student learning outcomes to merely getting students through the semester. Moreover, both students and faculty felt a strain on physical and mental health. Students reached out to faculty with questions at all hours of the day and night, and faculty felt obligated to answer as quickly as possible. This onus meant checking email at all hours and, when we took too long to respond, students reached out again, either to their instructor or to someone in a higher position. Worse yet, they stopped responding altogether. Instructors expressed stress about questions such as: Did I do everything I could? Did I say the right words to help my student? Is it my fault they are not responding? What if . . . what if . . . ? All faculty—not just adjuncts—were feeling the strain.

Faculty in general and adjunct faculty in particular complained about being overwhelmed, feeling inadequate, and experiencing mental and physical exhaustion . . . all for the same paycheck they had been receiving before the pandemic. Stress was at an all-time high for adjuncts trying to balance their own well-being with limited or no health care while, simultaneously, caring for the health, well-being, and success of their students.

COVID-19 changed the lives of most Americans. Those working as instructors in higher education were no exception. Students coped with issues related to internet access, employment, caregiving, and maintaining their own physical and mental health. Instructors had to quickly learn new ways of teaching and learning while trying to maintain their own physical and mental health. Adjunct faculty faced all these same challenges while working at multiple institutions, managing significant course loads, and earning substandard pay per course. Although the higher education landscape is likely to be forever changed by the pandemic, one thing did and will remain the same: the dedication of instructors to their students. Both full-time and adjunct instructors made the best of a terrible situation. Faculty are resilient as they strive tirelessly to teach students, mentor students, and foster student success. COVID-19 stripped many experiences from students and faculty during the spring 2020 semester, but COVID-19 also demonstrated how resilient faculty can be and are. That is a lesson for the ages.

Implications and Suggestions

As people discuss COVID-19, the tendency is to focus on the negative. However, that perspective is short-sighted. Although there were numerous challenges, students and faculty extended their knowledge and skill sets. For instance, digital communication improved. As faculty and students navigated email, WebEx, and Zoom they learned how to be appropriate and effective across platforms. Furthermore, communicating in these platforms fostered relationships despite continued campus closures. These relationships were and are important because through them, faculty learned about the inherent disparities students face. This realization led to the development of an equity task force on the authors' campus to improve teaching and learning.

College campuses will return to in-person learning. Yet, it would be a mistake to forget the lessons of the pandemic. Moving forward, equity work must continue. College administration should consider seminars where faculty and students can tell their pandemic stories. This opportunity could uncover meaningful ways to promote equity. Working from home versus on-campus should also be part of these conversations. It could be that allowing hybrid teaching and learning would be more equitable for faculty and students. For instance, there would be less commuting and more time with family. Institutions should also encourage language in the syllabus that allows instructors time to log off and disconnect so burnout is reduced (e.g., no answering email after 7:00 p.m.). It is imperative that we learn the lessons from COVID and use them to advance our educational atmosphere to be healthier and more equitable.

Conclusion

In sum, COVID-19 presented numerous ongoing challenges for both students and faculty teaching and learning in a community college. Despite these challenges, students and faculty persevered together to complete the semester. Nevertheless, this success came at a price in terms of workload, work-life balance, digital (a.k.a. Zoom) fatigue, as well as physical and mental health. Life will go on after the pandemic and we must take care of ourselves and our students as we prepare for that life.

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Unpacking Privilege in Pandemic Pedagogy: Social Media Debates on Power Dynamics of Online Education

Roy Schwartzman

Keywords: online education, instructional communication, pandemic pedagogy, social media, critical incident analysis, student engagement

Abstract: As one of the world's major social media hubs dedicated to online education during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Facebook mega-group *Pandemic Pedagogy* provides a panoramic perspective of the key concerns educators and students face amid a public health crisis that forces redefinition of what constitutes effective education. After several months of instruction under pandemic conditions, two central themes emerged as the most extensively discussed and the most intensively contested: (1) rigor versus accommodation in calibrating standards for students, and (2) ways to improve engagement during classes conducted through videoconferencing, especially via Zoom. Both themes reveal deeply embedded systems of privilege and marginalization in the structures and methods of online education. The pandemic starkly exposes disparities in access, equity, and inclusivity. Addressing these challenges will require explicit measures to acknowledge these power imbalances by rethinking what counts as effective teaching and learning rather than relying on institutions to revert to business as usual after this pandemic abates.

Introduction: From Interruption to Intervention

March 11, 2020: FULL STOP. That was the day face-to-face classroom instruction screeched to a halt at my university, suspending all classes for 1 week. During this time, all courses would transform into a fully online delivery mode as a way to protect students and teachers from the newly declared

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COVID-19 pandemic. Faculty were instructed to "put all your courses online." This imperative treats online instruction as if it were a spatial transfer, simply moving packaged goods from one shelf to another. Although the rapid, large-scale shift to online instruction began as an emergency stopgap, communication educators and students will continue to face the post-pandemic ramifications of more extensive and intensive incorporation of online instruction for years to come. Regardless of their experience in online teaching, instructors quickly realized that online represented more than merely the location of instructional content. The pandemic-induced disruptions forced faculty to reflect seriously on what counts as effective pedagogy and the role of communication in instruction.

Back to March 11th. That evening, I considered the magnitude of the task at hand. Two decades of designing and teaching fully online communication courses, including the performance-based fundamentals course, taught me that "putting courses online" even within the constraints of emergency remote teaching involves more than cosmetic alterations. The online environment presents a different media ecology, which explains why (once upon a time) instructors earned additional pay to redesign an existing face-to-face course into an online one.

To clarify, when I developed online versions of the communication fundamentals course a number of years ago, I was paid the equivalent of teaching an additional section. Other institutions typically provided something similar (e.g., one course release). The last time that happened for me was several years ago. Media ecology establishes, however, that educational technologies never operate as neutral content delivery mechanisms (Barnes & Strate, 1996). One does not simply "put an existing course online" because the online medium transforms the nature of the course and the teaching/learning experience (Dowd, 2016). Far from a mere interruption, educational pedagogy throughout and beyond the pandemic invites—no, demands—transformation of what communication instruction is and how it operates.

Faced with an emergency that required quick adaptation to remote delivery formats, faculty and staff across campus had to break through silos and work together to create and implement best—or at least viable—practices in remote and online learning environments. To foster communication across these divides, I created the Facebook group *Pandemic Pedagogy* (https://www.facebook.com/groups/pandemicpedagogy1). It would provide a forum for stakeholders across all levels and types of education to optimize teaching and learning throughout (and beyond) the pandemic. The group grew rapidly, with membership eventually stabilizing at more than 32,500 hailing from 99 countries and comprised of teachers, course designers, students, and others directly involved with educational practice. *Pandemic Pedagogy* provides a panoramic perspective of key issues the education community faces amid a public health crisis that forces redefinition of what constitutes effective instruction.

From Intervention to Interpretation

The following reflections stem from preliminary examination of emergent themes from the more than 1.4 million content items generated thus far in the *Pandemic Pedagogy* Facebook group. The reflections that follow employ critical incident analysis in teaching (CIAT) as developed by Tripp (1993). Critical incident analysis links stories of personal educational experiences with the deeper, structurally embedded forces that generate and perpetuate these episodes. CIAT proceeds through four kinds of judgments. Practical judgment involves narration of the event and the major challenges, questions, or decision points it poses. Diagnostic judgment includes the causes and consequences of the incident. Reflective judgment offers personal evaluations of the event and how it affects others as well as self. Critical judgment moves into meta-analysis by addressing who or what generates this type of incident. Through critical judgment, the personal incident can broaden into an archetypal experience that informs the professional practice of others.

Although CIAT begins as a self-reflective analytical procedure, it is particularly appropriate for application to social media communication contexts. The narration of an incident on social media constitutes an observable threshold for an incident to qualify as critical. The decision to share an incident on a platform with thousands of other educators worldwide demonstrates that the episode has more than personal importance and deserves public scrutiny. Subsequent interactions among group members enact diagnostic and reflective judgments, with the accumulating comments stimulating instructional improvement (Bruster & Peterson, 2013). Thus, this essay concentrates on connecting the practical with the critical by investigating the underlying power dynamics operant in the particular incidents. Tripp (1993) stresses the importance of driving analysis to this level because "we also have to locate responsibility on the system that has constructed the practices this teacher employed and which has also been primarily responsible for the construction of her view of these practices" (p. 122).

Posts and comments appearing most frequently are shown in the "top posts" area of Facebook's group administrator tools. Posts are ranked by the engagement they generate, operationalized as the number of comments and reactions. In addition to the amount of engagement to indicate breadth of impact, intensity of engagement was judged by tracking the topics that instigated conflicts so intense that members called for administrator intervention. The intersection of breadth and intensity yielded two themes that garnered the most attention: how to apply academic standards under pandemic conditions, and student (dis)engagement during class videoconferences (especially via Zoom).

Avoiding Rigor Mortis: Calibrating Standards

Every instructor hopes to embrace high standards for students. Throughout the pandemic, however, insistence on the same kinds of standards implemented the same way could prove grossly inappropriate. Adherence to rigidity may ossify the standards, failing to account for how the standards themselves may impose inequitable burdens. Even a policy as straightforward as an assignment due date ordinarily presumes a baseline availability of the resources and environment—such as the expensive computer labs that sat empty throughout most of the pandemic—to complete the work promptly and to specifications. Digital divides in online access and skill sets consistently track to race and culture (Reilly et al., 2017), and particularly to socioeconomic status (Morgan, 2020). In many online environments, students may be especially reticent to disclose cultural factors—such as low income reflected in the physical environment visible onscreen—that present barriers to learning.

The longer the pandemic-induced mode of education continues without addressing such inequities, the more these disparities will persist and potentially deepen achievement gaps. Many posts in *Pandemic Pedagogy* express concerns that students will fall behind not because they shirk coursework (as those students likely would perform poorly anyway), but because they lack the necessary means for engaging in their courses properly. Posts and comments inquire: To what extent are instructors evaluating the student's work, or are they evaluating how well a student can access the time, tools, and environment to produce high-quality work (Schwartzman, 2020b)?

Two of the intertwined themes that figure most prominently in *Pandemic Pedagogy* discussions revolve around communicative constructions of students: characterizing student motivations and calibrating assessment of student work. The portrayals of students range from casting them as manipulators who exploit the pandemic to describing them as adrift or traumatized from pandemic-related stressors. The manipulative image arises from descriptions of students who ask for exemptions from deadlines or from assignment requirements, attributing missing or shoddy work to nebulous pandemic factors. Group members respond by noting that students who lack the resources or opportunities for doing work properly may not disclose these deficits for fear of humiliation. Furthermore, insisting on full documentation of excuses during the pandemic could infringe on medical privacy or FERPA regulations if the rationale relates to contracting COVID-19.

Profiles of students as traumatized most poignantly emerge from (duly anonymized) notes of thanks from students who disclose the hardships they face. The rapid spread of the virus touched many students directly, as friends and family members suffered or died without any personal visitation allowed (due to threat of infection). Members generally prefer allowing for Type II errors, allowing some cases of manipulation to go undetected and unpunished. Anecdotal reports of student performance across various disciplines remain mixed, but turn decidedly more negative with final grade calculations at the end of each term. Most frequently, educators lament abnormally poor work from students, but they also acknowledge that the stress from the pandemic could have taken its toll. Other instructors celebrate high student achievement, suggesting that some students immersed themselves more thoroughly in coursework when removed from campus-based distractions and social life. The ability to escape distractions, however, may in itself signify privilege. The allure of completing coursework "in the comfort of home" presumes a home environment conducive to learning, one that accepts and validates the student (Linares & Muñoz, 2011), providing basic emotional foundations as well as the physical conditions that foster learning.

For many students, the physical campus environment they share serves as a grand equalizer, assuring them access to equipment, space, motivational peers, and student support services devoted to their success. Physical campuses offer dedicated spaces for study with minimal distractions, social spaces for positive peer interactions, and ample opportunities for mental and physical stimulation as well as emotional support (Tinto, 2012). This connectivity with people and resources has tangible effects. Tinto (2012) adds that "absence of social involvement and the social isolation and loneliness that follow often lead to withdrawal," and that "students living in residence halls on campus are found to have higher retention rates than those who live off campus" (p. 65). Campus-based services make tools such as computer labs, equipment checkout, and assistive technologies (especially for disability accommodations) available to all students. In their influential study of student retention and success, Kuh et al. (2005) repeatedly note how the campus can provide a powerful sense of place that embodies learning—not simply genial geography, but a sense that everyone at the institution belongs. Online environments can prove inviting as well, but they do not provide as immersive an educational experience. Eventually, perhaps online course environments will become as fully immersive and engaging as online games along the lines of Fortnite or World of Warcraft.

The fundamental debates about assessing student performance center on calibrating the balance between enforcing academic standards (demanding rigor) and adapting to pandemic-related extenuations (extending grace). Members defend positions across the continuum from "everyone gets an A" to "ratchet up the rigor now that students aren't partying with their peers." Advocates of rigor note that students still must master the same competencies to succeed in the professional world, regardless of the pandemic. Many proponents of rigor fear that learning will stagnate and students will fall behind in achievement (below grade level in K–12, not meeting accreditation and licensure standards or delaying graduation in higher education).

Camera Obscurer: Surveillance and Presence

A second prevalent theme bears specifically on the video component of online instruction, focusing on how best to engage students via videoconferencing tools such as Zoom and similar platforms. Recurrent, detailed discussions center on the challenges of teaching to empty "black boxes" of students whose cameras are turned off. "I hate teaching to black boxes" has become a regular refrain. Members frequently express extreme frustration at the disconnect they experience in the absence of any visual feedback. Some discussants connect the muted videos to student disengagement (a manifestation of apathy or antagonism). Others suggest more nefarious motives, such as the blank screens serving as cover for skipping class. Even worse, a cottage industry has arisen for bots (e.g., the infamous Beulr app) that clone a Zoom user's identity so that the person appears to be present in meetings they do not actually attend.

As with so many other aspects of online education, usage of technology enacts and reflects systems of power and privilege (Schwartzman, 2020a). This point applies especially to camera policies that do not account for gender, class, race, or cultural factors (Finders & Muñoz, 2021). There may be legitimate reasons for requiring cameras to remain on, but such a requirement carries unintended consequences. The "camera on" mandate takes for granted access to reliable bandwidth and other technologies that enable consistent video streaming. Furthermore, insistence on sustained direct eye contact is not a universal cultural norm. The camera also can reveal conditions a student may prefer not to share: surroundings that suggest poverty, cultural artifacts that risk negative stigmatization, or concern about other people who may be visible on camera (e.g., revealing cohabitation arrangements). The ability to blur or replace the unfiltered background comes only with the privilege of equipment that can run these enhanced features properly.

Perhaps attention could focus less on camera policies and more on multiple ways to engage with students in differently mediated environments. If cameras are not required, instructors can create an atmosphere that invites students to voluntarily unmute their video. The extensive communication research on creating immediacy, "the feeling of psychological closeness" between student and instructor, could prove beneficial here (Gardner et al., 2017, p. 28). The closer the perceived bond between students and teachers, the more each student may feel comfortable activating the camera that could expose vulnerabilities or differences. Greater immediacy has both cognitive and emotional benefits by increasing student motivation to learn and participate (Kelly, 2010). Hundreds of studies demonstrate the link between the positive relationships established through student-teacher immediacy and improved learning (Frymier, 2013). The preponderance of research on immediacy in communication instruction discusses building closeness in direct face-to-face interactions (Gardner et al., 2017). Although more rarely addressed in communication scholarship, a robust body of research in instructional technology and distance education investigates how to cultivate immediacy online, a concept more frequently discussed in these research communities as presence. Thomas and Thorpe (2019) suggest that online instructors prioritize using "presence and authenticity" to create an environment that "enhances the students' comfort, confidence, and willingness to participate," and thereby "provide a 'safe container' for students to participate and interact without being judged, ridiculed, or marginalized" (p. 67). Students and teachers can cultivate presence by behaving in ways that project themselves as fully involved, participatory, and acknowledging each other as valued individuals.

In fully online environments, presence most intensively arises in the interactive components of the course that place the student and teacher in direct contact (Thomas & Thorpe, 2019). Two decades ago, Arbaugh (2001) noted that verbal and nonverbal behaviors that foster immediacy in traditional classrooms have a similar effect in online modalities. The benefits of immediacy may be more easily realizable in synchronous courses where the teacher and students interact in real time. Although more challenging, similar measures to communicate immediacy can be implemented in asynchronous online courses as well. Some of these techniques include (Conaway et al., 2005):

- Expressing appreciation of student efforts, not simply outcomes;
- Sharing experiences similar to those of students;
- Referring to the class as a cohesive collective by using inclusive language (we, us, our) and addressing students by name;
- Quoting and referring to student work when discussing course material;
- Demonstrating openness to interactions beyond the immediate course content;
- Inviting and listening to student feedback;
- Validating the inherent worth of the student, irrespective of academic performance;
- Enabling students to use breakout rooms as a way to build closeness.

For example, students in my communication theory and methods course immediately made overtures toward immediacy by using humor in our initial class meeting. Every student unmuted their video to reveal an “inside joke”: a background photo of me superimposed on a page from the textbook I wrote, suitably yellowed to mimic an important archival document. For good measure, the background included a seated Bernie Sanders duly attired with the facemask, parka, and knitted mittens he wore at President Biden’s inauguration.

Conclusion and Inclusion

No amount of imaginative online course contortions can counteract embedded privileges and deprivations that structure students’ ability to access and benefit from technological tools. It remains unclear whether a genuinely new educational landscape will emerge from addressing the power dynamics brought into bold relief by the pandemic. Although early theorists touted online education as the great equalizer that would universalize availability of knowledge (Schwartzman, 2014), the migration online during the pandemic proved otherwise. Maximizing the benefits of online learning requires designing and deploying technologies that do not deepen existing inequalities. As a long-time practitioner of both online education and poetic inquiry (Faulkner, 2020), I have often turned to poetry in struggling with the profound reassessment of educational practice that the pandemic poses. Poetry germinates at inflection points that stubbornly resist definitive (re)solution. Poetry itself embodies the struggle to grapple with the possibilities of communicating at the limits of what can be expressed. One fragment of a poem perpetually in progress (as much of my work is, wavering between composition and decomposition) issues a caveat about settling into “the new normal” championed by institutions trying to return to pre-COVID practices. I wrote about the flirtations between pedagogues and demagogues, questioning the blustery proclamations of victory against the virus, then backsliding by returning to a time

> when online pedagogy
> bleeds into demagogy,
> rewarding those already awarded
> privileges.

The ongoing discourse on *Pandemic Pedagogy* may offer a glimpse into how and whether the post-pandemic educational landscape evolves. Future research, especially employing big data analysis techniques, could discern more subtle and longitudinal patterns of discursive content. Those studies, as well as detailed content analyses, would complement the more theoretical reflections on (post-) pandemic educational practices.

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The Other Side of 2020: Questioning Everything—Doing Something

Adam W. Tyma

Keywords: critical media literacy; instructional communication; reflective pedagogy; autoethnography; pandemic pedagogy

Abstract: In February of 2020, everything around the world changed. By mid-March, the majority of the world was locked down. Teachers were called on to create a sense of "normalcy" for their students. And we tried. During that process, though, as a teacher, I started to truly question what I was teaching and—more importantly—HOW I was teaching. This reflective essay offers a critical interrogation of my own pedagogical choices during and because of the COVID-19 pandemic . . . and so many other "moments" that have led up to it. I contend that we need to look in the mirror and ask ourselves, "Are we doing this right?" The following offers my starting point.

There is nothing quite like a pandemic, the outcry for social justice/systemic change across myriad of fronts, a presidential election tarnished by what is now referred to by many as the "big lie," and an insurrection at the United States Capitol to force one to look seriously at how we are performing our professional and personal identities and ask, "Am I doing this right?" Given my areas of teaching and research (popular culture, media studies, critical theory, argumentation, and pedagogy), I believe I am morally obligated to disconnect myself from my teaching to make space for students to form their own conclusions and ideological positions. Frankly, that is what I was taught to do. Today, as faculty find ourselves on "lists" generated by online spaces like TurningPointUSA and RateMyProfessor.com, it seems critical to maintain that separation for personal and professional protection—even for "tenured" faculty members like me. As I reflect on the current state of society though, I am no longer so sure I am willing to maintain this position. This essay attempts to clarify reasons for my transformed position on what my moral obligation is as both "teacher" and "scholar."

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I have been teaching introductory mass communication courses for nearly 20 years. I started teaching that class 2 years after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States now referred to as "9-1-1." Based on what I considered my obligation as a teacher, I did not intentionally set out to examine the event from a critical perspective; however, it crept in anyway. Unfortunately, neither the class nor I were ready to tackle the conversation skillfully.

I left that class (and headed into my PhD) hoping I would never have to experience another national crisis again let alone discuss it from a critical lens in my classes. Since then, we (the United States) have found ourselves facing the economic recession of 2008/9 . . . then a second recession in 2019/20. We experienced the death of Trayvon Martin and the Sandy Hook massacre, and the Aurora, Colorado, theater shooting (all in 2012), Michael Brown (in 2013), Charlottesville (in 2017), Stowman Douglas High School (in 2018), and the list could continue ad infinitum, it seems. In 2020, however, the country and world found ourselves in the midst of global mega-crises stemming from the novel COVID-19 virus pandemic and social justice protests spurred by George Floyd's murder. News feeds and social media networks exploded with calls for—among other things—"the media" to refrain from being biased for/against the president, for/against the virus, for/against the scientific and medical communities, for/against the social justice protesters, as well as for/against White supremist people and groups. It was and is in this discursive space that I began to question whether or not it is even possible—let alone morally responsible—for me to be this "neutral" and "objective" teacher not only in my introductory mass communication courses, but also in the content I select and pedagogy I employ in all my classes. Moreover . . . should I be?

Outside the classroom, I fly my politics openly. For example, I was raised to defend those who are not able to defend themselves whenever possible. Until now, however, I would tuck my personal values and beliefs away once I stepped into the classroom. I saw myself enacting what Socrates did nearly 3 millennia ago (or at least the Socratic method as I had been taught to understand it—these are two very different things). Challenge but do not proclaim. The cognitive dissonance I was experiencing led me to re-read the account of Socrates's trial and execution as described in Plato's *The Republic*. That re-reading drove me to tackle *Teaching to Transgress* by bell hooks and *Critical Media Literacy* by Douglass Kellner again. As I reflected on my pedagogy in light of re-reading these insightful works, I realized I was wrong. I have been doing it wrong for 20 years. Perhaps not entirely wrong but definitely not in the way Socrates, Dewey (1997), Freire (2005), Giroux (2011), Hall (1996), hooks (1994), Fassett and Warren (2007), among others suggest. Consequently, in this essay, I interrogate my personal teaching philosophy and the way I conduct my pedagogy, starting with the "Intro" class but really expanding into all facets of my teaching life. In doing so, I expose what I have been doing wrong and why, as well as propose how and why I am transforming both.

> "Time to take the gloves off." When attempting to be objective no longer serves the greater good (if it ever did).

Most primary and secondary level schoolteachers must be licensed to do so in the United States. Licensure preparation typically includes completing coursework in curriculum, classroom management, educational psychology, teaching strategies, as well as discipline-specific courses. Ultimately, this is where new teachers learn the rules, the laws, and the processes and are discursively constructed as "teachers." I see nothing wrong with the licensure process. I learned valuable insights and strategies during that process . . . which I promptly forgot when student teaching (making for an honestly rather terrible experience). I also crammed for an exam (the PRAXIS[1]) I did not realize I was required to take. I dutifully complied throughout the process, deeming these necessary hoops through which to jump. Today, however, I fully recognize I was Foucault's (1995) *docile body* being fed through what Pink Floyd likens to "the meat grinder" in *The Wall* (Parker, 1982). I joined the program naïve and eager to comply. I came out of the grinder with a bit of gristle and tasting a little more "gamey" than some, but I earned the paper that proved I was now a "teacher."

https://graveshamnut.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/meat-grinder.jpg

Image from *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (Parker, 1982)

Although I had done the work and earned the license, I never fit in as a high school teacher. Even during my student teaching experience, I had a difficult time sticking to the "preferred" (i.e., "required") content. Perhaps I pushed students to think rather than merely regurgitate. Perhaps I had been seen by students at a 311 concert with a beer in my hand. Whatever the reason, I met with the principal who reminded me of the "rules" I needed to abide by. I transitioned into the role of regular long-term substitute teacher after that semester. The school districts loved me as a long-term substitute—simply not as "one of them."

Why is this history important? It is important because these are some of the first spaces where my pedagogy was formed and revised. It was here where I was socially conditioned to ground my pedagogy in what Freire (2005) describes as "the banking model" of educational practices. Since then, however, I was introduced to Fassett and Warren's (2007) argument that we need to teach students how to think, not what to think. Based on what I learned from them and other crucial communication pedagogy scholars, I re-constructed myself from "high school teacher" to "college professor." Oddly enough, expectations based on my social conditioning as a high school teacher as the teacher "at the head of the class" have continued to float around my pedagogy today—which has inspired this reflection and subsequent transformation of my teaching philosophy and praxis.

Given the conversation thus far, the specific expectation I interrogate here is the one that claims a teacher's political views do not belong in the classroom. Debates about teachers indoctrinating students has been a dominant topic in "the media" for as long as there has been a tension between the goals of the classroom and the desires of the political machine. Having taught in everything from middle school and high school classes to English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to large lecture hall college classes, I can assure you there is no time to indoctrinate. There is barely enough time to cover course content. Although there is potentially more academic freedom and space to "play"[2] at the university level (versus K–12 classrooms), there is always more content to translate and skills to develop than there are hours in the day. Time is undoubtedly a constraint prohibiting overt indoctrination via course content and readings.

Another charge suggests that lectures, discussions, and assignments might indoctrinate students by covertly privileging a left-leaning ideology. If a Republican is in office, then the argument focuses on teachers as part of a left-wing conspiracy to overturn the duly elected president, administration, and congress. If a Democrat is in office, then the argument focuses on teachers as part of a movement to further entrench the "Radical Left" into society. A thought for everyone to consider here—perhaps those faculty teaching subjectively are not asking students to align with a left-leaning or radical left-leaning ideology at all. Rather . . . and this might be truly radical . . . perhaps those faculty are asking students to be critical of ALL systems of governance, policies, and existing power structures. Perhaps they are following Freire's (2005) imperative for teachers to go beyond asking students to regurgitate normalized information (which is inherently biased by author's stance) and to, instead, work with students to develop skills to learn on their own—to think, not to memorize.

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[1] I do find it interesting that I often use this phrase to discuss the intersecting moment between theory and practice, and see it as emancipatory and necessary. Back then—it was just a hurdle to do what I wanted to do.

[2] I use "play" in the Foucauldian, discursive sense here.

Here is the hard truth I have come to realize: As a teacher, I have grown too lazy and too passive in my pedagogy. Working under the assumption that I have been teaching "the right way," I have probably been limiting breadth and depth of classroom conversations and, consequently, have probably been limiting what students actually grasp and retain. If I am truly going to come out of the other side of 2020 doing something better, I must (like a mechanic looking for the problem in the engine) tear down the whole powerplant, examine each valve, line, hose, gasket, fluid, and contact point, and try and figure out what I have been doing that is working and, equally if not more important, what is not working. Only then do I get to turn the engine over and see if it is running the way I want it to . . . the way I need it to so I can make sense of my place as a college professor on the other side of this new "normal."

> "Time for a little Praxis tune-up": Moving a transformed teaching philosophy into classroom pedagogy.

We can do all the critical reflexive work we want. We can read books (my stack is growing), attend seminars and conferences, journal, write essays (like this one), and think critically on what we do. Unless we actually take action, however, such reflexive work means nothing. Without intentionally making strategic changes to our day-to-day practices as teachers, all we are doing is making ourselves feel better, creating some sort of academic or professional catharsis—which does nothing beyond helping us tolerate who we see in the mirror. As I work through my own reflective COVID-19 video journal (entries still happen to this day), I came to a realization—I think I have been sick of my own teaching practices for a few years now. Self-promotion moment: I had an idea 3 years ago that became the impetus for an edited book I did with Dr. Autumn P. Edwards out of Western Michigan University.[3] The idea was and is that "Communication is Service." To clarify, the underlying thought is that the base of "communication" is "commune." In the process of communing, we understand each other, respect each other, and—hopefully—become better for it. It is meant to bring peace and enlightenment. It serves a purpose. The same can be said of teaching. In the classroom, I am meant to bring ideas to the floor, and engage in intellectual exchange with students around these ideas. We come to a meeting place. Rather than making that service further entrenching the status quo, I consider what both hooks[4] and Freire[5] argue in their discussions of pedagogy and the responsibilities of faculty. Their argument—and one that makes more and more sense to me in the world we all find ourselves in right now—is that the purpose of the classroom is to work toward understanding both the course content and the intersection of that content with the systems that create, shape, and control whatever that content is.

Remember that I began this essay talking about the introductory mass communication (a.k.a. Intro) course. This past summer (2020), I taught Intro asynchronously online for the first time. We had moved into the Zoom universe (like so many others) to finish the Spring 2020 term, but I was asked to teach the summer course so students could finish it on their own within the allotted time—6 weeks. While I was

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[3] The book is called *Communication Is . . . Perspectives on Theory.* You are welcome to check it out.

[4] Read *Teaching to Transgress.*

[5] Read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

"teaching"[6] the class, I also journaled (for a little grounding), reflecting heavily on how I teach my classes and why I do things the way I do. I always thought I was able to create a space where conversations happened—I am not sure now if I actually ever did that all too well. I also assumed that students could approach me about near-anything—so why did I limit my interactions with students more now than I ever did? My "tear down" exposed something in my pedagogy and, subsequentially, my praxis in the classroom: I devoted a lot of time to actions that did not result in truly emancipatory and critical moments, but it made me feel like I was doing something. If there is one thing the Zoom universe has taught me, it is the imperative to focus on quality rather than quantity. Spend less time doing something light—spend more time getting in the trenches. Zoom requires names under faces. It is the best name tag ever created. Use them! Our classroom management must be about the quality of engagement in the room and not simply about ticking the minutes down so that we meet some established "contact hour" norm. What can be accomplished in 20 minutes? What actually needs the full 75? The full 2+ hours or that seminar? I am thinking about my Spring graduate seminar right now and am pretty sure there is no reason for us to be on a Zoom call for 2 hours and 40 minutes. Be smart—be strategic.

Personally, we must be just as honest with ourselves. Are we taking care of ourselves? Really? If you know me, you may know that I competitively powerlift (pick up really heavy things and put them down). We all need those aspects of our lives that have NOTHING to do with "the work." Find those things that take you out of your head and your classroom, just for a little while. When putting your own practices for a semester together, be smart about it. Some changes I have made that I am holding myself to—and it has not been easy. First—know how to declare work hours and non-work hours (yes, this will need to be fluid as grading marathons begin while also pushing for the next hurdle, but do the best you can). Provide for one or two more office hours per week, but do not respond to emails at all hours. The act of self-care is as important to teaching as well thought-out yet flexible for "those moments" lesson plans. Take care of yourself. We need to take care of ourselves!

My last little moment of realization: Make the content count. The Communication discipline, in all its myriad forms and subcategories and nooks and crannies, works to help us understand how we construct our worlds not just through the ideas exchanged but also how and why and where and to what end goal. That is a massive challenge for the discipline—and an incredible opportunity to develop a space where students and teachers can hone their personal critical awareness of the messages that surround us daily and, by extension, further develop the ability to create, interrogate, and change our realities themselves. As a teacher and researcher of the discipline—I can say that I am guilty of not taking this opportunity on to its fullest potential. Considering what I teach (heading back to the top of the essay), I have ample opportunity to make those moments count. We need to treat it as agenda-setting: We should never tell our students what to think—but we definitely can and should be helping them figure out what to think about, talk about, and do something about.

As I close, I am still left wondering "Can I really do the work required to make all of this actually happen?" My answer is "maybe" and that is why I am morally obligated to try. If I can make it through what is happening right now and get to the other side with minor emotional scarring, I guess my answer is more accurately, "I damn well better, otherwise what is it all for?"

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[6] I personally have to really think about whether that was actually teaching I did during Summer 2020. It very well may have been me struggling for some sense of normalcy. What I discovered, instead, was that the class was not being taught. I was doing something—recording lectures and comments, grading assignments, reading essays—but I am not sure if it was teaching. I DO know that it was forcing me to the look in the mirror.

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Connection Over Correction: Engaging Students in Conversational Commitments for Effective Communication Across Difference and Difficulty

Jennifer Sandoval

Keywords: reflexive pedagogy, dialogue, identity, pedagogy of interiority, instructional communication

Abstract: In light of a national reckoning with racism in the U.S., many instructors are assessing their own pedagogical practices with regard to handling these topics in their classrooms. In developing my authentic teaching philosophy over the course of 18 years, I have adapted many practices I used in my prior career in dispute resolution. To clarify, I center classroom engagement around what Hart (2007) describes as "a pedagogy of interiority." Classroom engagement focuses on connection rather than correction as we help students develop their "authentic inner potentials" (p. 2). I regularly challenge myself to invite students to develop their authentic personal selves via contemplation and reflexivity. In doing so, we move from a teacher-centered focus to a student-centered one derived from a relational partnership with them. By focusing on connection rather than correction, we create an environment of curiosity, compassion, and intensive reflection where students come to know themselves and their strengths in ways that extend beyond the classroom. This essay highlights how students co-create conversational commitments coupled with a rapid debrief process that moves my students forward together toward shared mindfulness in thought and behavior.

In response to the myriad instances of racism so blatantly exposed throughout the U.S. in 2020, many instructors and departments are reviewing the way they address communication across difference in their classrooms and curricula. Although racism and its impact are not new, 2020 prompted an important reckoning—particularly for those who have not had to consider their own identities or those in their orbit due to embodied or other privileges. The context of the college classroom is a complex space embedded in larger structures and histories. Our own experiences and expectations are culture-bound

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and we make pedagogical choices that are often a reflection of that socialization into the field and into our own identities. Consciously or not, this influences the way students understand their roles, rights, and responsibilities in this slippery educational space. While this essay takes a more instrumental approach to classroom dialogue, it is essential to note that the embodied identity of an instructor, the composition of the group of students, and the institutional context matter deeply. Self-reflexivity is critical to the process of effectively engaging students in personal development and conscious conversation in ways that ultimately establish an inclusive and transformative classroom environment. In the spirit of Freire's "revolutionary educator" the goal of these approaches is to engage " . . . the quest for mutual humanization [with] efforts imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, [we] must be partners of the students in [our] relations with them" (1972, p. 75).

I am often asked to present to early career faculty or graduate students about how to manage conflict and tough topics in the classroom. Many instructors express anxiety about their ability to facilitate conversations around "difficult topics" (Brigley Thompson, 2020). Brigley Thompson (2020) suggests further that we can do so by creating and critiquing "safe spaces" for conversation. We can never truly promise a safe space, however, when it comes to communication about identity—especially for minoritized and marginalized students. The trauma many Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in our classrooms have experienced at the hands of the U.S. education system cannot be underestimated (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). While we cannot erase those experiences nor ensure the words and behavior of everyone around us will honor and respect difference, we can endeavor to construct safer spaces by engaging in considerable pre-conversation work and metacommunication. As Bahktin (1984 [1961–1962]) argues,

> a single consciousness is a contradiction in terms. Consciousness is essentially multiple . . . I am conscious of myself and become myself only when revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another . . . the very being of [hu]man is the deepest communion. (p. 287)

Communication as dialogue, or conscious conversation, is the core of my pedagogy and approach to exchanges of self and understanding in the classroom.

Arguably, achieving conscious conversation through dialogue (Stewart, 1978) across difference is an ambitious goal. As my colleague, Keith Nainby, and I (Sandoval & Nainby, 2017) argue, however, communication instructors can "make a place" that leads to transformation through relational dialogue. Doing so requires commitment to disrupting some of our taken-for-granted assumptions about what communication courses and classrooms look like, as well as who is afforded agency to drive engagement forward in those classrooms. As we (2017) explained, "efforts to raise consciousness or similarly focus on student empowerment in learning contexts are also contested because historically, notions of what counts as awareness, agency, and action are themselves the products of normative discourses" (p. 21). In other words, the nature of any classroom is power-laden. Consequently, dialectical tensions that exist across privilege and oppression, structure and agency, as well as embodied identity and positional roles must be addressed. I rely on Moore's (2014) Satisfaction Triangle that includes attending to issues, emotion, and process in order to work through these tensions as guiding forces that help create and maintain an inclusive classroom culture and climate.

While some instructors may believe classroom culture and climate only matter when teaching courses that contain "controversial" content (e.g., race, gender, sexuality), I argue that inclusive pedagogies in any classroom can foster a sense of belonging and opportunity to be heard, as well as to engage critically in learning. It is difficult to avoid centering ourselves in reflections about the practices of teaching. For these reasons, my philosophy is to approach the classroom as a shared learning space where we honor relational partnerships from a place of authenticity, compassion, and connection. The foundation of this approach is centered in bell hooks' "engaged pedagogy as a practice of freedom" . . . "To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (1994, p. 13).

To achieve these goals, I had to let go of my unrealistic perception that teachers must know all the answers and focus on correcting student mistakes and misperceptions. I have not escaped those cognitive habits, but they are overshadowed by my desire to connect. In essence, in order to construct an environment of curiosity, compassion, and intensive reflection, we must establish opportunities for our students to co-construct the environment in dialogic relationship.

Moreover, Hart (2007) argues that beyond cognitive learning goals—we are obligated to help students develop "their authentic inner potentials" by enacting a "pedagogy of interiority" (p. 2). I agree wholeheartedly, and we can only do so effectively when we have taken stock of our own authentic inner selves. Reflexive teaching practice involves more than merely taking a few notes about what did or did not work on a given day, week, month, or semester. We must also invite opportunities for our philosophy to evolve over time based on reflexive teaching as we co-construct meaning with our students (Freire, 1972; hooks, 1994). My own reflexive teaching over time has revealed, for example, that the experiences and expectations of students have held remarkably steady over time; however, their understanding of what it looks like to communicate effectively across difference has transformed.

To create an environment that fosters deep and challenging dialogue, I spend considerable time sharing personal goals and identifying expectations based on what they read in the syllabus as related to their previous experiences. Specifically, I break the class into small groups to discuss the following questions (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Questions for Co-Construction of Class Climate and Culture

What are you most concerned about/nervous about after listening to the introduction for this course?	Identifying fears about content or engagement opens up important self-reflection spaces and a shared understanding of what is at stake
What does it look like to discuss things we care about, but may disagree about effectively and respectfully?	It is often easy to identify things like "respect" as needs for effective communication across difference, but descripting how we experience respect is key
What are the things you need from each other in order to engage in conscious conversations effectively?	Thinking through what will contribute to an open and safer climate is essential to building trust amongst peers
What are you willing to commit to as a member of this class?	Students/participants should reflect on the work they will have to do to be a part of conscious dialogue
What do you need from Dr. S in order to engage in conscious conversations effectively?	Positioning yourself, the instructor, as a partner in commitment to effective dialogue sets the tone for all efforts
What has contributed to positive classroom environments and educational experiences for you?	Past experiences influence what we bring into each new space; however, we don't often remember the positive environments—thinking through what we created that can help determine what is needed
What has contributed to negative classroom environments and educational experiences for you?	Negative past experiences may be easier to retrieve from memory and they also provide essential information about what will limit creation of safer spaces

Contemplative pedagogy also provides a valuable framework for reflective practices where students can use their own lived experience to deepen their learning (Barbezat & Bush, 2014). I also often ask students to reflect on what has contributed to positive educational experiences and spaces where they felt they could bring their authentic selves into the conversation. Conversely, I ask them to reflect on negative experiences and barriers that have prevented their fullest participation. These questions lead to valuable conversations about the characteristics of safer conversational spaces. Students often bring up experiences that have led them to participate less due to fears about being shamed by peers or professors, lack of knowledge about a topic, or the concern that their answer will reflect on their entire identity community (Steele & Aronson, 1995). When asked, a majority of students report that they have never talked about how to engage in classroom discussion beyond information regarding how "participation" is measured for their grade. This is particularly concerning in the field of communication. I look at our classrooms as an opportunity to model and engage in group reflection about better practices and effective communication in complex contexts. This does take a small investment of time early on in a term, but a proactive approach has the potential to prevent problems later on as well as set an important tone for how to move through any challenges that emerge.

Student groups most frequently report feeling nervous about getting into arguments in class, being accepted, offending others, confrontation, and negative repercussions for their opinions. When asked how to approach class in ways that will ensure they do not experience these negative results, the overwhelming response is "respect." Students struggle to respond, however, when pressed to describe what respect in class discussions looks like. They do offer some specific actionable behaviors in the form of dos and don'ts:

> Do listen attentively and actively.
> Do make eye contact when speaking and listening.
> Don't talk over one another.
> Don't interrupt.

This list shows the ways many students have been socialized in "appropriate" classroom and conversational behavior. It is important to note these ideas are culturally bound and often problematic when applied to a diverse student group.

Students also bring up more ambiguous goals such as showing kindness, being sensitive, being supportive, being open-minded, and even being patient. It is important to reflect on the ways in which normative discourses have influenced students' expectations and fears as well. Most colleges and universities operate in similar ways in the U.S. and the "standards" for behavior are entrenched in White supremacist, patriarchal ideology. Students and instructors alike can have difficulty moving beyond the limits of our imagination when defining what transformative dialogue might look like.

After almost 2 decades of facilitating conversations about identity, discrimination, and injustice in both educational and professional settings, I rely on a few conversational commitments of my own that are intended to summarize some of the most effective approaches to engaging across difference through observing these conversations and feedback from students and participants (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Conversational Commitments

Commitment	Description
Be present	Acknowledging the many people, thoughts, and stressors that are competing for our attention and re-setting attention
Speak your truth	Willingness to share lived experiences contributes to an open exchange
Listen to understand	Mindful listening means attending to what is being shared rather than focusing on our own response
Lean into discomfort	Identify the difference between discomfort and harm and prepare students for managing discomfort
Expect and accept lack of closure	Managed expectations about the outcomes of conscious dialogue around experience and across difference
Assume good intentions	Enter conversation with the perspective that no one showed up today to hurt you on purpose. Questions and comments likely come from a good place even if they do not land well.
Take responsibility for mistakes	Intentions matter, but impact matters more; it is important to set an expectation that when we make a mistake or cause harm we acknowledge it and apologize
Stories stay, lessons leave	In conscious dialogue participants may share personal stories about their own identities and experiences; members of the class should commit to honoring those stories and keeping them confidential, but be able to share what they learned from the narratives given

1. We agree to commit ourselves to being as present as possible. In my classes, we spend time acknowledging all the things that are competing for our attention but commit to at least putting in some effort to re-set and re-center when we arrive in our shared space.

2. We agree to speak our own truth while—at the same time—understanding that our individual truths may not be the same as those of other participants.

3. We agree to strive for honesty and the courage to share. We talk about mindful listening and the importance of listening to understand rather than listening to respond.

4. We agree to lean into discomfort. As such, we will be required to unpack the difference between discomfort and harm. While many of us may not have been socialized into spaces where we talk openly about things related to identity, it is often due to privilege that some are not required to confront topics of identity and discrimination daily.

5. We agree to both expect and accept a lack of closure. In other words, we acknowledge that we will not solve systemic racism or other structural problems in a matter of weeks. However, we can open new spaces for deeper understanding across difference. Being transparent about the challenge of conversations that may not lead to solutions but rather only to next steps is important when defining the goals of a dialogic approach.

I have found these steps to foster a classroom climate and culture that are conducive to productive dialogic interactions. That said, there will be times when a conversation goes awry despite our attempts to prevent it from doing so. The way we address these situations is critical to getting back on track. Ignoring problematic statements, trying to simply move on, or shutting down dialogue completely are largely ineffective responses (Myers & Rocca, 2001). However, we must acknowledge our own limitations, even temporary ones, to responding in the moment. When a class discussion has escalated to a point that it may harm students or instructor, I propose steps I have found useful to avoid destruction of the classroom climate (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
Responses to Escalated Conversations

Response	Note
Acknowledge the escalation	Never ignore a problematic statement or an escalation—that will contribute to alienation of the students the comments harm
Re-visit salient conversational commitments	Remind participants of their co-constructed commitments to engaging ethically and with care; make sure the commitments are always available for participants
Take a break	Often it is valuable to de-escalate by ending the conversation at the moment, but committing to revisiting the topic at the next meeting
Debrief the escalation	When you return create space to discuss why the conversation escalated and what you can do to either prevent future problems or respond more immediately to those same issues

I should note here that it is critical to avoid weaponizing norms and expectations that reflect White supremacist and patriarchal structures. As hooks explains

> If the effort to respect and honor the social reality and experiences of groups in this society who are nonwhite is to be reflected in pedagogical process then as teachers—on all levels . . . we must acknowledge that our styles of teaching may need to change. (1994, p. 35)

Most of us have been socialized into a specific way of teaching that Freire (1972) called the “banking” approach to education. In this model instructors deposit information into students in an uncomplicated process that doesn’t allow for human nuance. It is essential to recognize and validate a wide range of emotional expression when honoring difference (Biddle & Hufnagel, 2019). The point of re-direction is to avoid harm and expand the ability of participants and students to engage across difference, not to engage in tone policing. Ira Shor (Shor & Freire, 1987) provides a compelling example of broadening not only our ways of knowing, but also liberatory discourse. In describing his experience teaching after graduate school and attempting to create a “linguistic meeting ground” with his students, he explains,

> What mattered, I think, was my refusal to install the language of the professor as the only valuable idiom in the classroom. My language counted, but so did theirs. My language changed, and so did theirs. This democracy of expression established a mutual atmosphere which encouraged the students to talk openly, not fearing ridicule or punishment. (p. 23)

By ignoring harmful statements or escalation instructors can alienate students who are the targets of the ignorance or bigotry. The power imbalances in a classroom are real and we have to acknowledge those in our own participation. Reminding everyone of the commitments that were made to engage in ways that honor full personhood and dignity of all is valuable, but so is taking a break from the conversation while committing to re-opening engagement at a later date. Also critical is to openly discuss what went wrong and how to improve during the debriefing process, which serves as the important first step before restoring the climate and culture.

Finally, I realize the temptation to focus on content coverage and approaching the students in ways that lead to positive end-of-semester teacher/course evaluations. I also acknowledge that course content and student perceptions matter, but the process of dialogue and creating safer spaces for emotional expression are equally if not more critical as we teach students to live and work effectively in the world today. A number of studies have claimed significant deterioration in content retention the further students get away from the lecture, also known as the "forgetting curve" (Allen et al., 2011; Richards & Frankland, 2017). While others point to a decrease in attention span for today's generation of college attendees (Bradbury, 2016). This has led to increased attention to practices of metacognition, active learning, contemplation, and other active practices outside memorization (Ambrose et al., 2010; Barbezat & Bush, 2014; Fiorella & Mayer, 2015). Thus, I challenge instructors at all levels to consider a superordinate goal of authentic personal development. By engaging students in the actual practices of effective communication across difference and difficulty, these can become measurable outcomes as well. For example, at the end of each of my class sessions, I do a rapid debrief (Supiano, 2019) to identify what worked well in our conversation that day and what we can adjust to do better next time (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Rapid Debrief

Question	
What did we do today?	One or two students offer a quick summary of class activity and content
What worked well today?	Students list whatever approach or information was particularly effective or meaningful
What needs improvement?	Together we identify any challenging moments or things that did not work particularly well
What's next?	I provide a brief summary of what is coming up in class and the next discussion
What's giving you life this week?	This is an opportunity for students to share high points of their week or anything they are truly enjoying (e.g., music, a television show, a relationship) in order to end on a fun and positive note

I find this immediate feedback technique to be vital in making micro-adjustments across the term rather than waiting for mid-term or end of the semester evaluations. Any adjustments I make are addressed transparently and if I am unable to fully respond to something identified as a problem we discuss why and how. Importantly, there are options to provide anonymous feedback online.

In closing, reflexive pedagogy invites students to participate in their education in a deeply meaningful way as it affords opportunities to move beyond basic content competency and toward mindfulness in thought and behavior. We can achieve this by making metacommunication and conversational agreements a center of practice and by focusing on connection rather than correction. We should strive to achieve this because it fosters lifelong skills regarding how to communicate effectively across difference and difficulty all people need to effectively co-construct reality of the complex world we inhabit together.

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Pedagogy, Protests, and Moving Toward Progress

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Keywords: pedagogy, pragmatic, humanistic, cultural competency, Civil Rights Movement, instructional communication

Abstract: Our world is in constant flux and educators are at the ship's helm steering toward what former U.S. Representative John Lewis called "good trouble." However, in many cases, educators lack the training required to be most effective in doing so. As instructors face student demands to address topics on race and social justice, many educators are unsure about how to respond appropriately to the chants of "No Justice, No Peace!" Thus, this essay explores humanistic and pragmatic approaches for doing so in terms of fostering cultural communication competence when incorporating topics on race and social justice issues in the classroom.

With more than 60 years of combined experience teaching topics on race and ethnicity, our primary focus in the classroom is to teach students to become *Good Citizens*. Recently, protests, politics, and the pandemic have laid bare the need to place topics on race and ethnicity prominently in our college classes. Thus, we offer this essay as a guide regarding how to address these topics in ways that facilitate communication competence and encourage civil discourse. More specifically, we explore two pedagogical approaches: a humanistic approach and a pragmatic one. We begin, however, by providing a brief historical overview of race and ethnicity in the United States.

Brief Historical Overview

Scholars have hotly debated various philosophies, historical facts, geographical settings, and chronological timelines of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Early studies focused primarily on national religious

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leaders such as Rev. Dr. Martin L. King and Rev. Ralph Albernathy. Monographs such as David Margolick's (2018) *The Promise and the Dream: The Untold Story of Martin L. King Jr and Robert F. Kennedy*; Taylor Branch's (1989) *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–1963;* and Clayborne Carlson's (2007) *The Struggle for Freedom* are prime examples. Most of these publications portray the movement as a Southern rather than national event. Consequently, these studies provide insight into the lives and philosophies of these Black leaders, but not in relation to the presidents they served.

Aldon Morris's (1986) *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, marks a shift from this top-down perspective to focus specifically on local Black social movements. More specifically, he examines the history of the Civil Rights Movement by looking at African American community organizations such as the Black church, the National Association of Colored People (NAACP), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Southern Christian Leadership Union (SCLC). Morris argues that the African American Church is responsible for the success of the modern Civil Rights Movement because it is the only institution owned exclusively by African Americans. As such, the Black church was the backbone of each local African American community. It housed all the protest meetings, provided funding for both local and national Civil Rights campaigns, and selected church members to serve as their local community activists. Like Morris, William Chafe's (1981) study, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* breaks new ground, as well. His study of race relations in Greensboro, North Carolina, revealed that the African American community could sustain successful campaigns by utilizing Black leaders from local community organizations. He also illustrates how historically African American College institutions like North Carolina A&T State University and Bennet College provided "massive African-American student participation in protest demonstrations and sit in campaigns, within local downtown department stores which successfully led to the desegregation of business enterprises like Woolworth department stores" (p. 94).

Recent scholarship also focuses on Northern states campaigns too; for example, eradicate du jour segregation in public schools, prejudiced access to higher education, redlining, job discrimination, and police brutality. This important scholarship illuminates the false perceptions that the Civil Rights Movement was limited to Southern states. Clarence Taylor's (1997) *Knocking at Our Own Door: Michael Galimison and the Struggle to Integrate New York City Schools* and his (2019) *Fight the Power: African-Americans and the Long History of Police Brutality in New York* are excellent resources. Another is Felton Best's (2018) book, *Not in Our Own Backyards: African-Americans in the Civil Rights Movement of the North*. In it, he argues that racial integration in the Northern states was a myth and exposes discriminatory practices against African Americans in insurance, banking, housing, voting, lodging, zoning, and educational curriculum. He also discusses attempts to integrate Roxbury's African American children into the Boston public school system. Massachusetts newspapers reported that, "the racial mixture of black students into public schools is welcomed everywhere else, but not in our own backyards" (p. 84). Moreover, when a Black student was denied admission to a nearby West Harford predominately White school, Governor Roland celebrated with a glass of wine on television when the *Sheff versus O'Neill* case was rejected. In response, many Northern public schools created charter schools that admitted students, instead, based on a lottery system.

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter campaign arose in response to citizen journalist reports of rampant police brutality against African Americans. Although such brutality is not new, it was undeniably exposed for all to see, particularly in the recording of the George Floyd murder in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Hill et al., 2020). Some have called this a mandate for a "New Civil Rights Movement" (Alexander, 2010, p. 38). The modern Civil Rights Movement is clearly a national one that continues to gain momentum both in the U.S. and around the world. The Black Lives Matters campaign focuses directly on the existential right of Black existence.

Today's Civil Unrest/Protest—*Race and Social Injustice*

The civil unrest and protests taking place across the nation and world today are not new nor are the systemic injustices put upon Black Americans. Recent marches, however, have shined a light on how Blacks continue to suffer unjustly from police brutality and racial bias in the criminal justice system. In fact, according to the Criminal Justice Factsheet (n.d.) published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), "84% of Black adults say white people are treated better than Black people by police; 63% of white adults agree based on 2019 research on police relations." In the same factsheet, "87% of Black adults say the U.S. Criminal Justice System is more unjust towards Black people; 61% of white adults agree" (Criminal Justice Factsheet, n.d.). When it comes to the treatment of Black children, "Nationwide, African American children represent 32% of children who are arrested, 42% of children who are detained, and 52% of children whose cases are judicially waived to Criminal Court. African American children represent 14% of the population" (Criminal Justice Factsheet, n.d.). Although these statistics are certainly impressive, we offer some examples as further support.

In 2014, 12-year-old Tamir Rice was playing with a toy gun at a neighborhood playground when he was shot and killed by a police officer (Barrett, 2020, p. 1). That same year, Eric Garner, a 43-year-old Black man, died from a police choke hold that suffocated him to death (Marcus, 2016, p. 55) and an 18-year-old Black male by the name of Michael Brown was shot and killed by Darren Wilson, a police officer as he stood 10 feet away (Potterf & Pohl, 2018, p. 422). In 2015, Sandra Bland, a woman of color, was arrested on July 10, 2015, after a traffic stop, and found hanging in her jail cell 3 days later on July 13 (Dowler & Christian, 2019, p. 823). In 2016, Philando Castile, a 32-year-old Black male, was shot by a police officer after a traffic stop (Ockerman, 2016, p. 56). In 2020, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old Black female was asleep in bed when police entered her home and shot and killed her as a result of a no-knock warrant by Louisville police officers (Legal Monitor Worldwide, 2021, n.p.). And, as mentioned earlier, George Floyd, a 46-year-old Black male, died when a police officer knelt on his neck for over 8 minutes, suffocating him to death. What do these deaths have in common? They represent the Black men and women who died at the hands of police officers.

Since the George Floyd murder, protests have erupted both in the United States and abroad. Crowds of protesters representing myriad cultural backgrounds chant "Black lives do matter" and "hand's up, don't shoot" in solidarity, clearly frustrated at this utter disregard for Black lives. In essence, protestors are demanding that we no longer judge people by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. These words, attributed to the late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. more than 50 years ago, extend beyond injustice embedded in the criminal justice system to many other disparities inflicting Black communities and, frankly, the systemic racism that has inflicted people of color for centuries.

To those reading this essay who may not understand what it means to be Black in America, we offer this perspective based on history and personal experience. Black people living in the U.S. have persevered and overcome countless encounters of injustice and racism at work and in their communities to hold positions as educators, doctors, attorneys, business owners, corporate executives, and political leaders today. That said, however, the economic, political, and social institutions of this nation continue to perpetuate unfair treatment of Black Americans. In a 2016 Pew Research Center report, for instance:

> The racial gap extends to household wealth—a measure where the gap has widened since the Great Recession. In 2013, the most recent year available, the median net worth of households headed by whites was roughly 13 times that of black households ($144,200 for whites compared with $11,200 for blacks). For most Americans, household wealth is closely tied to home equity, and there are sharp and persistent gaps in homeownership between blacks and whites. In 2015, 72% of white household heads owned a home, compared with 43% of black household heads. And on the flipside of wealth—poverty—racial gaps persist, even though the poverty rate for blacks has come down significantly since the mid-1980s. Blacks are still more than twice as likely as whites to be living in poverty (26% compared with 10% in 2014). (pp. 8–9)

In light of the fact that this nation was built on the backs of people of color, these statistics should outrage all Americans regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. In essence, the political, education, health care, judicial, and financial systems were designed to oppress Black Americans and have been doing so for generations.

Unfortunately, America remains a largely segregated and politically polarized society. In many ways, this segregation is traced to slavery in America, which served to preserve White supremacy and maintain power and control over Blacks. We argue in this essay that Black America cannot achieve systematic, racial justice reforms without the support of White allies. We contend that success in overcoming systemic racism and social injustice rests with Blacks and White allies working together. As educators, we are responsible for doing our part by demonstrating proficiency in teaching our subject matter, as well as cultural competency in acknowledging and honoring the lived experiences of oppressed groups, in terms of both epistemological relevance and cultural applications. The next sections propose some strategies for doing so rooted in humanism and pragmatism.

Humanistic Approaches to Instructional Communication

Some teachers seem to just know innately what to do and say to manage even the most difficult discussions. They appear to be anointed with some special gift to manage even the most volatile discussions. Class discussions result in fostering a heightened sense of awareness and enlightenment. This perception begs the question, are these teachers born or made? Joseph DeVito's (1995) humanistic approach to communication effectiveness offers five qualities and behaviors that teachers may employ when dealing with topics of race and ethnicity.

#1 Open

Teachers who employ a humanistic approach to instructional communication are open to the individuality of each student. Differences of opinion will undoubtedly occur and, when they do, teachers encourage openness by reminding students that being open does not necessarily also mean agreement. Rather, openness makes space for diverse views and opinions to be both expressed and honored as they represent a variety of worldviews. Take the following example of a class discussion in an intercultural communication course. There may be students who have different political views and opinions. It is important to ensure that everyone has a voice and is included in the dialogue. Take for example, student A who might be a supporter of Black Lives Matter Movement and student B may be a supporter of Blue Lives Matter or All Lives Matter. It is important that the instructors create an atmosphere of respect and set ground rules to be open to civil discussion around differing worldviews, political, or social perspectives.

#2 Support

Supportive teachers create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable expressing their ideas without fear of judgment. For example, teachers encourage and then celebrate apprehensive students when they courageously answer questions and volunteer to lead group activities. Students of color may wonder whether their unique perspectives will be honored or dismissed, which may result in class discussions and activities controlled predominantly by White classmates whose perspectives may perpetuate dominant American culture. Supportive teachers are intentional in how they use verbal and nonverbal communication to dissuade such concerns. For example, in an ethnicity communication course, you may have an international student who may not be a proficient English speaker. It is important that the instructor encourage students to express themselves as best they can and provide verbal and nonverbal affirmations.

#3 Positive

Each teacher portrays a unique aura or energy in the classroom. The aura of teachers enacting a humanistic approach to instructional communication is one of high regard for self, others, and the situation. This aura fosters a positive communication climate where students and teachers are excited to participate and motivated to learn. For example, in an African American communication course, there may be non-Black students who may feel apprehensive contributing to class discussions. Therefore, it is significant to create a nonjudgmental environment and simultaneously provide encouragement in a non-evaluative setting during class discussions.

#4 Empathy

Not to be confused with sympathy; where an individual *feels for* another person, empathy is where a person *feels as* another person without losing their identity. In other words, a teacher that conveys empathy is able to put themselves in the shoes of another person. Teachers that exude an empathic humanistic approach to discussion of race and social justice also integrate and encourage opportunities for students to experience empathy regarding worldviews that are not their own. For example, in a race, gender, and communication course, sometimes students of color, women, and those who identify as LGBTQIA may feel frustrated because they believe their voice is not being heard. This is where the teacher's role is most important in establishing a welcoming and open dialogue where the student does not feel invisible, ignored, or insignificant.

#5 Equality

Equality is another term that is often both misunderstood and misused. As Wendy Fox-Kirk and colleagues (2020) argue that equality is a myth perpetuated "in organizations through discourse and text" (p. 586). Juliana Menasce Horowitz and colleagues (2019) report that most Americans believe "the country hasn't made enough progress toward racial equality" despite the dominant narrative suggesting otherwise (para. 1). Simply stated, to communicate as a human interacting with another human is equality. For a teacher, this means fostering a climate where no student is superior or inferior in the classroom. Enacting equality recognizes that each person (teacher and students) has something important to contribute. For instance, in a rhetoric of social movements course, the student and professor should both have equivalent voices. Both are valuable contributors. Instructors should create an atmosphere where various political views and philosophical opinions are welcomed and embraced.

Pragmatic Approaches to Instructional Communication

The humanistic teacher characteristics and instructional communication strategies described in the previous section may help instructors integrate discussions of racism and social justice effectively in our classrooms. This section adds to those strategies by illustrating how pedagogies embedded in a pragmatic approach can further enhance such discussions.

#6 Confidence

With this approach the teacher demonstrates confidence in diverse classroom settings. Regarding discussions about racism and social justice, there will be times when the student knows more than the instructor. When teaching a course on race and ethnicity, it is imperative that instructors are sufficiently prepared and knowledgeable with the current literature in the field. This includes keeping up with contemporary published scholarship, current issues, media, and cultural events. It is especially important for a novice instructor in an ethnic studies course to demonstrate cultural competency.

#7 Expressive

Expressive teachers use verbal and nonverbal communication that connects with the students and demonstrates genuine interest in them and what they have to say, as well as in the subject matter. For example, in a culture and communication course, the instructor should be enthusiastically engaged with the subject matter and students. "Life is a stage" for these expressive instructors. Not everyone is animated or dynamic; however, you can demonstrate enthusiasm with what you are endeavoring to convey, and in one's response to students and the classroom dialogue.

#8 Interaction Management

Interaction Management as a pragmatic instructional strategy refers to *taking turns* during the communication interaction. No one (teacher or student) should monopolize the conversation or feel as if they are being interrogated. *Everyone has a voice.* Teachers that enact interaction management regularly give students opportunities to find their voice. For example, in a small group communication course, no one should dominate the discussion, including the instructor. When students are silent, instructors should induce verbal and collaborative engagement. The mantra should be "Thank you so much, let's hear others' opinions."

#9 Other-Orientation

Other-orientation is essentially *audience analysis and adaptation*. To clarify, the teacher translates academic jargon to be intelligible to students. Lectures, classroom discussions, and activities result in students that are more informed about myths and truths regarding racism and social justice in the United States when everyone is given an opportunity to participate. For example, in an international communication course, instructors should not always make the classroom discussions about themselves. Allow others to tell their truths to debunk the myths and stereotypes about their culture.

#10 Immediacy

Immediacy promotes an environment of "*We-ness.*" It is important in the classroom setting that the teacher avoids terms such as *You* and *Them*. This creates an "*Us vs. Them*" mentality. Instead use terms such as "*We*," "*Us*," and "*Our*" to promote classroom unity. For instance, teachers convey immediacy when they refer to students by name as a rule rather than an exception. For example, in an intercultural theory course, comprised of students from various cultural backgrounds, it is vital to never refer to such students as "You People." Instead, ask students how they would like to be identified in terms of their cultural identity. Instructors can also include a statement on their syllabus regarding students' preferences regarding their identity.

Conclusion

In a 2009–2014 criminal justice report released by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):

> African Americans represent 26% of juvenile arrests, 44% of youth who are detained, 46% of youth judicially waived to criminal court, and 58% of youth admitted to state prisons. One in six black men have been incarcerated as of 2001. If current trends continue, one in three Black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during his lifetime. African Americans now constitute 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population. African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of Whites. (Criminal Justice Factsheet, n.d.)

Given the historical, philosophical, sociological, and political realities regarding issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity, such topics should be addressed in college classrooms. To do so effectively, however, teachers must be educated in ways that foster cultural competence generally and provide pedagogical strategies for doing so. This essay begins to address that need by illustrating strategies rooted in humanistic and pragmatic approaches to instructional communication. As such, we invite scholars to join the conversation by doing research to assess learning outcome achievement in classes that do and do not integrate topics about race and social justice in them.

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INVITED FORUM: SOCIAL JUSTICE

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"No Justice, No Peace": Yard Signs as Public Pedagogy and Community Engagement at the Intersection of Public Health Crises

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Keywords: public pedagogy, epideictic rhetoric, teaching remotely, instructional communication, reflective writing, community engagement

Abstract: This paper examines yard signs as a site for public pedagogy that engages two concurrent, and comorbid, public health crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and racism. Specifically, I reflect on how yard signs responding to the George Floyd murder in my own Minneapolis neighborhood exist during a kairotic moment; as myself and my students are increasingly confined to our own homes, and as the boundaries between school and home are blurred, the public health crisis of racism and the specific community response of yard signs present opportunities for examining how these signs can act as entry points into difficult conversations among neighbors, classmates, and colleagues. While such signs are certainly examples of epideictic rhetoric, participating in either "praise or blame," I suggest that communication teachers can frame them as public pedagogy that "strikes a harmony between learning through public engagement and understanding these public encounters in the space of the classroom" (Holmes, 2016). As such, they can act not only as artifacts of community belonging, but as artifacts to promote reflection, conversation, and inquiry.

We are currently living and working through dual public health crises: the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has changed and continues to change our relationship with public spaces and with others, and a breaking point of police violence and institutional racism, which has plagued BIPOC communities for centuries. Over the past year, university faculty have had to reimagine their classes in virtual or online spaces while working from their homes. Likewise, our students must create learning environments

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without the common spaces at the university to facilitate community engagement. In my own home city of Minneapolis, several months into adjusting to working and learning in confined environments, those environments turned increasingly hostile as the city erupted in protests and as the lack of safe space for students and teachers of color was once again made painfully, urgently present after the murder of George Floyd.

During stay-at-home orders, as our homes are often not "safe spaces" and as we are physically isolated from our university communities, how can we foster environments where we explore difficult conversations with students while maintaining respectful boundaries between home and school? How are communities engaging and supporting one another in isolation? In this paper, I reflect on neighborhood yard signs as timely, meaningful artifacts that teachers might use as entryways into such conversations. Further, I reflect on how such artifacts might help us imagine and engage community dialogue during this kairotic intersection of public health crises.

A Kairotic Moment for Learning and Reflection

As communication instructors, we seek to create community and engage our students as members. In Peter Elbow's (1973) iconin text *Writing Without Teachers,* he positions having a community of writers and readers as the most important way for individuals to develop their voice and, by extension, to participate fully in the public sphere. Elbow emphasizes writing as "a transation with yourself and with other people" and builds his pedagogy on that concept of writing as community (p. 76). Scholars of online pedagogy have long written about the unique affordances and challenges of developing community in online classroom environments; now, as we are increasingly relegated to our homes and immediate community spaces, and as we are limited in face-to-face contact, the importance of virtual and online communities is immediately present.

While working from home has made me feel, at times, more isolated from my university community, it also presents an opportunity for deeper connection with my neighborhood community. Like so many around the world, I have spent the last year at home with my family, intimately glimpsing how my partner and children and neighbors conduct themselves in their professional spaces. During the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home orders, my 6-year-old learned to read. His mastery of this new skill coincided with intense changes to our lives and habits; our daily routine no longer involved commutes into downtown, or bus rides to school or the university campus. With limited places to safely go outside our own home, and under CDC recommendations regarding low-risk activities, my children and I increased our neighborhood walks.

Accustomed to yard signs that range from political to supporting local businesses and schools, I may not have interacted with the onslaught of signs surrounding my home. However, through neighborhood walks with my children during a time of restricted outings, my son was excited to engage his world through text. He read each sign, out loud, as we passed by on our walks. After reading, he would ask question after question, trying to understand the meaning and context. I would answer, as best I could, in a way appropriate for a young child becoming a more active member of his community.

After the murder of George Floyd, my community focused more acutely and urgently on another, equally dangerous, public health crisis: structural racism and the murder of Black people at the hands of the Minneapolis police department. Racism and racial disparities have been part of my community, but as a White woman living in a comfortable neighborhood in south Minneapolis, it is easy for me to ignore the urgency of that crisis. However, the protests following George Floyd's murder and the targeted violence and riots in my neighborhood made that crisis more apparent. Already stuck in my immediate physical community, another kairotic moment emerged: it is increasingly difficult to escape or ignore what is, and has been, happening within the boundaries of my immediate neighborhood—the 6-block radius surrounding my home—and throughout my broader community.

We had already had discussions about what happened when police officers killed George Floyd; he had seen Black Lives Matter signs since infancy. But being able to actually read these signs on his own led to a different type of engagement with what has been happening in his neighborhood. He asked me to explain Black Lives Matter again, and what "No Justice, No Peace" meant. As I explained signs, their actual meaning, their intended meaning allowed *me* to see the signs in a new way. I began to reflect on artifacts that had become mundane: What did it mean to place a Black Lives Matter sign in my yard? What am I communicating to my neighbors? How am I signaling my own belonging, and how am I actively working to value Black lives? How are my actions measuring up to my words? What is the intersection between action and text? Our open conversations and genuine inquiry led me to wonder how I might position these artifacts as useful sites of inquiry and discussion in my communication courses.

The Intersection of Two Public Health Crises: Local and Global Communities

The dual public health crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and racism have created an unsustainable, dangerous environment. While these crises are tragic, literally life-threatening, they also offer a kairotic moment for understanding how communities come together and resist. As communication teachers, we can embrace this moment by examining, alongside our students, how communities engage in asynchronous, text-based conversations and explore the possibilities regarding how communities are coming together, and how they are resisting and speaking up during these crises, through the use of such commonplace artifacts as yard signs. If our goal is to help students recognize their belonging among a community of writers and readers, these artifacts present entry points for their own engagement and action, as well.

During the spring, summer, and winter of 2020 we were bound, as we had not previously been during my own lifetime, to our homes and our neighborhoods because of the pandemic and stay-at-home orders. The spaces of the clasroom, the school building, and the workplace have been regulated to the space of our own homes. Like so many, I have spent the last year navigating ways to work, teach, and learn without the help of physical spaces that create important work/home life boundaries.

As we navigate these artifacts, we must also be aware of such blurred boundaries related to identities, space, and labor. On the one hand, it is productive and appropriate to challenge our own worldviews and spaces by disrupting our comfort zones and compartmentalization. For example, I reflect on how my experience as a mother impacts my research and teaching, and whether I should separate these identities completely. On the other hand, I want to respect boundaries that, when blurred, may further problems regarding labor and self-care. As such, I sometimes hesitate to ask my students to bring artifacts from their home communities into the classroom discussion. With these boundaries in mind, I suggest that yard signs offer a specific focal point to ground and center classroom conversations about home communities. Teachers can use yard signs as designated artifacts that facilitate difficult classroom dialogues while decentering individuals and focusing, instead, on values and positions (Ruiz-Mesa & Hunter, 2019). Further, yard signs can act as an artifact to focus classroom discussions of public pedagogy and how, during this particular moment in time, communities are working to engage textual conversations that challenge power structures and dominant narratives (Holmes, 2016).

Yard Signs as Epideictic

While many of my own neighbors had already displayed various yard signs, I first noticed an increase in these artifacts at the start of the pandemic, with such messages as "Thank You Essential Workers!" and "We Are In This Together!" After the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020, the yard signs multiplied and changed to say things like "Justice for George" and "No Justice, No Peace." When viewed through the lens of epideictic rhetoric, such yard signs primarily strengthen and intensify adherence to shared values, rather than persuade an audience who disagrees with their message (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Yard signs that display the name of a local elementary school or political candidate do similar work: they signal group belonging and quietly celebrate institutions or values *already* celebrated by the target audience (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). When I choose to place a yard sign in my yard, I am participating in a silent community conversation potentially only noticed by those who already share my beliefs, who attend the same school, or support the same candidate. Like epideictic rhetoric, yard signs may intend to move an audience toward some action—support this school or vote for this candidate—but are generally aimed not at those with opposing beliefs, but at those who already support that school or candidate, whether or not they feel confident in their choice. The yard sign acts as epideictic rhetoric by creating community and strengthening adherence to already shared opinions or values.

Alongside messages that signal community belonging and that address others within that community, there are those that require the audience to supply additional context; the most compelling example from my own neighborhood is a sign in a local coffee shop window that reads "What if They Took Your Children?" Signs posing questions exemplify a distinct type of community engagement: rather than demand action, they invite reflection. At the same time, the way these signs are engaged with, and the context of their community and assumed readership is important to consider; in other words, do these signs engage neighbors who don't already believe or feel the same way about defunding the police, about opposing ICE detention centers, or about supporting the efforts of Black Lives Matter? Do these signs work to genuinely persuade or inform?

Shifting the Framework: Yard Signs as Entries Into Dialogue

Conversations with my son, who asked what it means to "say their names" or whose children had been taken, led me to reflect on how yard signs are appropriate, kairotic artifacts to engage our students in communication courses. My son engaged earnestly; from his own context, he asked open, honest questions with the desire to understand. As an adult who already understands the context and who has already aligned myself with various political and social justice movements, I read the signs differently. To me, the signs had only been epideictic; to him, they were entry points into inquiry and understanding.

My son's earnest questions, which only happened because of these yard signs, forced me out of my own space of privilege and isolation. My subsequent research on ways to talk to White children about structural racism teach *me* and inspire an iterative process of reflection, more research, more conversation, and action. In this way, the yard signs act as public pedagogy in my own home; but would these same yard signs have had this impact if we were not confined to our smaller neighborhood space, or if we had other places to go, like driving or bussing to school, work, activities, and so forth? In this sense, the pandemic is kairotic. Much has been written already about how working remotely and staying at home intersected with the global protests in response to police killing; the murder of George Floyd was not the first instance of police murder in Minneapolis, not by far, but it was the first to happen during a pandemic when neighbors are more likely able to organize and focus on community engagement and organized action.

The moment in time when our worlds are both more localized and more expansive creates an opportunity for engaging our students in activities and projects that focus on or stem from their neighborhoods and communities. Centering local community engagement in these little neighborhood pockets, and then bringing that engagement out into the wider world of the classroom, has the potential to create a web of connections and to enact the local/global dichotomy/dissonance/dualism that we inhabit.

Holmes (2016) frames public pedagogy as "an approach to the teaching of writing that values the educative potential for public sites, communities, and persons beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom and/or campus community" (p. 4). While much of public pedagogy focuses on bringing the classroom into the community, I see yard signs as meaningful artifacts that teachers can use to bridge the gap between community and classroom, in this moment when that gap is both wider and narrower through virtual learning. Holmes revisits the importance of "location" in her text, and I echo that attention to location and context. Yard signs exist in a specific context, tied to the location of their neighborhood. As such, they speak to a potentially narrow audience: neighbors moving through these locations on foot who might notice them in passing.

Holmes (2016) gestures toward the type of learning and engagement that takes place in public spheres as often particularly challenging, and the work of integrating public engagement into writing courses as emotionally difficult work. Yard signs, then, as artifacts that are removed from any one individual while retaining their identity as part of a community, are useful sites of engagement. Especially now, as students are confined to their own homes and local communities, we can use these artifacts to engage one another and to practice reflection and inquiry while navigating emotionally difficult topics.

These artifacts—neighborhood yard signs—provide an opportunity to bridge the gap between academic institutions and communities; further, they provide an opportunity for university communication courses to invite students to reflect upon and engage public dialogue happening in their home communities. Holmes (2016) claims that public pedagogies "attempt to shift the loci of power and authority, positioning students and community partners as teachers and teachers as learners, blurring traditionally defined roles" (p. 150). As education communities shift to online, and as students and teachers navigate the various limitations of working from home, we might use this opportunity to stretch the definition of public pedagogy to include opening up dialogues with our students about the ways in which their communities are already working to establish and shift authority and how we might blur and complicate the roles of teacher and learner. Yard signs present useful entry points to such inquiry. Presenting yard signs as central artifacts of discussion and reflection can root more theoretical conversations in immediate, material, tangible sites of community engagement.

Yard Signs and Inquiry in the Communication Classroom

Using the best practices outlined by Ruiz-Mesa and Hunter (2019), we can use yard signs as artifacts of public pedagogy and ask students to engage signs they encounter in their own neighborhoods. These signs opened up "difficult dialogues" with my young children during our walks both because of the content of our discussions and because their questions challenged my own biases, assumptions, and knowledge. Ruiz-Mesa and Hunter (2019) advocate "focusing on the discourse, not the discussant," and "clearly reiterating that an idea/perspective is separate from the speaker," in their best practices that emphasize the importance of difficult discussions around often polarizing topics in a communication classroom (p. 139). They outline 10 best practices that work to build classroom community and that demonstrate "that sometimes communities disagree; however, they continue to support one another" (p. 140). While I do not outline all 10 of their best practices here, I encourage using them to facilitate conversations with students about yard signs and their own interactions with such signs in their communities. I particularly encourage these guidelines that help focus conversations on values and specific moments in time in order to help students reflect on and engage their own values as they align with or bump up against such displays of community engagement.

Asking students to spend 30 minutes walking around in their own local community spaces and to note any yard signs presents a timely and productive way for students to engage such topical, difficult conversations that Ruiz-Mesa and Hunter (2019) present in their article in a way that lends itself to both engaging difficult positions and ideas while also separating individuals from these ideas. Students can ask questions such as "What values do these/does this sign evoke? What do I know about the context of both this specific artifact and the context of its message? If I don't know the meaning or political/social/physical/cultural context of a sign, how can I begin to investigate that? How does this message signal a type of group belonging? To whom is this artifact speaking? Does this message invite conversation or inquiry? What dominant beliefs or practices does this message challenge? How does this message either align with or disrupt my worldview?"

Teachers can follow the best practices laid out by Ruiz-Mesa and Hunter (2019) to facilitate these conversations with students; in many ways, these artifacts lend themselves to difficult conversations because they materially separate the belief or idea from any one individual. In other words, communication teachers can have difficult conversations without asking their students to cross boundaries and reveal their own positions or beliefs; the conversations can focus on the artifacts. These signs are printed texts, often utilizing elements of design, color, images alone or with text, that engage a public conversation absent an individual orator. While they are associated with a home or business, they are immediately removed from any one person, and rather than engaging another person in a real-time conversation, these artifacts invite a more reflective and nuanced engagement, one that centers around asking questions. With the instructor as guide, these artifacts can be positioned as both epideictic rhetoric, signaling belonging or group identification and amplifying already shared values, and also as entryways for explorative research and invitations for self-reflection.

Next Steps and Considerations

Engaging moments of public debate and communication can be difficult, particularly when these debates include emotionally charged topics (Holmes, 2016; Ruiz-Mesa & Hunter, 2019). At the same time, engaging in these conversations while creating a safe space and sense of community are important, particularly considering that our students are already existing and making sense of how these dual public health crises impact their daily lives; their education practices and environments; and their ability to connect and communicate with their neighbors, family, and friends. As communication instructors, we can reposition yard signs as kairotic artifacts that allow us to engage difficult conversations with a focus on inquiry rather than debate. Leading with questions, modeling reflection and earnest research, and facilitating exploration of the yard signs that students encounter in their own communities can help to foster our learning communities during a shift to online instruction.

While this shift has the potential to increase isolation from communities of learning, I hope that my reflections offer a way to leverage the affordances of both increased community engagement and on increased confinement to our home spaces. Communication instructors can help to frame dissonance and unknowns as generative entries into research, as Young et al. (1970) do in their text. Students can respond to these artifacts with questions that interrogate their own positionalities and prior knowledge while celebrating the ways that they are already engaged in making meaning in and with their communities.

As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, as universities reopen or plan to reopen, and as cities continue to do the difficult work of rebuilding and fighting police brutality and racism, bringing public signs into the communication classroom continues to be a useful way for students to analyze how such texts engage their communities. While I initially considered yard signs a particularly useful artifact during stay-at-home orders and when attempting to build community in online courses, it can be a useful exercise for teachers to ask students to engage such community artifacts in face-to-face conversations, as well. Further, teachers might ask students to specifically engage or find artifacts on campus that engage various communities. I see, as the most useful way to bring such artifacts into the communication classroom, approaching these signs as entry points into research and as ways to engage conversations that students are not already participating in.

To encourage such reflective work, communication instructors must continually reframe such artifacts as potential ways to open up, rather than shut down conversations. Further, communication teachers should be wary of the ways in which their students encounter and engage various messages and be prepared to step in when necessary in order to preserve the safe space of the classroom. Not all artifacts will be useful or safe or generative; communication teachers can encourage students to consider the questions: "Who is being called to action here? Whom does this message engage? Whom does this message aim to help? Whom does this message aim to harm?" Finally, communication instructors might engage students in conversations about how increased attention to local surroundings due to travel restrictions and an increase in working and learning from home create opportunities for community engagement and conversations; together with students, teachers can interrogate the ways in which yard signs participate in such ongoing conversations and whether or how yard signs might function beyond epideictic toward openness and learning.

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Invisibility as Modern Racism: Redressing the Experience of Indigenous Learners in Higher Education

Amy R. May and Victoria McDermott

Keywords: Native, Indigenous, colonization, intercultural communication, racism, instructional communication

Abstract: Indigenous Peoples represent the smallest group of ethnic minorities in the United States, and they are significantly underrepresented in the academy. The tumultuous relationship between institutions of higher learning and First Nation Peoples can be explained in part by the use of education to colonize and force the assimilation of Native Peoples. The end result of centuries of dehumanization and marginalization is invisibility, "the modern form of racism used against Native Americans" (the American Indian College Fund, 2019, p. 5). Educators are challenged to identify institutional inequities and redress barriers to promote social justice through informed and genuine practice, indigenization, and curriculum development that reflects intercultural communication competence.

Centuries of oppression and dehumanization in Eurocentric[1] educational systems have resulted in a tumultuous relationship between institutions of higher learning (IHL) and First Nation[2] Peoples. As scholars working within these racist and oppressive systems, we have a responsibility to support

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[1] Eurocentric is a collective term used to describe educational practices that frame Indigenous knowledge as "primitive, barbaric, and inferior, centering and privileging European methodologies and perspectives" (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p. 6).

[2] Indigenous Peoples and First Nation Peoples are used interchangeably to present the descendants of the first inhabitants of the Americas. The terms are capitalized "to signify the cultural heterogeneity and political sovereignty of these groups" (Bird, 1999, p. 2). Native American is used only when represented by a direct quote, and Native is used as an adjective in line with best practices defined by the Native American Journalist Association (n.d.).

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Native and Indigenous learners as they navigate educational systems designed to invalidate their way of knowing. As non-Indigenous scholars, however, we exist in the "nexus of gray space," navigating the gap (Anthony-Stevens, 2017, p. 84) between the status quo and our "good intentions" (Castagno, 2014, p. 1). Framed in the colloquial, we have an opportunity to "act and talk and learn and fuck up and learn some more and act again and do better" (Oluo, 2019, p. 230) as we partner with larger communities of inquiry to challenge systems that use Eurocentric educational practices as a weapon against Native learners. As such, we advocate for an experiential reflective[3] practice framed by four guiding principles (Crazy Bull,[4] 2014): (a) challenging the settler mentality that frames the Eurocentric higher education in the West; (b) honoring pre-contact Indigenous knowledge educational systems; (c) valuing culturally responsive education as a basic human right; and (d) changing our behavior through genuine, informed practice.

Eurocentric Higher Education: A History of Oppression and Legacy of Systemic Racism

Cornfield (2007) argues, "all people and peoples are living histories" (p. 1). For First Nation Peoples, colonization and the forced assimilation of Native children in boarding schools represents critical histories within the context of Eurocentric education systems that help us understand why, in part, Native peoples remain highly underrepresented in the academy. Only 17% of Native learners continue their education after high school compared to 60% of the larger U.S. population, and undergraduate Native student enrollment has been on the decline since 2016 (PNPI, 2019). As educators, we cannot increase Native student participation and engagement in and with IHLs until we (i.e., non-Indigenous scholars) understand the trauma Eurocentric educational systems inflicted on Native communities through colonization.

Colonization

The legacy of colonization is one of disruption, destruction, and degradation of Native and Indigenous Peoples and their culture. Early settlers from Europe claimed the Doctrine of Discovery, legally and morally granting themselves entitlement to Native peoples and their lands (Miller, 2008). Driven by the "settler mentality" of cultural superiority, Native peoples were challenged to adopt the colonizer culture through Eurocentric education systems or die. Collectively, "education was both a target and tool of colonialism, destroying and diminishing the validity and legitimacy of Indigenous education, while simultaneously replacing it with an 'education' complicit with the colonial endeavor" (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019, p. 2). The primary strategies used by colonizers were boarding schools and forced assimilation.

Beginning in the late 1800s, the U.S. government started forcibly removing Native children from their homes and placing them in government-funded boarding schools. The goal was to weaken and break the cultural identity of Native Peoples (i.e., detribalize), and force their assimilation into Euro-American culture, thereby reducing their resistance to colonization efforts (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2019). One of the first government-sponsored boarding schools[5] in the lower 48 states opened in 1879 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, by General Richard Pratt who argued his model of education would "kill the Indian . . . and save the man" (Pratt, 1892, para. 1). The Carlisle Indian Industrial School's model for forced assimilation was adopted across North America. The boarding school model arrived slightly earlier in pre-statehood Alaska, opening in 1878 in Sitka by missionaries (Alaska State Archives, 2019). The children were forced to speak English, adopt Christian ideals, and learn about the "greatest" of Western cultural norms and values (Alaska State Archives, 2019). The documented trauma and abuse these children suffered was profound; moreover, the loss of their children destroyed many families and their villages. This forced assimilation continued for decades, and between 1950–1960, 70% of Indigenous children were in boarding schools where their home language and cultural practices were forbidden (Robinson-Zanartu, 1996).

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[3] Reflection is intentionally used as opposed to a "research" project. As noted by Smith (1999): "The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized people. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity" (p. 1).

[4] Delivered during her keynote address at the 27th Annual National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education.

Although many generations suffered cultural deprivation and abuse in these boarding schools during their century of operation, it wasn't until the late 1970s that the U.S. Congress outlawed the forced removal of Native children from their families (Treuer, 2019). Centuries of oppression in the European colonial process of education resulted in "intergenerational trauma and multigenerational deficits, benefits, grief, and distrust of non-Indians" (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004, p. 35). The legacy of trauma has resulted in skepticism and disdain for institutions of IHLs. IHLs were (and are) perceived by some Indigenous learners as "irrelevant, hostile, and unwelcoming" (Brayboy et al., 2015, p. 155), adding little value to Native communities and lessening students' knowledge of traditional skills needed for tribal life and survival, especially in the Arctic. As non-Indigenous scholars, we must honor the trauma inflicted by Eurocentric educational practices and change how we function within these oppressive systems. Without this acknowledgment, we risk continuing the destructive cycle of dehumanization and marginalization (the American Indian College Fund, 2019), resulting in invisibility, "the modern form of racism used against Native Americans" (the American Indian College Fund, 2019, p. 5).

Herein lies the challenge for many non-Indigenous educators: How do we shift power in a way that invites, promotes, and supports Indigenous students to self-direct their learning and validate their culture and lived experience? We don't have *the* answer to this question, but in the next section, we affirm the importance of our work as communication scholars and share strategies for promoting visibility through intercultural communication competence. We end by sharing the story of one Native learner who fundamentally shifted our way of knowing.

Indigenous Knowledge, Culturally-Responsive Education and an Opportunity to Change Behavior

Jefferson Keel, executive board president for the National Congress of American Indians, underscores the importance of communication for Native communities by noting "our future success as tribal nations is directly linked to how effectively we communicate, and advocate for, the issues important to all of our people" (National Congress of American Indians, n.d., p. 2). As such, communication instructors play a critical role in empowering Native learners to tell their stories and bring about positive change for their people. However, we are challenged as educators to create inclusive learning communities that support the development of fundamental skills in a way that will support "a long and varied history of storytelling and culturally unique ways of communicating with one another and with other communities" (National Congress of American Indians, n.d., p. 9). Indigenization or Indigenous knowledge honors and maintains strong cultural connections to the traditional ways of knowing despite the experience of colonization and forced boarding schools (Smith, 1999). As educators, we have the ability as leaders in our respective learning communities to provide space for Native and Indigenous knowledge (i.e., make them visible). Thus, we offer strategies for dismantling educational practices that "view cultural knowledge as unrelated units" and provide opportunities for our students to "think critically about their world and what is happening to them" (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004, p. 35). We strive to make our Native students visible through building intercultural communication competence and respecting communication differences.

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[5] The authors acknowledge that we are oversimplifying and omitting important history regarding Native boarding schools. For more information about the boarding schools, the *Civilizing Fund Act,* and the schooling of Alaska Native people, see Barnhardt (2001) for a historical overview.

Intercultural Communication Competence

Traditional communication basic courses often maintain strict requirements and rubrics to evaluate students' communication abilities within a narrow scope defined by topic selection, content structure, the ability to cite "credible" sources, and Westernized ways of communicating during formal delivery. However, First Nation Students' cultural communication norms[6] may vary significantly from the requirements of Western communication practice. For Native learners, these Western educational practices may represent a colonial mindset wherein Native knowledge and ways of knowing are deemed inferior to Western standards, continuing centuries of oppression (Tachine et al., 2017). One strategy is to encourage informative and persuasive speech topics that provide the opportunity for Native learners to share their language, culture, and ways of knowing, situating their culture at the intersection of their educational experience and showcasing knowledge that far exceeds "their ability to memorize facts" (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004, p. 35) or research a random topic that does not speak their lived experience. Providing these opportunities to express their culture are critical for Native learners "to be alive as tribal people" (Crazy Bull, 2014, 35:05).

Storytelling is another integral part of Indigenous communities that should be celebrated as a form of public speaking. Ignoring storytelling as a structure and organizational framework invalidates Indigenous educational systems and cultural norms, limiting equitable access to education. Moreover, the traditionally accepted norm of citing academically approved sources discredits and undermines the cultural norms of elder knowledge in Indigenous communities. Ultimately, the perpetuation of only Western ways of knowing have and continue to "crowd out other epistemological and ontological possibilities" (Stein, 2019, p. 144) and further "discredit the knowledge possessed by dominated people" (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004, p. 35).

Communication Differences

Western standards of eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and posture are often the standard by which we measure competence. However, these Western standards do not align with many of the communication norms for Native learners. Forcing them to adopt Western communication standards reaffirms the colonial mindset by treating their cultural practices as deficient (i.e., adapt to our cultural norms or fail). This "deficit syndrome" has defined the educational experience for many Native learners (Pewewardy, 2002). Such specific standards for nonverbals and verbals can directly contradict cultural norms within Native communities. For example, making eye contact can be seen as disrespectful, especially when power differentials exist (i.e., professor and student). Children are often taught to respond to questions using their eyebrows, as opposed to verbalizing "yes" or "no," a practice that carries over for many Native learners in the classroom. As previously noted, elders are seen as credible sources, and openly challenging an elder is perceived as disrespectful (Stiegelbauer, 1996). One of our most powerful failures occurred during a public speaking intensive. We were attempting to use debate to introduce some of the basics of persuasion; however, we noticed the students were uncomfortable engaging in the activity. Following the activity, we asked the students to reflect on the experience. This was when we learned that we had placed all the elders on one side of the argument and all the younger community members on the other. We had inadvertently asked the students to break their culture norm of respect and regard for elders as knowledge creators and sharers to argue against those they considered their community teachers (Stiegelbauer, 1996). Ultimately, the perpetuation of cultural norms centered around Whiteness, can "create isolation and alienation for non-White students despite no overt racial animus" (Tachine et al., 2017, p. 800).

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[6] The authors recognize the unique cultural identity of each tribe, and the dangers of defining a generic standard by which all Native learners communicate. The framework provided here serves as a starting point for understanding the differences between Native Peoples' communication practices and Western communicative norms.

Listening and Learning: Joanna's Story

In addition to our failures, we offer one of the most profound experiences that fundamentally shifted how we define our role as educators. We witnessed the legacy of trauma and its impact on Native learners firsthand when we worked with Joanna,[7] a student in the communication basic course. She disclosed she was educated in boarding schools outside of her village where she was told she was "stupid" and "incapable of learning" because she was Native. When she put "pen to paper" she was "haunted" by the "ghosts" of her educational past, resulting in what she described as a paralyzing inability to complete the assigned coursework. As we listened to her story and worked with her over several months, we struggled to fully understand her trauma as "American Indian people realize the atrocities that have been committed against them far better than the larger society" (Pewewardy & Frey, 2004, p. 35). Moreover, we struggled to support her in a way that validated Indigenous knowledge systems.

To support Joanna, we had to become listeners and learners (the American Indian College Fund, 2019), waiting for Joanna to invite us into her space, affording us this opportunity to fail, to learn, and to change our approach to education. First, utilizing Indigenous practices of peoplehood matrix (see Holm et al., 2003; Tachine et al., 2017), we had Joanna tell her story freely, without constraints. Allowing her to engage in storytelling, while providing positive affirmations and demonstrating active listening, Joanna slowly started to feel more comfortable talking with us. As Joanna shared her story, we took notes with her permission to reformat the information to fit within the Eurocentric required class rubric. At the end of the conversation, through our collaborative effort of Joanna speaking and us listening/writing, we created Joanna's first complete speech outline. Joanna had not even realized that we had completed the entire assignment within our hour of talking. For Joanna, this validated that her story and her experiences could be translated into the Eurocentric education system she had once been told she was "too stupid" to engage in.

During the first two speech presentations, we sat silently on the phone without interruption as Joanna recorded her speech to provide a sense of community and support. By adopting a "learner mindset," we were able to establish trust, affirm her way of knowing, and build a meaningful interpersonal relationship to support her sense of belonging. With this newfound confidence in her ability to engage with the Eurocentric education system, Joanna directed her own learning, defined the rules for classroom engagement, and has started the journey to reconcile the ghosts of her past. During the editing process for this piece, we checked in on Joanna. She is continuing to meet her educational goals and working toward degree completion, constantly challenging and defying the "ghosts" that once haunted her.

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[7] Out of respect for the student and to ensure her privacy, we have used a pseudonym and omitted identifiable descriptors. Joanna's story is told using her words as detailed in a letter sharing her experiences.

Conclusion

Fleming (2006) argued "because many people have such limited knowledge of Indians, we are, arguably, among the most misunderstood ethnic groups in the United States" (p. 213). This quote still rings true as the struggles of Native Americans remain invisible, and the traumatic legacy of Eurocentric education continues to negatively impact and impair the success of Native learners in higher education. To bring about change and earn the trust of Native communities, educators must become learners, challenging Western ideals of communication practice as the standard by which we evaluate and judge communication competence. Furthermore, as we heed the cries for social justice and reform, we are urged to reflect on our teaching practices, acknowledge different ways of knowing, and make genuine and informed change.

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"It's Been a Good Reminder That Students Are Human Beings": An Exploratory Inquiry of Instructors' Rhetorical and Relational Goals During COVID-19

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Keywords: instructional communication, communication education, pandemic pedagogy, qualitative thematic analysis, RRGT

Abstract: As colleges and universities moved to remote learning during the Spring 2020 semester due to COVID-19, the traditional higher education classroom format was challenged. This study examines how instructors reconceptualized their rhetorical and relational goals in the pandemic classroom. A thematic analysis of 68 qualitative survey responses revealed that instructors adapted their rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction due to a perceived change in students' needs. Moreover, findings suggest that instructors intend to continue to use many of these instructional changes in their post-pandemic classrooms. These conclusions confirm that instructors should consider contextual factors not only during but also after COVID-19. We close with practical recommendations for instructors beyond the pandemic classroom.

In March 2020, colleges and universities across the United States (U.S.) and around the world closed their campuses, moved classes online, and sent their students home in response to COVID-19 (A. Hess, 2020; Rashid & Yadav, 2020). Instructors had weeks—in some cases days—to adapt their classes and prepare to engage in remote teaching/learning for what became the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester (Diaz, 2020). Throughout the shift to online learning, instructors adjusted assignments

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and reevaluated their expectations, and institutions allowed students to take courses pass/fail without repercussions (Lederman, 2020). For many instructors, the adjustment to completely online instruction was challenging due to increased workload, constraints on student engagement, and shifting student needs in this ever-changing instructional context (Diaz, 2020; Flaherty, 2020).

Instructors and students enter the classroom with specific goals and needs (Mottet et al., 2006). Instructors have rhetorical goals centered around how they communicate course content to students and relational goals focusing on how they engage interpersonally with students. Students have specific academic needs related to learning course content and relational needs regarding the connection they develop with their instructor. Mottet et al. theorized that when instructors communicate in ways that align with students' academic and relational needs, student learning is maximized. As the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the educational landscape (Rashid & Yadav, 2020), instructors were challenged to reconsider students' needs and adjust how they sought to achieve their own rhetorical and relational goals in the newly (re)defined *classroom* (Arnett, 2020).

The transition to remote learning was extremely difficult for many students (e.g., Lederman, 2020; Son et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). Pre-existing conditions, such as student food and housing insecurity, were exacerbated as states issued stay at home orders (Wright et al., 2020). Many students lost their only source of income due to canceled student employment and their access to much needed campus resources such as high-speed internet (Goldrick-Rab, 2020). In addition to these logistical challenges of completing coursework, students experienced heightened mental health distress (e.g., anxiety, stress, depression) due to the pandemic (Son et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Consequently, instructors were called on to adapt their approach to teaching (Arnett, 2020; Gadura, 2020). The purpose of this study was to explore the ways college and university instructors adjusted their rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction during the rapid shift to online learning brought on due to COVID-19 in Spring 2020.

Rhetorical/Relational Goals Theory

A significant body of instructional communication scholarship focuses on communication dynamics between instructors and students in the classroom (Mottet et al., 2006; Myers et al., 2018; Myers et al., 2005). One primary theory, rhetorical/relational goals theory (RRGT) (Mottet et al., 2006), posits that instructors formulate rhetorical (e.g., influencing students to learn course content) and relational (e.g., building interpersonal relationships with students) goals communicate in ways that achieve them (i.e., use of immediacy behaviors, use of positive nonverbals). Simultaneously, students have academic (e.g., learn course content, get a specific grade) and relational (e.g., to be understood and confirmed) needs that are met through interactions with instructors, classmates, and course materials. Mottet et al. (2006) suggest that learning and motivation are maximized when instructors engage in communication behaviors that address student academic and relational needs. Conversely, learning and motivation are reduced when these needs are not met.

Communication Behaviors and Rhetorical/Relational Goals Theory

A good deal of research has been conducted to ascertain student perceptions of instructors' rhetorical and relational communication behaviors (e.g., Claus et al., 2012; Kaufmann & Frisby, 2017; Myers et al., 2018). Goldman and colleagues (2017), for example, asked students to choose from a limited number of most preferred communication behaviors. Students selected clarity, competence, and relevance. When given the option to select additional behaviors, students also identified self-disclosure and immediacy (both relational) as important.

Regarding disclosure, Kaufmann and Frisby (2017) argue that relevant disclosure helps instructors achieve both rhetorical and relational goals. Other scholars have found that both rhetorical and relational communication behaviors influence students' impressions of their instructors. Students identified clarity as a communication behavior that helps meet both academic and relational needs (Myers et al., 2018). Exploring RRGT in the context of student and instructor misbehaviors, Claus et al. (2012) found that when students thought their relational needs were met, they engaged in less negative behavior in the classroom. In contrast, when instructors misbehave (e.g., are incompetent and/or offensive) students engage in more negative classroom behaviors, which may negatively impact students' academic needs.

Although most studies guided by RRGT have explored communication in face-to-face classrooms, Frisby et al. (2013) examined students' experiences taking online classes. They discovered that when instructors conveyed social presence, students "recall[ed] more about what they learned" (p. 474). We contend, however, that results from such studies may be influenced by students' socialization toward normative approaches to education that position instructors as knowledge providers and students as knowledge receivers. Thus, an inherent bias in them is the assumption that learning happens within isolated classroom spaces that privilege rhetorical over relational communication approaches. Consequently, the teaching/learning process and research examining it ought to be complicated in ways that move from a transactional to a co-creational model that acknowledges the influence of larger sociopolitical and instructional contexts on the classroom (Ashby-King, 2021; Fassett & Warren, 2007; Rudick, 2017).

Considering Students' Lived Experiences in the Classroom

Much of the instructional communication scholarship published to date focuses on isolating instructor and student communication behaviors as quantitative variables and interrogating them using the process-product model (Friedrich, 1987; Sprague, 1992). However, student and instructor communication does not occur in a vacuum void of social, institutional, and departmental context (Hendrix, 2020; Hendrix et al., 2003). Yet, few scholars have considered how individual positionalities and contextual factors contribute to communication in the classroom that results in students being treated "more as variables than as individuals with agency" (Ashby-King, 2021, p. 206). J. A. Hess et al. (2001) suggest this could be accomplished by adding additional inputs to studies. More recently, Arrington (2020) argues that the racialization of U.S. society and students' perceptions and experiences creates a complex classroom environment when teaching an intercultural communication course. These works provide a starting point for theorizing beyond the process-product model approach. We argue that constraints brought about by COVID-19 illustrate how vital it is to expand the instructional communication research paradigm in these ways.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, student and instructor communication was influenced by contextual factors created and exacerbated by the crisis and the resulting shift to online learning (Arnett, 2020). Thirteen percent of college students did not have access to the internet at home and college students in rural, low-income, and Latinx households were most affected (Gao & Hayes, 2021). Thus, many students were not able to attend synchronous classes once they were required to move off campus (Goldrick-Rab, 2020; Lederer et al., 2020). Many students also experienced mental health challenges that may have impeded their academic success, such as worrying about sick loved ones and increased anxiety surrounding the pandemic (Son et al., 2020). The idea that students' lived experiences could influence their ability to learn is not new; however, COVID-19 intensified the need for instructors to adjust their pedagogical approaches based on contextual factors not often considered in instructional communication pedagogy (Ashby-King, 2021).

Institutions of higher education often cater to *traditional students* (e.g., 18–24 years old, recent high school graduates, financially dependent on parents/caregivers) and may not be structured to support the needs of students who do not fit into these demographics (Bahrainwala, 2020). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2020), 52% of full-time college students were employed in 2018 and more than half of those worked more than 20 hours per week. More than half of all full-time students did not live at home or in on-campus housing and almost 60% had children of their own living with them (NCES, 2020). Food and housing insecurity have also been highlighted as serious issues faced by college students and more than 60% of students in the U.S. were food-insecure to some degree in 2019 (AAC&U News, 2019; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018). These major stressors may negatively impact students' academic performance (Payne-Sturges et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2020). Some scholars are calling on instructors to take these contextual factors into account when designing courses and engaging with students (Bahrainwala, 2020; Wright et al., 2020). During Spring 2020, the shift to online learning highlighted these somewhat hidden issues and renewed calls for instructors to reconsider their approaches to teaching and learning.

As the COVID-19 crisis brought previously overlooked elements of student learning into focus, Spring 2020 provided an opportunity to reimagine how college and university instructors approach teaching based on contextual factors (i.e., COVID-19) influencing student learning. As such, the unprecedented experiences of teaching during a pandemic offers the opportunity to contribute to theoretical and pedagogical implications that can inform teaching/learning in a post-pandemic educational landscape. Guided by RRGT, we sought to answer the following research question:

> **RQ:** How, if at all, did college and university instructors adjust their rhetorical and/or relational approaches to instruction due to COVID-19?

Methods

To answer our research question, we collected qualitative survey responses from 68 instructors who served as the instructor of record for at least one college course during the Spring 2020 semester. We conducted an interpretive thematic analysis to examine participant responses. The remainder of this section discusses participant demographics, data collection, and analysis procedures.

Participants

Sixty-eight instructors participated in this Institutional Review Board-approved study. The majority of participants were U.S.-based and represented institutions located in 28 states.[1] One participant indicated their institution was located outside of the U.S. The majority of participants were tenured/tenure-track faculty (e.g., assistant professor, associate professor, professor). On average, participants had approximately 13 years (SD = 10.4) of experience teaching in higher education. Eighty-five percent of participants taught in communication or a related discipline (e.g., public relations, strategic communication, mass communication). The remaining participants taught in business, psychology, English, and advertising. Forty-three participants self-identified as female/women and 25 self-identified as male/men. A complete breakdown of participant demographics can be found in Table 1.

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[1] Participants represented institutions in Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Washington, DC.

TABLE 1
Participant Demographics

Demographic	*n*	%
Gender		
Female/Woman	43	63%
Male/Man	25	37%
Title		
Professor	10	15%
Associate Professor	17	25%
Assistant Professor	16	24%
Instructor/Lecturer	9	13%
Adjunct	4	6%
Graduate Teaching Assistant	12	18%
Years Teaching		
1 to 5	21	31%
6 to 10	11	16%
11 to 15	14	21%
16 to 20	9	13%
21 to 25	3	4%
26 to 30	3	4%
30+	6	9%
Did Not Report	1	1%
Region[2]		
U.S. West	9	13%
U.S. Midwest	15	22%
U.S. South	33	49%
U.S. Northeast	8	12%
Non-U.S.	1	1%
Did Not Report	2	3%

Procedures

Participants completed the surveys in August 2020. At the time, they were far enough removed from the Spring 2020 semester to have reflected on their teaching experiences but had not yet begun to implement Fall 2020 institutional policies. We recruited participants on disciplinary (e.g., COMMNotes) and department listservs. We also recruited participants via social media platforms including Reddit, personal Facebook pages, and within specific Facebook groups where members were higher education instructors. No incentives were offered for participation.

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[2] Regions were based on the regions used by the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.).

After clicking on the survey link, participants were directed to the study's consent form and, upon giving consent, directed to the survey. Anonymous online qualitative surveys were used because the openness and flexibility of the method allowed us "to capture a diversity of perspectives, experiences, [and] sense-making" (Braun et al., 2017, p. 3). Qualitative surveys provided access to a geographically dispersed population and offered the opportunity to give voice to those who may otherwise choose not to participate in research. The anonymous nature of the studies may have allowed for increased participant disclosure (Braun et al., 2020; Davey et al., 2019). Moreover, due to the abruptness of the COVID-19 pandemic, qualitative surveys allowed us to quickly capture instructors' initial reactions to the pandemic and shift to remote learning that would not have been possible through other, more time-consuming approaches to qualitative data collection (e.g., interviews).

Closed-ended questions were used to understand instructors' mode of instruction during Spring 2020 and Fall 2020. Open-ended questions were used to capture rich descriptions of participants' experiences. After answering a series of demographic questions, participants were directed to answer the open-ended questions. These questions included: "After the switch to online learning, what values did you prioritize in your learning environment?," "How has COVID-19 influenced your overall approach to teaching?," "What changes do you plan on keeping for your courses and learning environment moving forward?," and "Thinking back to the spring 2020 semester, how did your expectations of students' engagement with the course and you as the instructor change from the beginning to the end of the semester?" Participants' survey responses resulted in 71 single-spaced pages of qualitative data for analysis. On average, participant responses to each question were approximately 37 words.

Data Analysis

We examined the data via a thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically, we engaged in both inductive and deductive coding to develop themes across participants' responses and to connect responses to our larger theoretical framework (Tracy, 2020). During the first review, we familiarized ourselves with the data by independently reading the responses. Based on the first review, we confirmed that RRGT was an appropriate theoretical framework for analysis. Guided by RRGT, we independently began the second round of data analysis abductively by moving between the theoretical framework and thematic analysis (Tracy, 2020). Using recurrence, forcefulness, and repetition, we independently coded the data to identify words, concepts, and experiences present across the dataset (Lindolf & Taylor, 2017; Owen, 1984). As patterns emerged, similar codes were organized into overarching categories. For example, responses that related to checking in with students and changes in classroom values were categorized under the overarching theme *shifting relational goals during the crisis.* During the third review of the data, we engaged in a collaborative sensemaking process. This allowed us to share our independent findings from initial analysis and interpretation, problematize our analysis and interpretation, and come to a shared understanding of the data that resulted in the study's final findings (Koesten et al., 2021). During our sensemaking conversation, we discussed the similarities and differences in the categories we identified and explored how the findings did and did not fit within our theoretical framework, leading to our shared interpretations of the data. We concluded by naming the themes and returning to the data to identify representative quotes that exemplified each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lindlof & Taylor, 2017).

Findings

Our analysis revealed that as instructors transitioned their courses online, they adjusted their approach to achieving rhetorical and relational goals based on students' changing needs. More specifically, instructors adjusted both rhetorical and relational goals during the crisis and indicated these shifts would be long-term. Most instructors anticipated having to adjust their rhetorical and relational approaches to adapt to an online learning environment. However, many instructors also believed they would be able to rely on traditional teaching approaches once students were comfortable with online medium. However, instructors quickly learned that was not the case. In fact, they were required to adjust their rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction, as well. As one participant wrote:

> Expectations [of students] changed significantly. I expected students to still concentrate on completing the course, which in my mind meant keeping up with assignments and watching [the] content I posted online. I expected students to attend optional virtual office hours and ask for help. Needless to say, my expectations were not met . . . students had bigger issues than finishing the course in many cases. Extra work and/or family pressures meant many did not participate in virtual office hours or help sessions.

Another instructor stated, "[I] knew students would be much less engaged, but I was surprised how many kind of dropped off." As these participants highlighted, instructors quickly realized that the changing context of the course, in addition to other challenges students face due to the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., food and housing insecurity, family members getting sick), changed students' needs and therefore caused instructors to adjust their rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction.

Shifting Rhetorical Goals During the Crisis

Due to the shift to online instruction and to the contextual constraints exacerbated by COVID-19, instructors adjusted their rhetorical approaches to instruction in order to address students' academic needs. For instance, instructors restructured expectations by "prioritizing [specific] learning goals" and "simplifying assignments whenever possible" and "trimming some requirements." They focused intentionally on "core outcomes" and communicating course material in "smaller chunks." Two subthemes highlighted the concrete changes participants made in their rhetorical approaches to instruction: (1) reconstructing expectations and communication behaviors; and (2) offering multiple options for engagement.

Reconstructing Expectations and Communication Behaviors

Participants reconstructed expectations of students to account for the constraints the pandemic was having on them. For example, one participant wrote, "All expectations became lax. Grading was less rigorous. Normally, I accepted nothing after a deadline, but I accepted assignments weeks after deadlines during COVID-19." Another participant wrote, "I gave students no 'deadlines' other than the last day of class. Normally, I have pretty strict submission and late policy." A third said, "I shifted more toward pass/fail activities." Instructors revised their traditional class policies and expectations to honor learning outcomes and to help students finish the semester successfully.

Instructors also reimagined how they communicated course content. For example, participants explained that "regular, clear communication" and the "clarity of [their] communication" was essential to meeting students' academic needs and drove the changes in their rhetorical approaches to instruction. Specifically, when transitioning online, participants attempted to streamline communication by packaging course content "into smaller chunks." Assignments were often reconstructed in order to avoid overwhelming students. Participants stated that using more frequent and smaller assignments and activities while online helped to avoid content overload for students. These examples suggest that instructors reconstructed their assignments with the goal of consolidating course content and communicated course content in ways that were clear and easy for students to engage with and understand.

Offering Multiple Options for Engagement

In addition to restructuring expectations, instructors also offered multiple ways for students to engage with course content. Instructors provided multiple methods of content delivery to meet differing student academic needs. These included making "lessons available throughout the entire semester, prerecord[ing] lectures in advance, and account[ing] for the time students would need to complete assignments." A key approach to this change was delivering material both synchronously and asynchronously. According to one participant, "I created asynchronous and synchronous options for every class, so students could do what worked best for them." Another explained that they adjusted the course design "so students could engage in the course in other ways than only during a Zoom session that was replacing [their] class session." A third shared that they "had to create multiple new opportunities to complete the assignments that were as equitable as possible and allow[ed] for student learning to take place while acknowledging the impact [of the pandemic]." As instructors realized that COVID-19 would change the way students engage with their courses, they sought to take multiple different rhetorical approaches to delivering course material in order to meet the varying needs of students.

Shifting Relational Goals During the Crisis

Participants also discussed ways they adjusted their relational approaches, noting that COVID-19 had not only changed the mode of instruction but also students' learning and living environments. Participants explained that they had to understand and accept that, in the new environment, students could no longer enter classrooms isolated from their other lived experiences. As one participant explained:

> The students were trying to cope with so much disruption. They lost their jobs, some were living entirely alone, other were bouncing between households of divorced parents. Some had responsibilities to care for younger siblings, some had no place to study, work or Zoom. Some lost family members to COVID.

The shift to online learning emphasized how faculty thought challenges, such as work and family responsibilities, influenced the learning experience for students. Therefore, instructors adjusted how they related to their students. One participant noted, "[I] tried to be more aware of students' emotional state." Another said, "I had to adjust my expectations of student engagement to allow students to be less engaged via Zoom because many students were not able to participate in Zoom meetings/class session." Two specific changes in instructors' relational approach to teaching provide examples for how they shifted their relational goals: (1) acknowledging the influence of contextual factors on student learning; and (2) providing additional support.

Acknowledging the Influence of Contextual Factors on Student Learning

During the initial shift to online learning, instructors sought to build relationships by communicating with students that they understood that factors beyond the students' control were influencing their engagement with the course. For example, as one participant wrote, "At first I thought synchronous online might still work, but I knew my students would not have easy access to technology. I thought they still might be free during class hours. I did not anticipate widespread unemployment." Another participant wrote, "I had several students who were ill, caring for children or elders, caring for sick family members or roommates, working more, recently unemployed, without stable housing, food or internet." Thus, instructors used more frequent personalized emails and reconstructed course expectations to acknowledge the impact of these contextual factors on students' relational needs. One participant explained:

> A little bit of humanity/humility goes a long way. I explained to my students a bit of how I was feeling and how I was adjusting my expectations (downward) for myself. I made it clear that I cared about them first as people dealing with a health crisis and that their safety and well-being was always more important than the work I was asking them to complete in class.

Due to the changes caused by COVID-19, instructors acknowledged the changing circumstances affecting their ability to connect with students relationally by recognizing and validating students' lived experiences outside of the classroom and the impact of these experiences on classroom engagement.

Providing Additional Support

As instructors acknowledged the influence of COVID-19 on students' ability to engage in the course, instructors provided additional forms of support they did not traditionally use to achieve relational goals. According to one participant:

> I had to really pay attention and check on who was logging into our Canvas course management site to identify those who were struggling. I reached out personally and for most we found a way to adapt things to allow them to successfully complete the course.

Instructors also facilitated additional check-ins with students as they realized that their students needed more support than what occurred during a typical in-person class session or through pre-recorded videos. For example, one participant said, "I did individual virtual check-ins with students about their writing about [two thirds] of the way through the semester." Another explained they held "required and optional individual check-ins." One instructor emphasized the additional support they provided, saying "my role became much more focused on 'you can do this' and [I used] tons of communication and notices." In doing so, instructors created additional opportunities to connect with students and provide the increased relational support that instructors perceived to be necessary to meet students' relational needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Long-Term Shifts in Instructors' Rhetorical and Relational Goals

Reflecting on their experience during the Spring 2020 semester, many participants explained that the experience led them to consider adjusting their rhetorical and relational goals moving forward. Participants said this was particularly important for the Fall 2020 semester, but many said what they learned during the Spring 2020 semester would lead to long-term changes in their approach to instruction. Two subthemes emerged: (1) distilling core concepts; and (2) centering student-instructor relationships.

Distilling Core Concepts

As they reflected on the teaching and learning experience during the pandemic, instructors became hyper aware of "rethinking what is important to each course." Participants highlighted that during the Fall 2020 semester, and possibly beyond, ensuring their rhetorical goals were centered around only the most relevant course content was a change they would continue. One participant described their approach saying, "I will concentrate on fewer topics this semester and focus on working with students to make sure they understand the core concepts." Another instructor explained that their experience teaching during COVID-19 caused them to place an emphasis on the connection between the course content and specific skills that will benefit students as they seek employment. In their words:

> COVID has refocused my teaching on job placement—ensuring that students have some tangible skills, a process for approaching resumes/cover letters, and exposure to real-world professionals. It has increased the clarity that I try to create in assignments. That said, it has also pushed me to give more freedom to students and to be more responsive to their needs and requests.

As instructors reflected on their experience teaching during Spring 2020 and the transition to online learning, they noted that they had begun to rethink the courses they were teaching, what content was most central to course outcomes, and how to connect the courses to the skills students needed post-graduation.

Centering Student-Instructor Relationship

Instructors noted that their experiences teaching during the Spring 2020 semester led to their desire to also maintain their shift in relational goals. Participants mentioned putting a larger emphasis on relational goals in their approach to instruction in the future. One important long-term change to relational goals was instructors viewing themselves as more of a support system for students. As one participant stated, "since students might have genuine needs, I plan to conduct needs analysis in my first week of teaching a particular class." Other participants emphasized that they would continue to reach out to students and take into account students' outside situations that influence their environment. As one participant stated, they will have "increased communication/transparency/empathy between [themselves] and their students" in future courses. Instructors also noted that they wanted to keep increasing their interpersonal communication and connection with students. One participant explained their shift in relational goals as, "I think centering the understanding that I care about my students. Wearing my heart on my sleeve a bit more with my students and remind them I want them to be successful in my class but in the world as well." After experiencing a perceived shift in students' relational needs during the Spring 2020 semester, instructors learned some of the hidden or even new relational needs that will continue to influence the classroom and learning outcomes beyond the pandemic, shifting their own rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction.

Discussion

This study sought to gain an initial understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic and college and universities' subsequent transition to remote learning influenced instructors' rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction. A thematic analysis of 68 qualitative survey responses revealed that instructors did adjust their rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction. As instructors perceived students' shifting needs, they adjusted their rhetorical approach by reconstructing their classroom expectations, prioritizing clarity, using multiple modalities, and segmenting course content. Instructors adjusted their relational approach by acknowledging the influence of contextual factors on student learning and increasing opportunities for interpersonal engagement with students. These conclusions build on J. A. Hess et al.'s (2001) call to problematize the process-product assumptions embedded within RRGT. To clarify, scholars and instructors ought to consider the teaching/learning process beyond the traditional notion of the classroom as an isolated learning environment wherein the instructor is knowledge producer, and the student is knowledge consumer (Ashby-King, 2021). By considering students' contexts and lived experiences as additional inputs (J. A. Hess et al., 2001), RRGT may serve as a better guide for instructors and scholars.

Problematizing the Process-Product Model

RRGT (Mottet et al., 2006) was developed following the traditional process-product model that has guided much of the instructional communication literature and theory building (Friedrich, 1987; Sprague, 1992). As such, the theory's foundational assumption posits that learning is maximized when an instructor's communication behaviors meet student academic and relational needs. Unfortunately, this assumption tends to privilege rhetorical needs over relational needs, which were positioned as a luxury rather than central to the teaching/learning process (Goldman et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2018). Moreover, conclusions of this study reveal a major limitation of RRGT. Relying solely on the process-product model does not allow for the consideration of individual, institutional, and societal contexts that influence student needs related to teaching/learning in the college classroom.

As J. A. Hess et al. (2001) note, scholars that follow the process-product model do not often take into account contextual factors such as individual student characteristics or teacher stylistic behaviors which could limit the value of their findings. When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the traditional learning environment, instructors adjusted their rhetorical and relational approaches based on shifting student needs. For example, as instructors learned about the variety of different challenges students were facing outside the classroom (e.g., food and housing insecurity, lack of stable internet access) (Goldrick-Rab, 2020; Wright et al., 2020), they adjusted their instructional approaches to meet these new student needs.

To address the changing landscape of higher education highlighted in these results, RRGT ought to be extended in ways that address students' academic and relational needs in light of contextual constraints inherent in their lived experience. For example, when a student is experiencing food and/or housing insecurity, instructors may privilege meeting the student's relational needs by connecting them to campus resources that will help them meet their basic needs of food and/or shelter. Once these basic needs are met, the student may more easily engage with course material, allowing the instructor to meet their academic needs through rhetorical communication behaviors. Thus, by considering RRGT from an input-process-product perspective, scholars may be able to expand on Mottet et al.'s (2006) initial suggestion that instructors should balance rhetorical and relational goals by considering how different contextual factors and individual circumstances (inputs) may call on instructors to privilege meeting one type of student need over the other in order to promote optimal learning.

Practical Implications

These conclusions also point to some practical implications for instructors in the new normal exposed by the pandemic and in preparation for possible future crisis events. First, instructors can create open lines of communication by fostering an open classroom environment with students early in the semester to ensure students know they can share challenges they are facing with their instructor. By creating an open classroom climate, students may feel more comfortable asking for help related to their lived experiences inside and outside of the classroom. One way to do this is to invite students to share concerns via email or in a private conversation during office hours. This can set the foundation for instructors to then pass along important information about campus resources to help address student needs. Additionally, starting the course by collaboratively setting classroom norms and dialogue agreements with students helps provide students a sense of ownership and opens the door for two-way communication between an instructor and their students.

Second, low-stakes reflective assignments throughout the semester provide an opportunity for students to share course reflections, as well as lived experiences outside the classroom they want the instructor to know. By asking students to reflect on what they have learned so far, what has been unclear to them, and what they need their instructor to know so they can continue to be successful in the course, instructors gain direct feedback from students that provides contextual information that will help them understand students' needs and how those needs may have changed since the beginning of the semester. Instructors can then adjust their communication behaviors in order to meet students changing academic and relational needs. In a semester during a crisis (e.g., during a pandemic) this is especially important as student's environments beyond the classroom context can change from day-to-day.

Third, instructors could offer check-ins with their students in addition to reflective assignments. Check-in meetings offer instructors additional opportunities to build relationships with their students and provide students the opportunity to interact with their instructor one-on-one outside of a traditional classroom setting. If requiring students to meet outside of class, instructors must be flexible knowing that many students have a number of responsibilities in addition to being enrolled in their course. We suggest that instructors consider using class time to hold check-in meetings to avoid adding undue strain on students. If students have already blocked a specific time for a course meeting, it will be easier for the student to attend and engage in a check-in meeting during that time.

Finally, although these implications focus on college and university classrooms, they are applicable in other contexts, as well. For example, when designing training and development programs, facilitators could use pre-training surveys to get to know participants prior to a session in order to adapt the content and approach to facilitation to the needs of participants. Additionally, instructional communication occurs during many crises when government agencies direct the public to engage in certain behaviors in response to a crisis. Based on our findings in a higher education context, we suggest that crisis communication strategies could be enhanced by developing stronger relationships with key publics in order to construct more effective rhetorical messaging to be delivered during a crisis. In essence, lived experiences affect learning in multiple contexts including, but not limited only to, college classrooms.

Limitations and Future Research

These conclusions should be considered in light of a few limitations. First, qualitative survey responses are a static form of data. Once participants completed the survey, we could not go back and ask follow-up questions, clarify a statement, or seek additional information. Future research could include other forms of qualitative data collection (e.g., interviews, focus groups) in order to add depth to the current study's findings. Second, RRGT focuses on instructor goals and student needs, but we only collected data from the instructor perspective. Thus, we relied on instructors' discussions and perceptions of their students' changing needs. Future research could focus on the student perspective or collect data from both students and instructors to gain a more holistic view of what could be learned from the experience of teaching and learning during the pandemic. Third, we did not ask participants to describe their institution (e.g., size, type). Looking at the differences in experiences based on university size and type may highlight inequalities experienced among instructors during the shift to remote learning.

Ultimately, future research ought to look beyond the process-product model to consider the role different inputs play in the teaching/learning process. In turn, this led us to argue for a more complicated, contextual understanding of RRGT. These theoretical implications lead to a number of potential avenues for future research. First, from a quantitative, post-positivist perspective, the input-process-product model (see J. A. Hess et al., 2001) provides an avenue to revisit foundational findings that connect instructor communication behaviors to student learning and examine if different contextual factors help us better understand how said instructor behaviors influence student learning. Astin's (1991) input-environment-output (IEO) model may offer an additional starting point for instructional communication scholars seeking to enhance prior studies by replicating them and adding input variables to better understand how contextual factors influence communication in the teaching/learning process.

Second, from a qualitative, interpretive perspective, we suggest researchers pay specific attention to exploring student needs in the classroom. An interpretive approach to this area of research would be valuable as interview and/or focus group methods will allow scholars to collect data that has the depth needed to understand the nuances of differing student needs and what students believe instructors can do to address said needs. Further, taking this approach will help scholars examine the communicative, relational foundation of teaching and learning that is often missed when scholars focus on reducing the teaching/learning process to measuring specific variables and connecting them to student learning (Ashby-King, 2021).

Conclusion

The transition to remote learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic transformed the learning environment in ways that also exposed many inequities perpetuated on college and university campuses. As instructors shifted their courses online, they adjusted their rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction to meet student academic and relational needs in light of unique lived experience. These findings highlight the need for instructional communication scholars to look beyond the process-product model and consider the role contextual factors have in the teaching and learning process. By understanding different needs based on students' lived experiences outside the classroom, instructors may adjust their rhetorical and relational approaches to instruction in ways that improve student learning and the environment for student learning. As challenging as the shift to remote learning was for students and instructors, reflecting on these experiences offers instructors the opportunity to move beyond normative approach to teaching/learning and transform the classroom by considering students' varying contexts and lived experiences in order to enhance student outcomes during crises and beyond.

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Reflexivity and Practice in COVID-19: Qualitative Analysis of Student Responses to Improvisation in Their Research Methods Course

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Keywords: chaos theory, instructional communication, improvisation, pandemic pedagogy, qualitative methods, reflexivity

Abstract: The improvisations needed to adapt to COVID-19 teaching and learning conditions affected students and faculty alike. This study uses chaos theory and improvisation to examine an undergraduate communication research methods course that was initially delivered synchronously/face-to-face and then transitioned to asynchronous/online in March 2020. Reflective writings were collected at the end of the semester with the 25 students enrolled in the course and follow-up interviews conducted with six students. Thematic analysis revealed that available and attentive student-participant, student-student, and student-instructor communication complemented learner-centered and person-centered goals, but unavailable or inattentive communication, especially with participants and students in the research team, contributed to negative perceptions of learner-centered goals. Implications explore how communication research methods pedagogy may achieve greater available, attentive, and learner/person-oriented goals through modeling, resourcing, reflexivity, and appreciation in online and offline course delivery to enhance shifts in communication pedagogy, whether voluntarily or involuntarily initiated by faculty.

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"I conclude, as a communication educator, offering a reminder of who we are. We are a field of study attentive to interruption, responsive to practices, and ever alert to possible change" (p. 9). Reading the words of Ronald Arnett (2020) in response to COVID-19 to communication pedagogy, we were indeed reminded that recalibrating or improvising may be an impetus for better teaching and learning. Stemming from that aim, we offer the following qualitative study of student responses to improvisation in their research methods course in the Spring 2020 semester, in which they began their learning in a traditional, face-to-face (F2F) classroom and ended the semester in an asynchronous, virtual classroom.

Considering the anxiety, uncertainty, negative attitudes, and poorly perceived utility of research methods to undergraduate students majoring in communication (Gray, 2010, 2014), we introduce this study attuned to both the challenges that teaching an undergraduate research methods class poses for faculty and the unique challenges that teaching such a course in COVID-19 poses for faculty. The dual purpose of this study is (1) to examine the consequences of COVID-19 transitioning from synchronous, F2F pedagogy to asynchronous, online pedagogy in an undergraduate communication research methods course completing qualitative research in teams and (2) explore best practices in undergraduate qualitative methods pedagogy that transcend and/or bridge the (off)online divide. The paper overviews communication pedagogy with specific attention to the undergraduate research methods course, contextualizes the study in chaos theory and improvisation's role in organization, clarifies the qualitative methods used to collect data with students, demonstrates the results of thematic analysis, and specifies best practices for teaching undergraduate communication research methods online and offline. We argue that available, attentive communication complemented positive perceptions of COVID-19 learning conditions, and that modeling, resourcing, reflexive, and appreciative practices may be adapted to both online and offline communication pedagogy to achieve learner and person-centered goals for communication research methods courses.

Communication Pedagogy and the Undergraduate Methods Course

Communication pedagogy scholarship contributes to the ongoing discussion of how to facilitate and mentor undergraduate research through the undergraduate communication research methods course. Teaching the undergraduate communication research methods course is noted to have challenges related to students' pre-instructional beliefs about communication research and their competence (Jackson & Wolski, 2001). Yet, undergraduate research is conceived as a worthwhile, transformative learning experience that is "difficult to achieve in classroom situations" (Rodrick & Dickmeyer, 2002). The integration of undergraduate research methods courses in communication curriculum has been documented as on the rise through the 1980s (Frey & Botan, 1988) and continuing into the present (Parks et al., 2011). Nevertheless, much is yet to learn about undergraduate communication research methods courses and their functionality, sequencing, and pedagogy.

More specifically, of interest to us is the work on teaching undergraduate qualitative research methods. Early research on undergraduate communication research methods courses demonstrated a gap in teaching qualitative methods (Frey & Botan, 1988) and developing relevant experiential activities to enhance qualitative methods teaching and learning (Parks et al., 2011). Early research on qualitative methods research courses reveals that qualitative methods were poorly represented at the undergraduate level (Frey et al., 1998). Over the last 20 years, there has been a good representation of qualitative research methods teaching activities published in *Communication Teacher*, indicating that there are communication faculty teaching qualitative research methods and seeking to improve their qualitative research methods pedagogy (for recent creative examples see Graham & Schuwerk, 2017, or Scharp & Sanders, 2019).

Given that "how qualitative research methods and methodology are taught is closely linked to the ways qualitative researchers in the social sciences conceptualize themselves and their discipline," additional works, like this one, are needed to better understand undergraduate qualitative research methods pedagogy in the communication discipline (Breuer & Schreier, 2007). Moreover, recent events, notably the global pandemic threat of COVID-19, affect teaching and learning, and as such, scholarship is needed to address COVID-19 and its impact on qualitative research methods in the communication discipline.

Chaos Theory and Improvisation in Teaching During COVID-19

Crises disrupt organizing. In institutions of higher education, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted organizing of systems (e.g., overall delivery of academic and student services) and subsystems (e.g., individual course delivery and pedagogy). Organizational and communication scholars posit applications of chaos theory to understanding how organizations like universities move in and out of order during crises (Sellnow et al., 2002). With roots in the hard sciences—biology, math, and physics—chaos theory's heuristic value for the social sciences positions it to advance organizational crisis communication research as an interdisciplinary and unifying framework (see Liska et al., 2012; Purworini et al., 2019; Sellnow et al., 2002; Sellnow et al., 2012). Chaos theory is a theoretical framework that helps organizational crisis communication research describe "complex non-linear systems" and their "lack of predictability in system behavior" as they, especially, respond to unstable disruptions termed chaos (Seeger, 2002, p. 329). Seeger points out that chaos theory suggests that disorder may be a prerequisite to systems cyclically establishing new patterns and structures for stability, order, and predictability.

Five applicable characteristics from chaos theory pertain to organizational crisis communication scholarship: (1) initial conditions (also termed butterfly effect), (2) bifurcation or system breakdown, (3) self-organization, (4) fractals, and (5) strange attractors toward stability (Purworini et al., 2019; Seeger, 2002). To begin, the disrupting or disordering event is conceived of as initial conditions with disproportional effects on the system than the initial conditions would suggest. Next, as the disruption affects the system, the related effects of the initial conditions and the increasing uncertainty threaten organizational performance and goals, but in response to the system breakdown, the third characteristic termed self-organization emerges in what Kauffman (1995) describes as "anti-chaos" to re-establish order. The last two characteristics are what Seeger (2002) describes as organizing features of the chaotic system. Fractals are "fragmented and irregular forms" that are inconsistent with logical expectations of observed patterns, yet these patterns are self-repeating (p. 334). Finally, strange attractors are underlying order and points of connection that pull the system toward organizing amidst the chaos. Providing examples of strange attractors, Seeger (2002) lists "[g]eneral social assumptions, relationships and structures, basic needs and values, first principles, conflicting tensions and perspectives, oppositional paradoxes" (p. 334). While these five characteristics could be teased out in application to institutions of higher education, more generally, the following section teases them out in reference to the subsystem of the traditional, face-to-face classroom and the pandemic.

Chaos in the (Virtual) Classroom

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the vast majority of institutions of higher education shifting to virtual learning in March 2020. At the outset, the *initial condition* associated with our institution was a 2-week shift to virtual learning; however, the temporary modification to course delivery quickly evolved into a permanent modification. Admittedly, the *initial condition* disrupted course design in the undergraduate communication research methods course and the student's qualitative research project that was in the data collection stage when virtual learning was mandated. Despite certification as online instructors and 10+ years using various learning management systems to deliver portions of or complete courses, we experienced *bifurcation or system breakdown*. An influx of student questions/concerns flooded our inboxes; late work trickled in; requests for extensions piled up; absentee students increased; students expressed frustrations with their research team in the course. We were not alone in noting the challenges students faced as many of them returned to their homes, assumed responsibilities that competed with their education, lacked access to stable internet, and were isolated from their peers and campus resources.

As 2 weeks morphed into 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 weeks, we and our students noted our *self-organization*. For example, student research teams reported using the GroupMe application to remind each other of interview and transcription deadlines, which in turn became a formal recommendation to all student research teams in the course to enhance student-student frequency and quality of communication. Additionally, *fractal* patterns were observed as students began disclosing their sense of isolation, concern for mental and social well-being, and their fears related to education, career, and family. These disclosures were unusual due to the concentrated quantity and frequency in one course in a short period of time, thus constituting a *fractal* pattern. Yet, the course calendar, scheduled learning modules, regular announcements on the learning management system, writing templates and videos, individual phone calls and Zoom meetings with the instructor, feedback on research paper sections and drafts, and celebrated student work constituted *strange attractors* drawing the class toward stability.

Improvisational Responses to Chaos

Improvisation is a prominent means to establish order in a new way. "Balancing structure and improvisation is the essence of the art of teaching" (Sawyer, 2011, p. 2). When considering improvisation, the jazz metaphor frequently surfaces as a sensemaking device (Weick, 1998). Just as accomplished jazz musicians' move between improvisation and rehearsed/habitual music playing complementary rhythms and sounds, organizational members, including faculty in higher education, move between new ways of organizing and trained expectations to complement institutional and student performances. Barrett's (1998) article on jazz improvisation implications for organizational learning identifies seven features of jazz improvisation: (1) interrupting habitual patterns deliberately, termed provocative competence, (2) embracing errors as a source of learning, (3) developing shared orientation toward minimal structures that allows for maximum flexibility, (4) negotiating and dialoguing toward dynamic synchronization, termed distributed task, (5) sensemaking retrospectively, (6) practicing together as members of a community, termed hanging out, and (7) taking turns soloing and supporting. While not all seven features of improvisation may concurrently emerge, these features function retrospectively as sensemaking devices as to how improvisations occur and offer proactive prescription for organizations that require rapid improvisation to match organizational performance to the shifting needs of the situation.

In relation to our pedagogical improvisation, the pandemic's disruptive chaos was disordering to instructional communication and pedagogy. Nevertheless, the initial condition of the pandemic to move from the traditional classroom learning environment to an asynchronous virtual learning environment was an impetus for improvisation. We offer the following research questions that combine interest in undergraduate communication research methods pedagogy and improvisation in response to COVID-19's disruption.

> **RQ 1:** How did COVID-19 impact the experience of students taking a communication research methods course in Spring 2020?
>
> **RQ 2:** What best practices emerge from students' experiences completing a communication research methods course in COVID-19 that would apply to online and offline delivery of the course?

Methods

Qualitative data were collected during and following a Spring 2020 communication research methods course taught by the lead author. The impetus for this study emerged as students and professors transitioned from synchronous face-to-face instruction to asynchronous online instruction in a 2-day pivot mandated by the university in response to "slowing the spread" of COVID-19. As such, Institutional Review Board approval was sought mid-data collection to include previously collected written work of students and subsequent semi-structured interviews with a sample of students from the course. This section outlines the course, participants, data set, and analytic method employed in the study.

Undergraduate Communication Research Methods Course

At the regional state university where data was collected, the undergraduate research methods course is called COMM 3310 Communication Inquiry and required of all communication studies majors. The course includes a broad overview of research ethics, quantitative and qualitative methods, and report writing. One of the program learning outcomes associated with the application of communication research is assessed in the course through an individually written research paper. In Spring 2020 students enrolled in the course with the first author, which was offered on a twice per week schedule for 1 hour and 15 minutes per class. The textbook adopted was used to set content areas covered within the course: the fourth edition of Treadwell and Davis's (2020) book, *Introducing communication research: Paths of inquiry*. For those that are not familiar with the text, it covers the breadth of communication research methods, including quantitative and qualitative approaches. While the entire text was taught and tested, students completed a qualitative research project using Photovoice (see Wang, 1999) collecting interview and photographic data with undergraduate students about well-being.

For the written research paper, students were divided into research teams that could further specify their research questions and sample undergraduate students. Some research teams did this while others remained general (for example, one group focused on pre-Nursing and current Nursing students and another group focused on female students involved in two or more campus organizations). Research teams functioned as data sharing groups as individual students interviewed three participants in semi-structured interviews, transcribed the interviews, captioned the pictures, and shared data with the rest of their team. Average research teams consisted of five students, meaning that students had an average of 18 participants' interview transcripts and photos to analyze for their individual research report to be written at the end of the semester. The transcript of the first interview was due prior to Spring break, but all other aspects of the qualitative research project were due after Spring break and were affected by the shift to asynchronous, online learning. Additionally, there was a research showcase scheduled with campus administrators invited to attend, thus allowing groups to present a poster of their collective findings and recommendations to enhance student well-being on campus. Improvising, the research showcase was replaced by another assignment when COVID-19 campus closures were announced that included reflexively examining the course, research project and paper, and personal experience. Thus, the action component of the Photovoice project was undermined by COVID-19, but the students were enabled to voice their perceptions of learning and personal outcomes.

Participants

Participants in this study include the 25 undergraduate students enrolled in a communication research methods course as a required class for the major and an optional class for the minor in communication studies. Only one of the 25 students was a minor with 24 students majoring in communication studies. The breakdown of classification was concentrated in upper-class students with freshmen (1), sophomores (7), juniors (11), and seniors (6). Of the 25 students enrolled, there was a relatively equal split of female (13) and male (12) students. In terms of ethnic diversity, student composition included White (17), African American (6), and Hispanic/Latino (2), and in terms of ability diversity, one student was legally blind with two other students registered with the campus Disability Services office for learning disabilities. Given that 78% of the institution's students are on financial aid and that 40% of the institution's degrees awarded are to first-generation college students, many of the students enrolled in this course had limited familial and financial resources as they worked to complete their Spring 2020 semesters.

All 25 students submitted reflection papers chronicling their experiences and reactions to COVID-19 on the research process and course delivery. In the instructions for the paper, students were told, "If you are willing for your professor to use your answers in a research study on COVID-19 and its impact on mentored undergraduate research, say 'I give my professor permission to use my responses for research.'" All 25 students copied that exact phrase or wrote a version of the phrase at the end of their paper, therefore consenting to their written reflections being included in the study. To protect their privacy, all students were assigned pseudonyms.

Reflective Writing and Interviews

Data was collected in two stages. First, research methods students completed a reflective writing essay due in the final week of the semester to the learning management system. In the spirit of pedagogical improvisation, the essay instructions were adapted to ask students about COVID-19 and its effect on collecting data for the course research project, working with a research team, discussing the topic of well-being with participants, reshaping individual perceptions of the research topic, affecting attitudes toward communication research, and reflecting on the shifts in course delivery. All 25 students submitted reflective essays ranging from two to four pages of content in APA style with the average essay being two complete pages.

Second, after submitting and receiving IRB approval for the study, 23 students, who were still enrolled at the institution, were contacted via their school email requesting follow-up interviews. An information sheet and consent form were attached to the email with an approved announcement requesting their voluntary participation in a Zoom-conducted interview about their COVID-19 experience taking the research methods course. Six students were able to arrange and complete an interview. Interview length ranged from 15–35 minutes with a 20-minute average interview time. Participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions including when they learned about COVID-19, its effect on them and their

Spring 2020 semester, its effect on their data collection and relationship with participants, and its impact on their learning. Interview transcripts were produced via Zoom and edited based on the recordings to more accurately reflect the participants' responses. In total, there were 61 pages of reflection essays and 221 pages of interview transcripts coded using thematic analysis.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis, the iterative analytic method selected for this project, typically includes (1) data immersion, (2) initial coding, (3) thematic coding, (4) theme reviewing, (5) theme defining and labeling, and (6) report writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2012) six-step model of thematic analysis, we began with immersing ourselves in the data by reading and re-reading the students' reflective essays and the interview transcripts. Next, we individually hand coded the texts segment-by-segment noting when students discussed challenges, emotions, interactions, processes, or practices related to COVID-19-induced research improvisation. Then, we met to discuss categories and how patterns converged and diverged into broader themes. "Reoccurence" was the primary criterion used to transition between initial and thematic coding (Manoliu, 2015). At this point, we reviewed themes, labeled themes, and located exemplary quotes to support themes. Our goal was to ensure saturation of each theme across the data set, match between themes and data, and coherency across themes as represented in reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Unlike Braun and Clarke's six-step model, we noted silences in students' interviews and reflective essays and contrasts between the reflective essays and interview transcripts. Themes centered around communication between students and participants, students and one another in research teams, and students and their instructor.

Findings

This section addresses the first research question: How did COVID-19 impact the experience of students taking a communication research methods course in Spring 2020? To do so, we turned to the three themes that emerged from data analysis: (un)available, (in)attentive, and (un)purposive. Thematic analysis revealed that available and attentive student-participant, student-student, and student-instructor communication complemented learner-centered and person-centered goals, but unavailable or inattentive communication, especially with participants and students in the research team, contributed to negative perceptions of learner-centered goals.

(Un)Available

To begin, the availability of participants, student research team members, and the instructor featured heavily in both written and oral accounts of COVID-19. The (un)availability theme was coded when students referenced the ability to contact and arrange communication with individuals related to the course and their project. Availability was thematically tied to student-participant, student-student, and student-instructor communication. Overall, students explained that the convenience of conducting interviews via Zoom enhanced participant availability, but that the variant use of technology undermined student availability.

Participant Availability. Student-participant communication availability was enhanced by the pandemic conditions. Prior to the campus closing, students complained in class that they were having trouble scheduling in-person interviews with participants. Because each participant was interviewed twice, first without photos and second with photos, participant availability was doubly challenging. In fact, deadlines were extended for the submission of the first transcript. When COVID-19 closures and distancing measures were implemented following Spring break, students were instructed to conduct the remainder of their interviews virtually. Bearing in mind that many students were home and no longer had to think about issues like organizational meetings or commute time, students discovered that scheduling the remainder of their interviews with participants was much easier. Theo compares and contrasts participant availability and the interview process pre-COVID-19 when interviews were in-person to COVID-19 virtual interviews.

> With the closure of basically everything, it became quite easy to schedule appointments with people, and we did not have to find a private and neutral place to meet. It also allowed me to sit at my computer and record them and take notes digitally and possibly already start a rough transcription. When doing an in-person interview, I am worried that I might not be recording their voice well enough or my own, but in the digital interviews, this is easier.

Similarly, Mandy described in her interview that "Zoom was really convenient" and that all of her participants were "flexible" and easy to schedule after the campus closure. Students were at the mercy of their participants' schedules to interview them each twice, and overall, availability of student-participant communication during COVID-19 enhanced students' completion of their data collection phase of the course research project.

Student Availability. Student-student communication availability was negatively impacted by the pandemic conditions in research teams that did not know each other well prior to the pandemic. While students noted that the all-online format meant that "group information was all online," students also noted that the members of the research team did not communicate frequently or effectively when the class pivoted to an asynchronous format. One student describes how "some of the group members would not answer for days and it delayed my research progress a lot." However, some research teams described having friendships with teammates prior to COVID-19, and these teams experienced student-student availability differently. In her interview, Lockett explained that her group had set up a GroupMe chat prior to COVID-19.

> At the beginning of the semester we made a GroupMe with everybody in it. So if we had any questions, we would immediately ask them, and when we were free, we would answer or look for the answer. Then, when it came time for the transcripts, I was like, "Hey, can I have your email?" And, we just sent everybody's transcripts. We had a pretty easy time of it.

Lockett's student-student communication was perceived as available and, subsequently, effectively facilitated the completion of her research paper. An underlying concern in shifting an F2F research methods course online is the relationships student researchers have with one another prior to the shift and how those relationships will impact communication availability.

Instructor Availability. Surprisingly, students did not frequently comment about the availability of the instructor, possibly because there was no direct question about it or they did not want to engage in face-threatening communication with someone grading their work. In the few instances that student-instructor communication emerged in reflective writing or interviews, students generally commented that they enjoyed or appreciated the F2F opportunities to ask a question and receive an immediate answer pre-COVID. Angel writes, "We just couldn't talk to our professor or group members in a face-to-face setting anymore, which I did enjoy." Similarly, Maddy described how the convenience of F2F classes did not translate to email or scheduling a phone or Zoom meeting, in part due to her own willingness to initiate.

> When in-person, I don't have issues with asking for help and don't feel as much of a burden for taking up someone's time, in this case the professor's time. Over email I feel very rude and as if everything I say is insincere, making it very difficult for me to get over that barrier I have set up in my head to just ask questions anyway.

Conversely, several students noted how available the instructor was via email or phone alleviating problems associated with data collection, analysis, or writing. Sasha described how the instructor allowed her "to call her at any time with questions," and JJ wrote that the instructor was "always there to help me with any questions I had." Instructor availability to address concerns and questions was likely a taken-for-granted fixture in the F2F pre-COVID-19 course conditions, but in the COVID-19 course conditions students either lamented the lost convenience of instructor availability or they adapted to achieve a modicum of pre-COVID availability.

(In)Attentive

Attentiveness was coded in the data when students discussed the quality of communication with participants, students, and the instructor. Attentive participant-student communication characterized COVID-19 conditions; whereas inattentive student-student communication characterized COVID-19 conditions.

Participant Attentiveness. Attentiveness in participant-student communication was frequently mentioned. Of interest, student researchers appreciated the topic of their project—well-being—as it had a particular relevance for participants and enabled more descriptive answers in interviews during COVID-19. Francis explains,

> Although the interview process was stressful, my participants' perspective towards well-being was different due to the COVID-19 situation. Listening to the different ways my interviewees were being impacted by the situation gave me a better understanding and appreciation of the study we were doing for the class.

Francis's sentiments were echoed in different ways as students described how participants opened up, provided more detailed answers, or gave longer interviews during COVID-19 compared to before the pandemic. Arguably, COVID-19 enriched the novice student interviewers' data as isolated and affected participants increased their quantity and quality of answers.

There were a few attentiveness concerns raised related to the limitations of virtual interviewing. Theo explained that he struggled to focus during virtual interviews,

> I think it was also harder for me to pay attention during interviews, and I imagine this was the same for the interviewees. I work better when in face-to-face communication and found my mind occasionally wandering instead of thinking of how to possibly get more information or better shape the next question.

Also, student researchers expressed a desire to be co-present in the same environment as their interviewees and better attend to their nonverbal cues. Student-participant attentiveness shifted with COVID-19 enabling richer disclosures in interviews yet constraining nonverbal cues.

Student Attentiveness. COVID-19 conditions prevented students from meeting in-person with their research teams, even if they were geographically close. Despite anecdotal complaints we receive for the amount of out-of-class group work required within the communication studies major, students expressed a preference for F2F meetings with their research teams. Students wanted to "meet in the library" or be able to "visit before or after class." Only a few students described how their team actively improvised to replace the function of an F2F research meeting. Maddy writes, "Positively, my team was already in communication with each other and a couple of us from the group set up Zoom meetings to help each other out as best we could." With that said, attentiveness of students to one another was quite limited. Even with using text messaging, email, or GroupMe for availability, most students described the quality of their student-student communication as poor. Allen concluded, "I think that the lack of seeing the other group members made me a little detached from the group overall." It was as if the COVID-19 shift from synchronous, F2F to asynchronous, online classes also represented a shift from team-based research to individual research.

Instructor Attentiveness. Once again, students did not make frequent references to the quality of communication between them and their instructor. Those that did tended to focus on messages of appreciation regarding the instructor's general helpfulness, frequency of communication with the class, and specific helpfulness in feedback on drafts or posting of resources. Honestly, their feedback was encouraging because the pandemic was a direct challenge to professional identity transitioning to teaching, researching, and serving from home with four kids learning from home. Even if the messages from students were requests for extra time or help writing a section of their papers, those requests were lifelines to the professional identity under disruption.

(Un)Purposive

(Un)Purposive theme was coded based on student references to learner-oriented goals (e.g., student learning outcomes, assignment instructions) that were purposively integrated into the course design and references to person-oriented goals (e.g., mental health as a student) that were unpurposively integrated into the course design. Students expressed consistent needs for communication to achieve both learner and person-oriented goals, but they stressed the role of course design, whether purposive or not, in achieving both.

Learner-Oriented Goals. In this study, the original pedagogical design of the communication research methods course focused on purposively developing learner-oriented goals set by the instructor and influenced by the program learning outcomes. From the course syllabus, student learning outcomes were enumerated focusing on typical expectations like write research questions, develop research methods consistent with questions posed, adhere to research ethics like informed consent, collaborate with a research team, collect qualitative data with participants, apply a method to analyze data, write a research paper with sections consistent with a qualitative communication project, and orally present research findings to an audience. These purposive goals, based on their reflective writing and their final written reports, were important learner-oriented goals for both students and the instructor. Improvisations required moving from in-person writing workshops in a computer lab to individual Zoom meetings and written feedback on sections of a rough draft of the final paper. Professionally and personally, it was satisfying to read students' drafts and final papers as they integrated comments from previous drafts, clarified ethical commitments to their participants, and wrote about how their COVID-19 experiences reflexively impacted their relationship with participants, interview method and data, and interpretation of data.

Person-Oriented Goals. The students' responses to the reflective writing prompt and interviews resulted in unsolicited personal chronicling of how COVID-19 impacted them, their families, and their views on health. In other words, while unpurposive, students adapted the writing assignment to reflect on personal experience and achieve personal goals, not just learning-oriented goals. For example, Alliah discussed her mom's concern for her safety, and Laura disclosed that she had an added complexity preventing her from traveling home—not wanting to accidently expose her grandmother to COVID-19 given her recent diagnosis of uterine cancer. Emotional expressions were also common as students described frustration, sadness, anxiety, and anger. In Wallace's interview, he admitted, "I was angry, angry at the world. I wasn't okay with what was going on." While not the objective of assigning the reflection paper or interviewing the students, students' reflections on the research methods course migrated to their reflections on the topic they were studying, the context in which they were studying it, and how their lives intersected with both.

Given that the communication research methods course study centered on college students' perception of well-being, student researchers learned much about their own perceptions of well-being and how COVID-19 impacted well-being. One student commented that it was "coincidental" that the course research project topic was college student well-being, demonstrating a recognition that the instructor did not strategically plan the topic to enhance COVID-19 learner or person-oriented goal attainment. However, it became a celebrated "coincidence."

Implications for Best Undergraduate Qualitative Methods Pedagogy Practices

The novel coronavirus may have interrupted pedagogical practices long-celebrated by communication and research methods faculty, but its novelty gave way to another type of novelty—improvisation. As Ebner and Greenberg (2020) invoked a Duke Ellington quote as inspiration for their pedagogical shifts in response to COVID-19, we too are inspired by the great jazz musician's words, "A problem is a chance for you to *do your best*" (emphasis added). The pandemic prompted many in the academy to "rethink the way they teach" generating change "under duress" or chaos (Supiano, 2020, para. 6). The improvisations emerging from the pandemic's chaos are not all worthwhile, but in many cases and in our case, improvisation nudged faculty toward a community of teachers to observe others' improvisations, bravely try and practice new pedagogical methods, and systematically reflect on their effectiveness. In the language of jazz, we soloed, supported, practiced, performed, and learned as "highly disciplined practicer[s]" of pedagogy (Weick, 1998, p. 544).

In the spirit of *doing our best,* we consider the implications of this study, its findings, and literature on best practices that enable online and offline research methods learning for the undergraduate. The implications for best practices in undergraduate qualitative methods pedagogy addresses the second research question posed in this study: What best practices emerge from students' experiences completing a communication research methods course in COVID-19 that would apply to online and offline delivery of the course? To answer the second research question, we turned to two blended sources: (1) student responses in the data that expressed appreciation for a particular way the course was designed, delivered, or improvised, and (2) scholarship on teaching and learning. In sum, we argue that both online and offline research methods courses may benefit from modeling, resourcing, reflexivity, and appreciation practices, which each functioned much like "strange attractors" (Seeger, 2002) moving the undergraduate research course from chaos to emerging structure. Post-pandemic, multimodal instruction will persist with some practices remaining based on their value to perceptions of availability, attentiveness, and goal achievement.

(Off)Online Modeling

When orienting students to the application of a research method, whether quantitative or qualitative, modeling can enhance students' ability to adopt and apply the steps of the method on their own. Harkening Bandura's (1977, 1978) notion of modeling and reinforcement and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning, research methods pedagogy within communication studies appears to value modeling. Instructors may have students read journal articles that model the method, demonstrate the method to the class, or have students perform the method for peers to see prior to sending them into the field to apply the method on their own (Cvancara, 2017). Similarly, instructors may choose to have students perform an exercise that uses the same skill set associated with the method or follows the same steps with a debriefing period for the instructor to facilitate discussion around the process of translating those skills or steps to research method (see Scharp & Sanders, 2019). In Spring 2020, the class in this study began offline in the traditional college classroom, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted in front of the class and in the table groups, thus modeling interviewing methods prior to conducting interviews in the field with participants. The offline course design included class periods scheduled in a computer lab for students to discuss samples, or models, of interview transcripts, thematic coding of texts, and completed research studies using similar methods. Then, after interacting with the models, they would be able to work individually and collectively on their transcription, coding, and writing while their instructor was present to address immediate concerns and questions. At the onset of pivoting from offline to online learning, the method of modeling needed improvising to adjust to the asynchronous learning management system.

Online, asynchronous modeling focused on (1) embedding short videos from YouTube in content modules and (2) the construction of a report template as a word processing document for students to download and begin writing their APA style qualitative report in the document. While only a few students noted the utility of the video modeling, with the exception of the tutorial on APA insertion of figures, almost all students wrote about the utility of the template. Students consistently expressed appreciation for the template. Consistent with Cvancara's (2017) use of templates in research methods courses, students in the study were given access to a document with cover page, abstract page, and paper with section headings and subheadings containing specific instructions in italics on how to complete the section. When applicable, students were also directed to pages in the textbook or journal articles posted in the learning management system. In her interview, Maddy recalled the template stating, "I remember there was a sample paper . . . It said what you need to write here, and it really helped me with formatting to see it. I'm a visual learner, and for me, to just see things is really helpful." Whether on- or offline, modeling of communication research methods and writing assists students to "see" and practice what it is they need to do. What can communication educators do to model research methods across (off)online contexts?

(Off)Online Resourcing

While models may function as resources for students in communication research methods courses, there are many forms of resources to assist them with learning and applying methodology. In the Spring 2020 course, a number of resources were developed by students and the instructor and made available on the learning management system. For example, to ensure students learned APA style for citing sources, they completed two annotated bibliographic entries of studies published in academic sources about college student well-being. Then, the instructor graded the entries, corrected APA errors, compiled all entries in alphabetical order, and published the full set of entries on the learning management system for students to access when writing the rationale and literature review sections of their research papers. In retrospect, this activity could have been student-led in their research teams to strengthen their social bonds and teamwork for greater capacity for available, attentive student-student communication. Additional resources included linked articles on the method being used, linked articles to bolster rationales (which were deemed weak after reading rough drafts), YouTube videos explaining how to write literature reviews, and more. Most resources were provided through the learning management system pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19, not making a significant difference in the course delivery format. To consider what resources may best assist students' research methods learning, the Spring 2020 semester demonstrated that purposive learner-oriented planning is beneficial, as in the case of the class annotated bibliography, but improvising is necessary as the instructor uses student assessments to gauge learning outcomes, as in the case linking articles to help with revisions of students' rationale section of their papers. What can communication educators do to develop and improvise resources for research methods across (off) online contexts?

(Off)Online Reflexivity

Reflexive practice is widely adopted in education to prompt students to critically think about who they are, what they have learned, how they have learned it, how learning and self mutually influence one another, how learning is applicable, how they might integrate learning into future practice, and how structures or power may influence learning (Nagata, 2004; Rothman, 2014). Differentiating between closely related terms, reflection is more akin to retrospective sensemaking and reflection-in-action is more akin to learning and making sense *in situ* (Kolb, 1984), whereas reflexivity is more akin to self-awareness and critical engagement within the retrospective sensemaking process. Reflexivity was achieved in Spring 2020 through the reflective writing assignment at the culmination of the semester, in which students were primarily asked to reflect on their research methods experiences, learning, and self. The assignment morphed for most students into critical reflexivity about who they were and how COVID-19 and the research methods course intersected with their broader social selves. To that end, students hearkened the social roles that they perform including students, family members, roommates, workers, organizational members, and friends and how the course and COVID-19 collided in expected and unexpected ways. Additionally, the assignment transformed into a personal reflection of well-being and how COVID-19 challenged many of their assumptions about well-being, especially their role in protecting public health and how public health safety measures were affecting their mental health and social relationships. By integrating a reflective writing assignment into the research methods course, communication educators enable specific reflection on learner-oriented goals, but simultaneously, students are able to extend reflections and reflexively consider person-oriented goals related to the critical, social accomplishment of learning. Reflective writing applies across (off)online learning conditions as students interrogate the relationship of social discourses, crises, and other exigencies to learning. What can communication educators do to develop reflexive praxis as students reflect on their research methods experiences across (off)online contexts?

(Off)Online Appreciation

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a communicative spirit and practice exploring and/or celebrating what works well (Barge & Oliver, 2003). Lahman (2012) applies AI to communication education and service learning through group communication that follows the 4-D cycle (Discover what gives life, Dream what might be, Design how it can be, and Destiny shape through what it will be). While AI in Lahman's pedagogical approach and Barge and Oliver's conversational approach in management trend toward offline communication, AI can cross learning contexts and have application in either online or offline communication research methods pedagogy. If the Spring 2020 semester had continued F2F, a facilitated AI debriefing would have followed the scheduled research showcase. As the purposive learner-oriented goals shifted with public health recommendations, offline AI was woven into the reflective writing assignment asking students to consider positive experiences and learning outcomes pre-COVID-19 and during COVID-19. Improvisation shifted AI to an online writing exercise. In the reflective writing exercise, students expressed appreciation for conducting research "from the comfort" of their couches, apartments, and cars. Students expressed appreciation for models and resources that helped them apply learning to their data collection, analysis, and writing. Students even expressed appreciation for instructor compassion and flexibility. Reflecting on her Spring 2020, Maddy stated, "It's really important and helpful. Professors are more willing to listen to their students . . . Just more willing to accommodate." AI holds countless possible enactments in communication research pedagogy, and the question continues to drive us to AI practice, "What can communication educators do to facilitate appreciative dialogue in research methods pedagogy across (off)online contexts?"

Conclusion

This study uniquely applies chaos theory and improvisation research to the context of the higher education classroom amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The chaotic pedagogical context brought on by COVID-19 initial conditions necessitated improvisational responses by both instructor and student to self-organize for desired learning outcomes. Consistent with the qualitative methods used by students in the course, this study relied on qualitative methods to collect student experiences in written and oral forms to comprise the data. The thematic analysis revealed that students had varied perceptions of student-participant, student-student, and student-instructor communication in the transition from synchronous, in-person to asynchronous, virtual learning. (Un)availability and (in)attentiveness of participants, student research teams, and their instructor impacted how they viewed COVID-19 and its perceived positive or negative impact on their Spring 2020 semester as college students, more broadly, and their learning in the communication research methods courses, more precisely. Perceptions of available, attentive participants, teammates, and instructor manifested in students' expression of appreciation of the COVID-19 learning conditions. Availability and attentiveness minimized negative associations with COVID-19 conditions and facilitated desirable learning and personal outcomes. Whereas perceptions of unavailable or inattentive teammates, particularly, manifested in students' expression of frustration with COVID-19 learning conditions. Modeling, resourcing, reflexive, and appreciative practices were especially helpful in both the instructor and students achieving learner and person-centered goals in the course, thus making these pedagogical tools flexible ways to adapt to online and offline communication research methods pedagogy. Like jazz musicians coordinating their improvisations for a coherent and compelling musical experience (Barrett, 1998), instructor and students are poised to improvise in chaotic, crisis situations to improve learning experiences and outcomes, self-organize, and recognize the value of strange attractors.

Considering what this study adds to scholarship on undergraduate communication research methods pedagogy, we position this study as filling an expressed gap for qualitative, rich descriptions of student's experiences with qualitative methods pedagogy (Richards, 2011) within the discipline (Breuer & Schreier, 2007). While prevalent at the graduate level, emphasis on qualitative communication research methods at the undergraduate level is less common historically (Frey et al., 1998), and, as such, has received less scholarly attention. We hope that more communication educators will see their undergraduate communication research methods classroom as a place for qualitative methods to be learned and adopted in student research and a place to engage in the merging of teaching and scholarship to collect data furthering work in this area. Furthermore, this study has implications for pedagogy that crosses and/or bridges the (off)online divide. The modeling, resourcing, reflexive, and appreciative practices proposed in response to creating available, attentive, and learner/person-centered pedagogy provide practical ways to approach each practice in (off)online teaching conditions. Finally, this study embodies reflective or reflexive learning theory and praxis. As Brockbank and McGill (2007) state, "learning does not occur in a vacuum. The context in which learning may happen is crucial. Learning is a social process . . . " (p. 4). Asking students to reflect on what they have learned was the initial aim of the reflective writing assignment implemented in this study, but reflexive learning broadened student thinking to examine who they were, how they have been shaped by what they have learned, and how they are shaping what they learn. In that sense of reflexivity, students intuitively extended their reflections to embrace the broader and more critical notion of reflexive praxis, and we argue, rightly so.

Additional research is needed for comparative cases of communication research methods pedagogy during the recent pandemic. Comparative cases and/or different methodologies could enrich the data through added student experiences to analyze and, consequently, widen the breadth of best practices. It would also be fruitful to compare how instructors improvised through synchronous communications technologies. Furthermore, additional research is needed to tease out students' social and mental health during the pandemic and its impact on their learning. This study focused on the undergraduate communication research methods course and the pedagogical improvisation in response to COVID-19, but the study did not focus on students' mental health or coping and the ways that communication faculty across different courses may use communication pedagogy to address such needs. Yet, mental health topically emerged in relation to student research in the course, suggesting that mental health was important to college students during this period of time. To a degree, activities like the reflective writing assignment used in this course invite prosaic response and disclosive storytelling; however, limiting the writing prompt as was done in this course, did not fully encourage students to make more general disclosures about their COVID-19 coping or mental health. We have learned from this retrospectively and would encourage others to learn from our improvisational errors by encouraging broader reflexive praxis in writing, which would empower students to reflect on how the course, learning outcomes, and their experiences impact them holistically. Even in a communication research methods course, it may behoove faculty to further investigate the value of compassionate pedagogy as the need for such intrusive measures is deemed necessary to care for the whole person rather than for the academic performance of the student in one class (Goode et al., 2020) especially in pandemic conditions. Compassionate pedagogy, like what Miller (2002) describes in her autoethnographic response to the Texas A&M bonfire tragedy, has the potential to connect with the person-centered, not just learner-centered, goals of teaching and learning, and subsequently, enable students to reflect on and greater appreciate what they are learning in and out of the communication research methods class.

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Pandemic Pedagogy: Elements of Online Supportive Course Design

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Keywords: instructional communication, emergency remote teaching, online supportive course design, teacher competency, pandemic pedagogy

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to identify which course design elements students perceive as supporting an easier transition to emergency remote teaching due to COVID-19, as well as to use those items to develop the Online Supportive Course Design (OSCD) measure. By asking students to rate their course with the easiest transition and hardest transition to emergency remote teaching, this study identified which structural elements were most important for supporting students during the transition. Using exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, a seven-item measure was developed to operationalize OSCD, and initial validity was established by examining the relationships between OSCD, autonomy support, and teacher competence. Finally, practical implications for university faculty and areas for future research are discussed.

In the Spring of 2020, COVID-19 caused the partial or entire campus shutdown of over 4,000 institutions of higher education, changing the lives of an estimated 25,000,000 students (Entangled Solutions, 2020). Colleges and universities converted many in-person courses to a remote format, shifting the attention of instructors and administrators to the best practices of "online learning." However, online learning

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scholars have been quick to make the distinction between true online learning and what has been labeled "emergency remote teaching" (Hodges et al., 2020). The primary goal of emergency remote teaching is to "provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis" (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 2). The unique circumstances of the pandemic create both an opportunity and necessity to investigate best practices for emergency remote teaching, and this "great experiment" (Zimmerman, 2020, p. 1) could also add to the existing body of research on best practices for online learning.

In the past, universities have occasionally been forced to move to emergency remote teaching following extreme weather crises (Helvie-Mason, 2010), but researchers have not yet investigated or established clear best practices for transitioning courses rapidly from face-to-face (F2F) to fully remote format. Nevertheless, all institutions were forced to do so in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020. Consequently, the first goal of this study is to provide practical advice regarding what students perceived as most helpful and least helpful within emergency remote teaching contexts. Second, this study proposes an Online Supportive Course Design (OSCD) measure to guide faculty in developing their course structures in future emergency situations, as well in intentionally designed online learning experiences.

Online Learning

In the broadest sense, online learning can be defined as "a learner's interaction with content and/or people via the internet for the purposes of learning" (Means et al., 2014, p. 6). Online learning is a subset of distance learning, which includes any learning that occurs when instructor and student are physically separated, whether or not those courses are delivered using internet-based formats (Means et al., 2014). In the past, online learning typically occurred in a fully online format where all instruction and assessment are delivered asynchronously via the internet or in a hybrid (a.k.a. blended) format incorporating a mix of asynchronous online and F2F meetings (Means et al., 2014). When institutions made a rapid emergency shift to remote teaching in the Spring of 2020, however, several additional formats were introduced. Some institutions also experimented with *HyFlex* and *BlendFlex* models, which involved having some students simultaneously attend classes in a mix of in-person, synchronous online, and asynchronous online formats, with a limit on the number of students who could attend in person each day (Lieberman, 2018; Miller et al., 2021). Many others taught courses synchronously online using videoconferencing tools such as Zoom, which is substantially different from the asynchronous online teaching featured in most previous research about online courses.

The emergency transition to remote teaching due to COVID-19 was an unprecedented rapid shift in teaching and learning that utilized the deployment of instructional strategies and tools that had not been previously tested or even available on a broad scale; therefore, it's vital to study this form of online teaching as discrete from intentionally planned online courses. However, previous research about online courses provides a framework for thinking about the key factors influencing success in emergency remote teaching contexts.

Money and Dean (2019) synthesized 10 years of online learning research and propose the following model for understanding what contributes to success in an online setting. More specifically, the model describes individual factors (demographics, technology preferences, etc.) and course design factors.

Individual Factors

Traditional online courses often attract a student population with different needs than F2F courses. Students who choose online courses often do so because they need greater flexibility due to other constraints (e.g., adult learners with full-time jobs, caregiver responsibilities, geographic constraints, economic disparities; Mather & Sarkans, 2018). Students who are successful in online contexts typically have strong communication and technical skills, are self-directed learners with an internal locus of control, and have strong time-management skills and an ability to work independently (Dabbagh, 2007; Driscoll et al., 2012; Goodman et al., 2019; Hoppes et al., 2020; NCES, 2018; Ortagus, 2017). This complex set of characteristics and circumstances impact what this population of learners needs and prefers in an online learning environment (Panacci, 2017). Specifically, students who intentionally choose online courses due to this complex array of constraints are more likely to pass asynchronous courses (Faulconer et al., 2018) and often worry about the time constraints associated with in-person courses (Stewart et al., 2010).

In contrast, many of the students who shifted from in-person to emergency remote classes were residential students who had intentionally chosen the structure and experience of F2F classes. Consequently, they would likely be developing the time-management, organizational, and self-directed learning skills needed for online learning success while taking the courses. Individuals whose education was unexpectedly shifted to a fully-online format by extrinsic circumstances constitute a different population of students; it would therefore be misguided to assume that the course design structures that worked well for previous online learners will be the same ones that will facilitate success during emergency transitions to remote teaching. Past studies have shown that on-campus student populations are more likely to withdraw from online courses than F2F courses (Murphy & Stewart, 2017), perform worse in online courses than F2F courses with the same content (Fischer et al., 2020), are less likely to be successful as they take larger online course loads (Glazier et al., 2020), and are more satisfied with synchronous course lectures than asynchronous lectures (Simonds & Brock, 2014).

Course Design

Although it is important for faculty to be aware that students in courses experiencing an emergency transition from F2F to remote teaching have different needs and characteristics than students who typically choose fully online courses; course design and instructor-student interactions are the areas where faculty have the greatest potential to impact learning success. Jaggars and Xu (2016) identified four course factors that contributed to student success in online courses: organization and presentation, learning objectives and assessments, interpersonal interaction, and use of technology. Of those factors, course grades were only meaningfully predicted by interpersonal interaction, which included elements such as regular announcements, a quick response time, and a sense of care (Jaggars & Xu, 2016).

Although instructional communication research about online teaching is somewhat limited (Chatham-Carpenter, 2017), previous communication research in online learning contexts indicates that instructor interaction matters. Teacher misbehaviors unique to the online learning context include ineffective and inconsistent communication, as well as lack of engagement from the instructor (Vallade & Kaufmann, 2018). Similarly, student perceptions of instructor immediacy, communication satisfaction, and task-related interpersonal attraction negatively predict perceptions of teacher misbehaviors (Hazel et al., 2014), and online nonverbal immediacy behaviors are associated with higher course engagement (Dixon et al., 2017). The use of videos for announcements and assignment feedback can increase perceptions of instructor immediacy (Bialowas & Steimel, 2019). Furthermore, Kaufmann et al. (2016) developed an online learning climate scale comprised of factors for instructor behaviors, course structure, course clarity, and student connectedness that help to generate a positive online classroom climate.

The evidence on instructor-student interactions in online courses ties into the larger theoretical background on social presence. Social presence is the degree to which a person is perceived as "real" in mediated communication and has a significant impact on student satisfaction and perceptions of student learning (Richardson et al., 2017). More specifically, instructor presence, which is the verbal and non-verbal cues that make up the "virtual visibility" of the instructor, also predicts student success (Chakraborty & Nafukho, 2015). Instructor presence can be conceptualized as the online equivalent of teacher immediacy (Chakraborty & Nafukho, 2015). Not only does instructor presence increase student satisfaction and course ratings, but it also increases self-reported perceptions of cognitive and affective learning (Baker, 2004).

As previously mentioned, because the students who were learning via emergency remote teaching are a different population than those who have typically elected to take online courses, it would be unwise to assume that past research on online learning is directly applicable to remote emergency instruction. To prepare for potential scenarios in which universities face another rapid shift to the emergency transition to remote teaching (e.g., pandemics, natural disasters), it is important to identify which course design elements facilitated an easier or harder transition to learning online. Consequently, we pose the following research questions:

> **RQ1:** Which format do students prefer for emergency remote teaching
>
> **RQ2:** Which course design elements are associated with an easier or harder transition to emergency remote teaching?
>
> **RQ3:** Do the individual course design elements work together as indicators to form a scale or subscales operationalizing online supportive course design in emergency remote teaching contexts?

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) posits that there are three underlying psychological needs that influence students' overall motivation and academic performance: autonomy (ownership of one's action), competence (a feeling of mastery), and relatedness (a sense of belonging; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020). Instructors can facilitate the satisfaction of these needs by creating learning environments that provide autonomy support and structure (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In classroom settings, perceived autonomy support predicts ratings of teaching effectiveness and course design effectiveness (Demir et al., 2019); however, autonomy support tends to be lower in online classes (Filak & Nicolini, 2018). Autonomy support may be particularly important in the context of emergency remote teaching when student autonomy is being limited by the cause of the emergency remote teaching (e.g., COVID-19). Moreover, as Ryan and Deci (2020) note, "When teachers are autonomy supportive, they are typically also supportive of students' other basic psychological needs (competence and relatedness) as well" (p. 4). Student perceptions of autonomy support have been correlated with greater levels of intrinsic motivation (Jang et al., 2010), engagement (Patall et al., 2018), and interest (Tsai et al., 2008). Given these important associations with students' adaptive classroom behaviors, the research team believes autonomy support could be a critical factor in the development of an effective online supportive course design.

Teacher Competence

Similarly, students' perceptions of teacher competence may be a vital factor in an online supportive course design. The move to emergency remote teaching caused by COVID-19 required teachers not only to have the knowledge and skills needed for effective instruction, but also to display confidence in successfully using those skills online (König et al., 2020). Originating from McCroskey (1992) as a dimension of teacher credibility, teacher competence includes knowledge or expertise in a certain area, but also includes the ability to explain complex material well, practice effective classroom management behaviors, and proficient communication skills (Teven & Hanson, 2004). Previous studies have found that students' perceptions of teacher competence predicted students' classroom experience, behavior, and outcomes, including motivation (Gorham & Christophel, 1992) and achievement (Akram, 2019), as well as cheating (Murdock et al., 2004) and self-reported misbehavior (Bru et al., 2002).

Since autonomy support and teacher competence are both associated with effective teaching and positive learning outcomes—and may be particularly important in the switch to an emergency remote teaching context—we would expect them to be positively correlated with a supportive online course design, so these variables can help to establish convergent validity. Additionally, there should be differences between these variables for courses that made more versus less successful transitions to emergency remote teaching (concurrent validity), so we pose the following hypotheses:

> **H1:** Supportive online course design will be positively correlated with perceived autonomy support and perceived teacher competency.
>
> **H2:** There is a difference in perceived autonomy support in courses that students perceive as having an easier versus a harder transition to emergency remote teaching.
>
> **H3:** There is a difference in perceived teacher competency in courses that students perceive as having an easier versus a harder transition to emergency remote teaching.
>
> **H4:** There is a difference in supportive online course design in courses that students perceive as having an easier versus a harder transition to emergency remote teaching.

Method

Procedures

This study was conducted at a large, diverse mid-Atlantic public university during the Spring 2020 semester. When the COVID-19 crisis reached the U.S., the university extended Spring break by a week to give instructors time to transition to remote teachings, and the remainder of the semester was taught exclusively online. Students enrolled in either of the undergraduate introductory communication courses that met the general education requirement for oral communication (COMM 100: Public Speaking or COMM 101: Fundamentals of Communication) and were asked to complete an online pre-course survey for course credit during the first 2 weeks of the semester, and only the demographic data from that survey was included in this analysis. The post-course survey, which was completely redesigned after the emergency transition to remote teaching, was completed during the last 2 weeks of the Spring semester for course credit, and collected all non-demographic data reported in this study. If a student did not wish to participate in the study, they were able to indicate that within the survey and their data was removed prior to analysis, per IRB-approved procedures. Students who failed attention checks in the survey were also removed from the data set prior to analysis.

Participants

Participants included 1,203 undergraduate students. Of these students, 935 shared demographic data in the pre-course survey, 45% of whom were female and 55% of whom were male. The average age of participants was 19.75 years (*SD* = 3.25). Most of the students were freshmen (56.8%), followed by sophomores (25.9%), juniors (10.3%), and seniors (6.7%). Students were asked to report their race/ethnicity and could indicate more than one response. The sample was 42.6% White, 32.3% Asian, 15.3% Black, 13.4% Hispanic, 6% Middle Eastern or North African, and 1.1% Pacific Islander. Of the students who responded to the post-course survey, 38% reported that they had taken a fully online course before this semester, and 62% reported that they had not previously taken an online course.

Measures

Student Preference

Students were asked about their preferences for future course format through two questions. First, students were asked, “Do you plan to take fully online courses in the future?” Next, to find out which format students preferred specifically for their communication course, students were asked, “Which format of your COMM 100/101 class do you believe would be most effective for a fully online version of the class?”

Easiest Versus Hardest Course Transitions

At the beginning of the survey, participants were given the following prompts:

1. Think about all of the classes that transitioned to a fully online format halfway through the semester as a response to COVID-19. Which of your classes had the easiest or most successful online transition for you as a student?
2. Which of your classes had the hardest or most difficult online transition for you as a student?

After identifying the courses that they perceived to have the easiest transition (ET) and the hardest transition (HT), those course numbers were pre-populated in the survey for each of the following measures, and students were asked to respond to each item side by side, once for their course with the ET, and once for the course with the HT, which allowed for a gap analysis.

Online Supportive Course Design

In order to identify whether there were structural elements that students perceived as being more supportive of learning during the transition to emergency remote teaching, the research team generated 16 items that described structural course elements that might impact the ease with which students might adjust to emergency remote teaching. Given that the COVID-19 transition happened so close to the end of the semester, there was not time to collect qualitative responses to generate items used in this survey (similar to the approach used by Goodboy & Myers, 2015), so these items were developed based on researchers' experience teaching online, previous research on online course design (included that cited earlier in this paper), recommendations that had been shared by the university's teaching and learning center, and anecdotal comments from students about what was and was not working for them across their course transitions. Students responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Example items included, "I was given clear instructions for what I needed to do," and, "I had weekly deadlines that helped me stay on track" (see Table 1 for all items). For the first part of the analysis, each item is being treated as an individual course design element, so an overall reliability measure for the full set of items was not appropriate.

Perceived Autonomy Support

Students' perceived autonomy support was measured for students ET and HT using a shortened six-item version of the Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ; Center for Self-Determination Theory, n.d.; see also Williams & Deci, 1996). The shortened LCQ contained items such as, "I feel that my instructor provides me choices and options," and, "My instructor conveyed confidence in my ability to do well in the course." The ET LCQ items had a reliability of α = .87, while the HT LCQ items had a reliability of α = .90.

Teacher Competency

Teacher competency was assessed using a nine-item scale developed by Murdock et al. (2001), who reported a reliability of α = .78. The teacher competency measure contained items such as, "The instructor's presentation of the material is well organized," and, "My instructor is well prepared for class." In the present study, the ET teacher competency items had a reliability of α = .92, while the HT teacher competency items had a reliability of α = .94.

Results

Student Preference

To answer RQ1, a frequency analysis was conducted on the two student preference questions. When asked whether the student planned to take fully online courses in the future, 17.4% of students responded, "Definitely"; 37.2% responded, "Maybe—if the courses I need are offered online at more convenient times than in-person classes"; 33.66% responded, "Maybe—if it is the only way that I can take the classes I need"; and 11.8% responded, "Definitely not." These results suggest that most students are open to taking online courses after experiencing emergency remote teaching, particularly if the online options are convenient.

The primary introductory communication course (COMM 101) in which this study was conducted is typically taught in a lecture-lab format in which the equivalent of 1 credit hour of content is taught asynchronously online, and students meet in the classroom for 2 hours each week. When asked which format would be most effective for a fully online course, 32.8% of participants indicated that they would prefer a fully asynchronous course with no set meeting times, and 67.2% indicated that they would prefer a partially synchronous class in which students would do some work on their own and would also meet with their entire class online during the normal lab time.

Analysis of Individual Course Design Items

In order to identify which course design elements facilitated easier and harder transitions to emergency remote teaching due to the COVID-19 outbreak (RQ2), a series of paired-samples *t*-tests were conducted for each item. Since Shapiro-Wilk tests for normality are designed for samples between 20 and 50 (D'Agostino, 1971), making it overly sensitive to large sample sizes (Meyers et al., 2016), skewness and kurtosis were visually examined for the individual items to ensure that the data met the assumption of normal distribution; none were found to be too skewed or kurtotic using conservative standards. To account for familywise inflation of alpha since a total of 16 *t*-tests were conducted, a Bonferroni correction was applied to lower the alpha threshold for statistical significance from the standard .05 to .003125 (.05/16 = .003125).[1] Additionally, the within-subjects effect size, Cohen's d_z (1988, 1992; see also Fritz et al., 2012), was computed in order to determine the magnitude of the difference between reported ET and HT.[2]

Results indicated that there were significant differences between the ET and HT course for all 16 items. Table 1 on the following page shows the means, standard deviations, mean differences, and effect sizes for all items, sorted in order from largest to smallest effect size.

Notably, students were far more likely to perceive that they were able to learn as much in their online course as they would have in-person in their courses with the ET than those with the HT. Some of the design elements that were most strongly associated with an easier transition included clear instructions, flexibility, having access to materials, having everything needed for the class in Blackboard, and regular feedback and reminders from instructors. Some of the elements that were most strongly associated with a harder transition included requiring more work online, changing assignments as a result of the transition, and lack of clarity about how to find and submit assignments.

Online Supportive Course Design Scale

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to evaluate whether the individual online course design items constituted a global measure of online supportive course design (RQ3). First, all participants in the dataset ($N = 857$) who completed all 16 items for both the ET and HT contexts were randomly split into two data sets in order to conduct an EFA on the first half and then confirm the factor structure with CFA on the second half.

Using the first half data set ($N = 431$), two EFAs were conducted to determine the underlying factor structure. Principal axis factoring using promax rotation was used to identify factors and eliminate survey items that did not adequately load onto a factor. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was > .5 for both solutions (.827 for ET, .895 for HT), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant for both solutions ($p < .001$), indicating the data met the assumptions necessary for factor analysis. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 and depicted above the bend in a visual inspection of the scree plot were considered. Both tests had three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, but the scree plots indicated that there were likely only one or two factors present.

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[1] A Bonferroni correction is the purposeful lowering of the alpha threshold for significance to mitigate Type I errors by dividing the standard alpha threshold ($\alpha < .05$) by the number of tests conducted. A discussion on the necessity of this correction is outside the purview of the present study; instead, see Frane (2015) and McEwan (2017).

[2] Commonly-used criteria for interpreting Cohen's (1988) *d* include $d = 0.2$ as small, $d = 0.5$ as medium, and $d = 0.8$ as large effect sizes. For more contemporary explications of Cohen's *d* and its application, see Cumming (2013) and Fritz et al. (2012).

TABLE 1
Results of Gap Paired-Samples T-Tests, With Mean Differences, Inter-Item Correlations, and Effect Sizes

	Easiest Transition	Hardest Transition	Mean Difference	Inter-Item Correlation	Effect Size
Item	***M (SD)***	***M (SD)***	***M (SD)***	***r***	**d_z**
1. I was able to learn as much in my online class as I would have in a campus classroom	3.86 (1.21)	2.32 (1.25)	1.54 (1.53)***	.23***	1.00
2. I have done well in this class after the online transition.	4.32 (0.85)	2.93 (1.26)	1.39 (1.39)***	.11***	1.00
3. I was given clear instructions for what I needed to do.	4.52 (0.68)	3.34 (1.28)	1.18 (1.30)***	.12***	0.86
4. My instructor gave me the flexibility that I needed to complete my work.	4.37 (0.88)	3.26 (1.34)	1.11 (1.53)***	.10**	0.73
5. I had the materials that I needed to do the work in this class.	4.52 (0.72)	3.59 (1.22)	0.93 (1.30)***	.18***	0.71
6. My instructor put everything that we needed for class in Blackboard.	4.58 (0.71)	3.66 (1.25)	0.92 (1.37)***	.11**	0.67
7. This class required a lot more work online than it would have in the classroom.	2.48 (1.22)	3.51 (1.33)	-1.03 (1.66)***	.15***	0.62
8. I received feedback on my work on a regular basis.	3.96 (1.08)	2.94 (1.36)	1.02 (1.67)***	.08*	0.62
9. My instructor sent regular reminders about what we needed to do.	4.35 (0.90)	3.45 (1.33)	0.90 (1.52)***	.12***	0.59
10. My instructor was available for me if I had questions or needed to talk.	4.48 (0.75)	3.69 (1.23)	0.79 (1.37)***	.12**	0.58
11. I had weekly deadlines that helped me stay on track.	4.30 (0.92)	3.57 (1.27)	0.73 (1.43)***	.18***	0.51
12. I did not know how to find or submit my assignments online.	1.67 (1.06)	2.32 (1.32)	-0.65 (1.34)***	.38***	0.49
13. I participated in discussion boards.	3.73 (1.31)	3.07 (1.34)	0.66 (1.72)***	.16***	0.39
14. The assignments in this class changed a lot after the online transition.	2.57 (1.37)	3.24 (1.37)	-0.67 (1.94)***	.01	0.35
15. There were online lectures or learning modules built into the course.	4.10 (1.21)	3.51 (1.41)	0.59 (1.79)***	.08*	0.33
16. I worked with other students on collaborative assignments (group projects, peer workshops, etc.).	3.27 (1.53)	2.96 (1.54)	0.31 (2.17)***	.00	0.14

Note. $N = 857$. This table is organized in descending order by within-subjects effect size (d_z)—see Cohen (1988, pp. 48–52) and Faul et al. (2007) for detailed explications of d_z.
$^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

For each EFA on the ET and HT items, pairs of items that were not correlated with any other item at $r \geq .3$ and/or were non-significant were excluded from further analyses, as they were deemed not factorable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Moreover, throughout the EFA process, only items with loadings on the rotated pattern matrix above .32 were examined. While no universal standards exist pertaining to item retention, items were retained on a given factor following Tabachnick and Fidell's guidelines for interpreting rotated factor loadings; echoing Comrey and Lee (1992), the authors forward that a cutoff of .45 (20% overlapping variance) on the primary factor as considered "fair." Items were omitted individually during the EFA process if they cross-loaded on more than one factor. A final consideration for item retention was conceptual in nature. For example, the item "I was doing well in this class before the online transition" was excluded, as it pertained solely to the COVID-related mid-semester shift to online learning—thus, limiting its utility in other contexts and potentially hindering the heurism of the nascent scale.

In the randomly selected bifurcated data ($N = 431$), the same seven items loaded onto a single factor in both contexts, explaining 39.64% of the variance in the ET context and 53.70% of the variance in the HT context, respectively. Table 2 provides the item loadings for the single factor identified in both the ET and HT contexts, as well as the means, standard deviations, and scale reliabilities. These items were focused on the design of and communication in the course, so this scale was titled the Online Supportive Course Design Measure (OSCD).

The remaining 426 randomly-selected cases were used in two maximum likelihood estimation CFAs. The first CFA examined the unidimensionality of items responding to the participants' easiest transition, while the second evaluated items pertaining to their hardest transition. Goodness of fit was assessed in concordance with the guidelines for assessing global model fit proposed by Brown (2015; see also Hu & Bentler, 1999). Given that chi-square tests are overly sensitive to sample size, other indices were used to assess model fit (viz., SRMR, RMSEA, CFI, TLI; Brown, 2015; Kline, 2016). Specifically,

> support for contentions of reasonably good fit between the target model and the observed data (assuming ML estimation) is obtained in instances where (1) SRMR values are close to .08 or below; (2) RMSEA values are close to .06 or below; and (3) CFI and TLI values are close to .95 or greater. (Brown, 2015, p. 74)

The CFAs were conducted using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) in R (R Core Team, 2020; RStudio Team, 2020).

For the seven ET items, the model fit was good, $\chi^2(14) = 32.31$, $p = .004$, SRMR = .036, RMSEA = .055 90% CI [.030; .081], CFI =.97, TLI = .95. The seven HT items also indicated good fit on a single latent variable, $\chi^2(14) = 35.67$, $p = .001$, SRMR = .031, RMSEA = .060 90% CI [.036, .085], CFI = .98, TLI = .97. Table 2 contains the standardized factor loadings for both the ET and HT items, all of which were significant at $p < .001$.

TABLE 2

OSCD Measure: Descriptive Statistics, EFA Loadings, CFA Standardized Loadings, and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

	Easiest Transition			**Hardest Transition**		
	Full Data Set	**EFA**	**CFA**	**Full Data Set**	**EFA**	**CFA**
Item	***M* (*SD*)**	**Factor Loadings**	**Standardized Loading**	***M* (*SD*)**	**Factor Loadings**	**Standardized Loading**
I was given clear instructions for what I needed to do.	4.52 (0.68)	0.62	0.66	3.34 (1.28)	0.71	0.75
My instructor gave me the flexibility that I needed to complete my work.	4.37 (0.88)	0.47	0.54	3.26 (1.34)	0.59	0.66
My instructor put everything that we needed for class in Blackboard.	4.58 (0.71)	0.56	0.55	3.66 (1.25)	0.73	0.62
I received feedback on my work on a regular basis.	3.96 (1.08)	0.49	0.52	2.94 (1.36)	0.68	0.64
My instructor sent regular reminders about what we needed to do.	4.35 (0.90)	0.53	0.55	3.45 (1.33)	0.72	0.73
My instructor was available for me if I had questions or needed to talk.	4.48 (0.75)	0.64	0.62	3.69 (1.23)	0.75	0.71
I had weekly deadlines that helped me stay on track.	4.30 (0.92)	0.49	0.48	3.57 (1.27)	0.57	0.60
Scale Descriptive Statistics	4.36 (0.53)	—	—	3.41 (0.94)	—	—
Scale Reliability	$\alpha = .74$	$\alpha = .73$	$\alpha = .75$	$\alpha = .85$	$\alpha = .85$	$\alpha = .85$

Note. Given the different loadings in ET and HT contexts, the items in Table 2 are listed congruent to their order in Table 1. All means and standard deviations were calculated from the full data set ($N = 857$). The full data set was randomly split into two files. Exploratory factor analyses on half of the cases ($N = 431$) were used to determine the factor structure of the items in ET and HT contexts; in both contexts, the analyses yielded the same seven items loading onto a single factor labeled online supportive course design (OSCD). Subsequently, confirmatory factor analyses (CFA; $N = 426$) were conducted on the remaining bifurcated data to examine the validity of the *a priori* measure of OSCD. All standardized loadings are significant at $p < .001$; goodness of fit indices for the CFAs are reported in-text.

Associations With Autonomy Support and Teacher Competence

To test H1, correlation analyses were conducted to evaluate whether supportive online course design was significantly related to perceived autonomy support and perceived teacher competence. As is shown in Table 3, strong positive correlations were found among all of the variables at the $p < .001$ level. H1 was supported.

TABLE 3
Reliability Coefficients, Descriptive Statistics, and Correlations Between Dependent Variables

	Easiest Transition		**Hardest Transition**		**Correlations**		
Variables	**α**	***M* (*SD*)**	**α**	***M* (*SD*)**	**1**	**2**	**3**
1. Perceived Autonomy Support	.87	4.06 (0.72)	.90	3.25 (0.96)	—	.80*	.74*
2. Teacher Competency	.92	4.37 (0.60)	.94	3.55 (0.98)	.74*	—	.77*
3. Online Supportive Course Design	.74	4.36 (0.54)	.85	3.41 (0.94)	.58*	.60*	—

Note. $N = 857$. Correlations below the diagonal bars are the easiest transition correlations, those above are the hardest transition correlations.
*$p < .001$.

Next, to test H2–H4, a within-subjects MANOVA was conducted to determine if there were significant differences between mean ET and HT scores on the perceived autonomy support, teacher competency, and online course design measures.

A visual examination of histograms and Q-Q plots for the DVs, as well as their standardized residuals following the within-subjects MANOVA model, indicated univariate and multivariate negative skew resulting in non-normal distributions. This negative skew was likely a consequence of the highest option on the Likert-scale, five, being the most frequent mean score for all the ET DVs—perceived autonomy support (17.5%), teacher competency (22.8%), and OSCD dependent variables (17.4%)—a trend which was not true for the HT DVs. In other words, for each ET DV, a sizeable portion of the sample (roughly one fifth) responded by rating their instructors with all fives on the five-point Likert scale. Consequently, the maximum mean score of five for each construct was more frequent than one might expect when surveying a population of this size.

Notably, the survey contained a series of attention checks, and only those students who passed these attention checks were included in the analyses. Therefore, we concluded that these scores are indicative of students' true responses to the scale items and not outliers. Instead, this may be an instance of a ceiling effect for the ET DVs (Cramer & Howitt, 2004); where students perceived their instructors as scoring high on the ET measures, but the bounds of the scales (1–5) limited the amount of variance that could be captured when examining higher scores. Consequently, as a result of these violations, the Pillai's Trace value is reported for the overall within-subjects effect, as it is more robust to these violations (Olson, 1974).

The omnibus within-subjects MANOVA was statistically significant, Pillai's Trace = .47, $F(3, 854) = 252.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .47$. Means with standard deviations are reported in Table 3. Univariate follow-up tests examining the differences between ET and HT found significantly higher mean ET scores for all three dependent variables. For the measure of perceived autonomy support, $F(1, 856) = 460.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .35$; post hoc pairwise comparisons indicated that ET had a statistically significant higher mean score than HT, $M_{diff} = 0.81$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [0.74, 0.89]. Similarly, the univariate within-subjects comparison of the teacher competency variable was statistically significant, $F(1, 856) = 524.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .38$; with students reporting significantly higher mean scores for their ET course compared to their HT course, $M_{diff} = 0.82$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [0.75, 0.89]. Finally, the univariate within-subjects test for the novel OSCD measure was statistically significant, $F(1, 856) = 727.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .46$; again, students reported higher mean scores for their ET course compared to their HT course, $M_{diff} = 0.95$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.88, 1.02].

In sum, the newly-posited OSCD measure was significantly positively correlated with the perceived autonomy support and teacher competency scales in both the ET course and HT course contexts. Additionally, results showed that ET courses had stronger levels of autonomy support, teacher competency, and OSCD than HT courses, thus H2–H4 were supported.

Discussion

While individual faculty members or universities have occasionally had to make short-term transitions to emergency remote teaching in the past, the transition that occurred in Spring 2020 was an unprecedented large-scale shift in learning. The goal of this study was to find out what types of course design elements worked well for students as a starting point for future research about effective emergency remote teaching as well as online education.

Student Preferences

Despite widespread concerns that students would not attend or return to college if courses were offered online in Fall 2020, the results of this study suggest that most students are open to taking courses online, particularly if online courses are offered at convenient times or if online courses are the only way to complete needed coursework. However, previous assumptions that online courses must be offered asynchronously do not hold up during transitions to emergency remote teaching. Whereas students who typically enrolled in online courses in the past were more likely to be parents, work full-time jobs, or have other responsibilities and economic constraints that made the flexibility of asynchronous courses attractive (Mather & Sarkans, 2018; Panacci, 2017; Stewart et al., 2010), students who were enrolled in F2F courses that transitioned rapidly to remote teaching had a different set of constraints and preferences. Many on-campus students who choose F2F classes thrive in environments that provide structure and social interaction, which might explain why more than two thirds of the participants in this study indicated that they believed that a partially synchronous format for the introductory communication course would be more effective for future students. While providing at least some asynchronous course options is important to ensure access for students with limited internet and technology resources at home, these results suggest that it is also important to provide synchronous learning opportunities to support students who benefit from the structure and social support offered by course meetings.

Even after the COVID-19 pandemic has passed and universities are able to transition away from emergency remote teaching, universities that have fully online programs should consider offering synchronous online courses along with the asynchronous course offerings that have been more typically offered in fully online programs. Further, when F2F courses can be resumed safely, our results indicate that students prefer the flexibility of both partially asynchronous content as well as the possibility of participating in virtual interactivity. As a practical matter, students' responses during this transition to emergency remote teaching suggests that the stark choice between courses offered as either fully-F2F or fully-asynchronous online may be waning—with students expecting, and universities offering, a much more creative mix of asynchronous, synchronous, and F2F learning.

Individual Course Design Items

The present study asked students about their courses that had the easiest transition (ET) and hardest transition (HT) to emergency remote teaching; as a result of this survey design, a wide range of student experiences from diverse disciplines from across the university were aggregated and analyzed. The elements that seemed to have the strongest effect size for helping courses have an easier transition—clear instructions, flexibility, having access to materials, having everything needed for the class in Blackboard, and regular instructor feedback and reminders—seem to be related primarily to process clarity (Titsworth & Mazer, 2010). The elements that were associated with a harder transition—requiring more work online, changing assignments, and lack of clarity about how to find and submit assignments—seem to be associated with greater uncertainty and unpredictability. However, the specific types of engagement in the course (discussion boards, online lectures, learning modules, collaborative assignments) had much lower effect sizes and were less influential in determining whether the transition to remote teaching was smooth. When designing courses for emergency remote contexts in the future, the items in this scale can be used as a checklist to remind instructors to be intentional about including structural elements that facilitate an easier remote transition for students. Additionally, these items might also provide a useful starting point for developing measures for online instructor clarity.

Furthermore, the findings of the present study underscore the importance of instructor communication behaviors and highlight the value that instructional communication scholars can bring to conversations about how to effectively transition courses to emergency remote teaching when the need arises. Just as prior research about online learning does not necessarily translate to emergency remote teaching, it would be similarly ill-advised to assume that instructor communication variables will function the same way in online learning environments as they do in F2F classes. Some instructional communication scholars have already started to evaluate how to most effectively teach communication skills online (e.g., Broeckelman-Post et al., 2019, 2020; Westwick et al., 2018, 2015, 2016) and evaluate how instructional communication variables function in online courses (e.g., Dixon et al., 2017; Hazel et al., 2014; Kaufmann et al., 2016; Vallade & Kaufmann, 2018) in intentionally designed online courses. Even so, as several other scholars have argued in the past year, this is an area ripe for future research and our scholarship about online teaching and learning needs to extend to include both online and emergency remote contexts (Miller et al., 2021; Morreale et al., 2021; Prentiss, 2021; Westwick & Morreale, 2021).

Practically speaking, our findings suggest that when instructors intentionally design an online course or move to an online context, they should prioritize matters of communication clarity and student convenience. For instance, instructors could email or text direct links to course content to students as opposed to having them find the link on a virtual website (e.g., Blackboard or Canvas). Instructors might even couple written instruction with recorded video or audio instruction, thus providing students with an additional mode of communication that may help their comprehension and retention of instructions.

Online Supportive Course Design

The development of the Online Supportive Course Design measure as part of this study is a first step in beginning to develop research tools that can be used to further explore what works in online learning contexts. The positive relationships that were found between OSCD, autonomy support, and teacher competency provide initial evidence establishing convergent validity of the scale; while the significant differences that were found between the ET and HT classes suggest that this measure has concurrent validity. Furthermore, this analysis addresses and supports many of the conclusions drawn by Money and Dean (2019) in their review of effective online education. For instance, the authors posit that effective online instructional processes may offer learners greater control over their own learning or be particularly mindful of learner perceptions of practical needs dovetails with our finding that autonomy supportive processes correlated positively with students' experiencing an easier transition to an online environment (Money & Dean, 2019). Furthermore, our finding that teacher clarity was an important component in the perceived ease of transition to online learning adds evidence to Money and Dean's assertion that online instructors must be effective facilitators. In an online setting, instructors must guide students through new content as well as a virtual learning environment; thus, they may well have to spend more time supporting students' navigation of the environment itself.

Even with the foregoing evidence, future research is needed to affirm the validity of these findings in other contexts—including both emergency remote contexts and online learning contexts, as well as in universities where students do and do not have prior online learning experience. Additionally, future research should evaluate the extent to which this scale is correlated with various dimensions of other instructional communication scales developed for use specifically in online contexts, such as the Online Learning Climate Scale (Kaufmann et al., 2016).

Conclusion

This study identified several course structure elements that facilitated easier transitions to emergency remote teaching, as well as several that made such a transition more difficult. By developing the OSCD measure, this study is a first step that can provide practical support for university administrators and faculty who are in the midst of emergency remote transitions, while also potentially demonstrating utility in developing more effective online courses in nonemergency contexts.

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"Minor Setback, Major Comeback": A Multilevel Approach to the Development of Academic Resilience

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Keywords: academic resilience, campus community, persistence, effective teaching, instructional communication, transitions

Abstract: This study examined communicative processes at multiple levels that may influence students' academic resilience through transitions. Participant interviews (*N* = 23) revealed that at the individual level, students develop a resilient mindset and effective academic strategies, engage in self-care, and compartmentalize. At the relational level, students rely on teachers to demonstrate positive teaching behaviors, receive academic and emotional support from a variety of sources, and find role models to inspire resilience. Finally, students reported that the campus community gave opportunities to build support networks and access campus resources, but identified threats to effective use of these resilience-building opportunities. Finally, all but one theme demonstrated that the development of academic resilience typically happens outside the traditional classroom yet affects student performance inside the classroom. These findings contribute to instructional communication research because of the application of an underutilized theory and method in instructional research, the multilevel focus on communication and resilience development processes, and by providing practical insight to create targeted approaches to improve student resilience and related outcomes.

Academic resilience, defined as the ability for students to maintain high motivation and performance when faced with events that put them at academic risk (M. C. Wang et al., 1994), has declined at an alarming rate (Gray, 2015). This decline in resilience can manifest in multiple ways, including lower retention and graduation rates. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the undergraduate

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student retention rate in 4-year institutions is 81% and the 6-year graduation rate hovers around 60% (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). The (in)ability for students to academically recover is indicative of their resilience, highlighting an indirect link between academic resilience and retention (Eisenberg et al., 2016). Given these integrated issues of resilience, retention, and graduation, universities have prioritized programs to address how we may better retain students when they are faced with academic risk. One key to increasing retention may be bolstering resilience. In the current study, we argue that there is a communication imperative to study the processes through which academic resilience can be developed and maintained in order to implement targeted interventions.

Buzzanell and Houston (2018) discussed the importance of studying resilience as a communication process that is often integrated in everyday interactions and happens at multiple levels. In this study, this multilevel approach is applied in order to explore how students perceive the development of academic resilience over time at individual, relational, organizational, and community levels. Ultimately, these insights have the potential to highlight practical ways that educators and community members can help to communicatively and collectively foster resilience in students. Specifically, transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984, 1989) provided a useful framework to examine these insights and gain an understanding of how students engage communicative resilience-building over time.

Communication Processes Through Transitions

Schlossberg (1981) proposed transition theory as a way to examine the continuous changes and transitions faced throughout one's lifetime, arguing that change resulting from transitions can influence relationship networks, an array of behaviors, and self-perceptions. Transitions occur when there is a change in assumptions, behaviors, and/or relationships, and these outcomes can be considered positive, negative, or both (Schlossberg, 1981). As students progress in their personal and academic lives, they likely experience a variety of transitions that affect their academic resilience and performance, and they utilize a range of communicative interactions and resources to manage or adapt to them. Individuals' responses to transitions are affected by a myriad of factors, including characteristics of the transition (e.g., duration), of the pre-transition and post-transition environments (e.g., interpersonal support systems), and of the individual (e.g., attitudes) (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984). In the current study, we utilize transition theory as a framework to examine characteristics of transitions through a turning point approach. This approach provides an opportunity to highlight individual, relational, and community levels of communicative processes involved in building academic resilience (Buzzanell & Houston, 2018).

To date, much of the resilience research focuses on the individual, with resilience presented as part of a larger umbrella of constructs (e.g., hope, efficacy) referred to as psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2012). General resilience is conceptualized as a trait-like (Li & Nishikawa, 2012), psychological variable, and is among the individual characteristics that influence how one responds to transitions (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984). For example, general resilience might include perceptions of competence, optimism, flexibility, and coping mechanisms one can employ when faced with adversity-inducing transitions (G. M. Wagnild & Collins, 2009). In particular, resilience manifests when a person can continue to function in a stable and effective way during times of distress, both psychologically and physiologically, as a result of many contextual, individual, and relational factors (Bonanno, 2005) and adaptations during transitions (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984). In the field of communication, T. D. Afifi (2018) articulated an important practical question: Why can some people demonstrate resilience when others cannot? We extend this question into the instructional realm in order to gain insight into problems of waning student resilience (Gray, 2015) and retention (NCES, 2017) by asking: When faced with adversity, why do some students persist and succeed academically, and others do not?

While investigations of academic resilience may provide useful insight in answer to this question, little research in instructional communication has considered this construct. Indeed, communication scholarship overall has been criticized for not keeping up with other disciplines in studying resilience (e.g., T. D. Afifi, 2018). The extant communication and resilience scholarship tend to focus on family contexts (e.g., Carr & Kellas, 2018) and community resilience in the wake of risk and crisis situations (e.g., Sellnow et al., 2017; Zhang & Shay, 2019). Thus, while we have some understanding of how resilience functions in select communication contexts, adversities in these non-academic settings are often treated as though they exist in a vacuum, separate from an individual's level of functioning in a higher education setting. The reality is that these non-academic contexts have the potential to influence students in academic realms, a consideration that instructional scholars are well-positioned to explore. Although related constructs have been examined in instructional communication literature (e.g., growth mindset in the basic communication course; Nordin & Broeckelman-Post, 2019, 2020), academic resilience has been relatively ignored in the instructional communication literature. Yet, the resilience that students build over time and in college has important implications for the coping strategies and individual resources students may transfer to situations outside of the classroom (e.g., health conditions, financial instability, job loss; T. Afifi et al., 2019; Beck, 2016). Thus, the development of academic resilience is a process that should be of interest to instructional communication researchers specifically and communication scholars more broadly.

Academic Resilience

Unlike general resilience, academic resilience is more state-like and malleable, providing insight into how students manage day-to-day challenges, as well as how resilience develops and strengthens over time and through multiple transitions (Black & Ford-Gilboe, 2004; Egeland et al.,1993; Eisenberg et al., 2016). We argue that transitions themselves may not, on their own, develop students' resilience, but that the multilevel communication processes taking place during those transitions play an essential role in facilitating academic resilience. This resilience, in turn, is important to student well-being and success.

Low academic resilience can lead to feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, stress, and loneliness, as well as decreased enjoyment or affect toward school, morale, and academic self-esteem (Martin & Marsh, 2009; G. Wagnild, 2009). Further, academic resilience is often a predictor of communication and academic behavior in education such as active problem-solving and support seeking (Li, 2006). For example, Martin and Marsh (2009) found that academic resilience predicted desirable communication in the classroom (e.g., participation). Martin and Marsh also reported that self-efficacy, planning, control, anxiety, and commitment predicted academic resilience and that academic resilience predicted enjoyment of school and general self-esteem. In other words, academic resilience leads to desirable communication behaviors and positive outcomes for students in higher education.

However, there are two important gaps in the academic resilience literature that are relevant to the current study. First, although it is conceptualized as state-like and malleable, researchers have rarely studied the process of how resilience evolves over time, often only measuring it at one point in time (e.g., Egeland et al., 1993). Further, other scholars have measured indicators that may be related to resilience but are clearly different from resilience (e.g., morale, efficacy; G. Wagnild, 2009). In a forum on the future of instructional communication, Goldman and Myers (2017) emphasized the importance of "developmental processes that students experience in their education" which provides a "more holistic view of their development" (p. 485). Transition theory provides a useful framework for answering this call and examining not only current levels of academic resilience, specifically, but the events that trigger changes in resilience and the communicative processes that facilitate or inhibit it developmentally.

Second, less is known about the potential role that all levels of communication and collaboration, including individuals, relationships, and the larger university and community, play in the development of students' academic resilience over time. Taken together, there is a need to explore resilience-building processes to develop practical suggestions for a multilevel approach to bolstering students' academic resilience and outcomes.

Individual Resilience

Related to resilience, scholars have identified psychological grit, and particularly the dimension of perseverance of effort (i.e., an individual's tendency to keep working toward long-term goals, even in the face of challenges; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), as a predictor of academic success. Perseverance of effort has been positively associated with college students' behavioral and emotional engagement (Datu et al., 2015), self-efficacy and the perceived value of schoolwork, management of time and study environment, and the use of self-regulated learning strategies (Wolters & Hussain, 2015), academic adjustment, GPA, sense of belonging, college satisfaction, and intent to persist (i.e., continue enrollment) in college (Bowman et al., 2015). Related to grit is the idea of a growth mindset (Dixson et al., 2017). Individuals with a growth mindset believe that intelligence can be developed, as opposed to a fixed mindset, which maintains that intelligence is static (Dweck, 2000). Notably, these mindsets focus on the origin and evolution of individual abilities (e.g., intelligence), which contribute to resilience, but do not form the focus of this construct. Though conceptually similar to resilience, grit is presented as an individual characteristic that *facilitates* resilience. Specifically, Blalock et al. (2015) argued grit may make a person more resilient by (a) keeping long-term goals salient and increasing individuals' motivation to address obstacles (i.e., individual level), and (b) motivating individuals to seek social support or resources following negative setbacks (i.e., relational level). While both grit and a growth mindset are characteristics that can bolster individual levels of resilience, an additional focus of the present study will be on the communicative processes through which students build and enact academic resilience. As Buzzanell and Houston (2018) stated, this is often accomplished collectively through relationships.

Relational Resilience

Communication research demonstrates that interpersonal relationships and interactions are powerful in helping an individual respond to adversity (T. D. Afifi, 2018). Indeed, social support has been positively associated with students' resilience and success; the supportive behaviors and messages individuals receive from others can help them navigate the challenges of college life. For example, family support has been identified as key to students' academic motivation and appraisal of responses to academic adversity (Collie et al., 2016; Theiss, 2018). In another study of adolescent students who had dropped out and returned to school, Pan et al. (2017) concluded that instructors, especially those who were supportive of students, facilitated students' resilience and related academic outcomes. Further, Lessard et al. (2014) found that meaningful connections with teachers and unwavering maternal support were often distinguishing factors between high school students who persisted and those who dropped out. Relatedly, Nazione et al. (2011) found that college students relied on memorable messages to help them navigate challenges; the most frequently reported of these challenges were academic in nature. Relationships, and especially those with instructors and advisors (Hunter & White, 2004), are important to students, as they are representatives of the university setting in which students are situated, highlighting the interrelatedness of multiple levels of influence, including relational and organizational levels.

Organizational and Community Resilience

Support from both the institutional and community levels can help to bolster students' academic resilience and persistence, though much of this research has focused on K–12 students. For example, Collie et al. (2016) found that students' use of schools' support services (i.e., academic support) and their perception of community support were crucial for positive academic outcomes, including motivation and academic buoyancy (i.e., the ability to manage everyday academic setbacks and challenges; Martin & Marsh, 2009). When comparing high school students who persisted and those who dropped out, Lessard et al. (2014) pointed out the importance of coordination at the organizational level (e.g., teachers, decision makers) to help students develop academic resilience. In the higher education context, Sidelinger et al. (2016) found that when students had positive relationships with instructors (i.e., representatives of the university), they were more likely to not only communicate with their instructor (i.e., relational), but also to make use of resources offered by the institution (i.e., organizational).

Taken together, because academic resilience is state-like and malleable, it is important for communication scholars to extend their understanding of the turning points that trigger changes in academic resilience over time and the multiple levels of communication processes (e.g., individual, relational, institutional) involved in these transitions. In particular, T. D. Afifi (2018) encouraged scholars to study the processes, and Houston and Buzzanell (2018) asserted that studying communication and stories with the multilevel approach could illuminate the collaborative components that build resilience. The goal of the present investigation was to apply these assertions to the context of academic resilience. Specifically, our study was designed to answer the following research question:

> **RQ:** What individual, relational, organizational, and community communication processes do students perceive as instrumental to developing academic resilience over time?

Method

In an attempt to interview students who ranged in academic experience and self-perceived academic resilience, we recruited students who were (a) enrolled in a required general education basic communication course, (b) enrolled in a remedial course for students who have been conditionally admitted to the university, and (c) upper-level students from a research subjects pool. Given that all first-year students are required to take the basic communication course at the university in which the research was conducted, we reasoned that all levels of resilience would be represented in this broad population. Further, students in remedial courses are often underrepresented, first generation, or transfer students who often have less efficacy, more anxiety, and less motivation, which are all correlated with resilience (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001; Howell, 2016; Martin & Marsh, 2009), which we reasoned would enhance the diversity of our student sample. Finally, in an effort to reach students at various levels of their educational journey, upper-level students were recruited via a research participation system. All students received the researchers' contact information and emailed the researchers to schedule a 1-hour interview, for which they received either required research credits or a $25 Amazon gift card paid for with a small research grant.

Participants

Participants ($N = 23$) included males ($n = 11$) and females ($n = 12$) who ranged in age from 18 to 23 ($M = 19.34$, $SD = 1.61$). The sample included six first-generation and five transfer students. Participants were primarily first-year students ($n = 14$), with two sophomores, three juniors, and two seniors. Approximately half of the sample was White ($n = 12$), and the remaining half included five Black/African American, one Asian, one Hispanic, and four students who described themselves as Mixed. There were 14 different majors represented in the sample, with self-reported GPAs ranging from 2.5 to 4.2 ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .45$).

Procedures

We collected data using in-depth retrospective interview techniques (RIT) to retroactively examine changes over time (Huston et al., 1981). Specifically, we employed a turning points approach—a guided interview process that asks participants to recall, and graph, particular points of change in a dependent variable on a timeline. Participants treated academic resilience as the dependent variable associated with each turning point as they graphed it on the y-axis.

Some participants ($n = 15$) reported to a private research lab and met with the researcher(s) and others ($n = 8$) completed virtual interviews through Zoom. In both interview formats, we first explained the study and allowed students time to review the informed consent document. Second, after providing a definition of academic resilience for them, students were given detailed directions about constructing turning point graphs, shown a sample graph, and asked to complete their own. They were encouraged to include as many events as came to mind and to include both positive and negative changes in academic resilience. The students graphed a total of 151 turning points, reporting between 4 and 12 ($M = 7.63$, $SD = 2.06$) turning points each. Next, the students wrote a brief descriptor of each event, indicated when the event occurred, and then rated their academic resilience at that point in time. Similar to past turning points research where students indicated the change in a dependent variable (e.g., 0 [*not likely to persist*] to 100 [*completely likely to persist*]; T. R. Wang, 2014), our participants graphed their turning points on a scale ranging from 0% (*not at all resilient*) to 100% (*completely resilient*) resilient. Next, students answered probing questions about each turning point to elucidate the factors that changed their resilience (e.g., Who was present? What did they say? What did you do? How were your academics affected?). Last, students were asked some general questions regarding academic resilience (e.g., advice they would give to other students, what they would like faculty members to know).

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed using a professional transcription service, resulting in 204 single-spaced pages of data. The data were analyzed using a combination of inductive and theory-driven analyses (Boyatzis, 1988). First, one author independently read 15 transcripts, using open and inductive coding to develop a thematic codebook for student-described strategies influencing academic resilience. Using that codebook, both authors coded 30% ($n = 7$) of the transcripts, achieving acceptable reliability (Scott's Pi = .83). The remaining interviews were evenly split between the authors to complete coding. Second, the authors moved to a deductive and theory-driven approach to data organization (Boyatzis, 1988). Specifically, based on the existing framework of resilience at the individual, relational, organizational, and community level, we organized each emergent strategy or theme into one of the extant levels.

Although organizational and community levels have been treated as distinct in prior research, our participants treated them synonymously, referring to the campus, organizational, or institutional community. Thus, organizational and community levels were collapsed and will hereafter be referred to as university community. Consequently, we have resilience-building strategies in three levels (i.e., individual, relational, and university community). The codebook was applied to the remaining eight interviews, with no new strategies emerging, suggesting theoretical saturation (Bowen, 2008). See Table 1 for the three levels of resilience, specific strategies, and descriptions.

Results

The thematic analysis revealed that all 23 interviewees addressed resilience-building strategies that could be implemented at the individual, relational, and university community level. Within each level, students identified four resilience-building strategies. At the individual level of communication processes, developing a resilient mindset emerged most frequently (n = 145), followed by developing academic strategies (n = 71), compartmentalization (n = 25), and self-care (n = 21). Relational-level communication processes included emotional support and empathy most frequently (n = 92), followed by positive teacher behaviors (n = 68), academic assistance (n = 57), and role models (n = 15). Finally, themes in the university community-level communication processes included developing support networks (n = 19), better promotion of university services (n = 13), a need to normalize a lack of resilience (n = 7), and a need to directly address threats to resilience (n = 3).

Individual Level Communication Processes

Students described developing a resilient mindset as finding your passion, focusing on the future, being responsible, and seeking challenges. For example, Joy described this mindset, stating, "Just think about the things that motivate you a lot. Keeping that in your mind so that you can have a goal you're always striving for." Some participants found mindset to be implicit in the term "academic resilience" itself, with Barrett sharing,

> When you hear the word resilience, you think tough, and grueling, and that it's going to be a lot of work. While that can be true in a lot of cases, I think academic resilience, especially on a personal level, is a lot more to do with inspiration and passion.

Part of the resilient mindset also came from experiencing and surviving challenges, as Alex described, "Everything that I've said I couldn't do, I could do. I put myself down a little bit, but after something good happened, I knew I can do the next thing good [*sic*]."

Other students described specific academic strategies that they were responsible for developing and using at an individual level. For example, Lindsey discussed strategies that she believed helped her to cultivate high academic resilience: "I keep a planner. I put everything down. Usually, after a lecture or a class, I go through my notes every day, just to refresh myself." Echoing similar strategies, Cody said, "do the reading . . . actually take notes and study more." Callie also talked about how she built up her resilience: "I worked hard second semester. I'd studied a lot more. I made flash cards and stuff and would review a lot after my classes."

TABLE 1
Multilevel Approaches to Resilience-Building

Theme	Description/Examples	Frequency
INDIVIDUAL LEVEL		
Develop a Resilient Mindset	Making cognitive shifts to facilitate resilience (e.g., find your passion, focus on the future, seek challenges, be responsible)	145
Develop Academic Strategies	Adopting or adapting individual behaviors to promote resilience and academic success (e.g., don't procrastinate, structure your study environment, do the work)	71
Utilize Compartmentalization	Cognitively or physically separating academic and non-academic foci to minimize the influence of external factors on academic performance (e.g., withdraw from negative situations, mentally separate personal and academic issues)	25
Engage in Self-Care	Enacting self-care strategies to address specific threats to resilience and academic performance or enhance resilience through general well-being (e.g., find balance, engage in healthy behavior, take care of mental health)	21
RELATIONAL LEVEL		
Emotional Support and Empathy	Seeking or receiving messages of comfort and support focused on emotional and/or mental well-being (e.g., support network that will listen, empathize, offer emotional support—can include teachers, peers, friends, and family	92
Positive Teaching Behaviors	Effective behaviors that are related to positive student outcomes (e.g., immediate, caring, and motivating, responsive)	68
Academic Assistance	Utilizing informational and academic resources through collaboration or interaction with others (e.g., teachers and advisors offer extra help or resources, tutoring services, provide useful critique or feedback, academic study groups)	57
Find a Role Model	Actively identifying someone to emulate in order to achieve academic success and demonstrate resilience (e.g., find someone who demonstrates positive behaviors, goals, and attitudes)	15
CAMPUS COMMUNITY LEVEL		
Help Students Develop Support Network	Institutional efforts to provide welcoming and accepting opportunities to build relationships with instructors, between peers, and connections with groups (e.g., Living Learning Programs, student organizations, organized social events)	19
Promote Campus Resources	Institutional efforts to provide and promote both academic and non-academic support and resources for students (e.g., counseling, tutoring, financial aid)	13
Normalize Struggles	Institutional efforts to destigmatize failure, normalize threats to academic resilience, and respond to adversity (e.g., hear from others that this is normal, discuss lows and highs, validate emotional struggles)	7
Address Specific Challenges to Resilience	Institutional responses to problematic student behaviors that affect the university's academic culture and individual student performance (e.g., alcohol abuse, partying)	3

Students acknowledged that their lives were comprised of many different facets and in order to maintain academic resilience, they had to compartmentalize academics. In one example, Rick said, "I've never had any problems shutting out the social aspect in order to focus on school." Douglas described a "mental divide" that allows him to distance himself from work when he is not working, which helps reduce stress and boost resilience. Renee also used compartmentalization in the advice she offered to others:

> I would just try to be like, 'Remove yourself from this situation. That's not your life. Your life isn't one single thing that's happening. There are multiple things you need to have responsibility for.' I just wish I could have helped myself separate the events going on in my life.

Finally, students also recognized that to be resilient it was incumbent on them as individuals to engage in self-care. This category included remarks about balance, awareness and treatment of mental and physical health, and general healthy behaviors. Put simply, Heather said, "Take care of yourself." Extending on this idea, Brianna said, "You can't have resilience if you don't care about yourself." For example, Lindsey described taking some time off to mentally refocus after being unhappy and struggling in her major,

> I was at a school I was not happy with. I was a business major, which is not my mind at all. I decided then and there I needed to take some time off. I took about two years to help bring that back up and get my mind back into being in school.

For a more habitual strategy, Rachel described how she "started meditating because it just gave me a nice quiet place to just stop thinking about everything."

Relational Level Communication Processes

Themes that emerged as representative of relational resilience involved strategies that a student cannot implement on their own. Rather, another person (e.g., friend, family member, instructor, advisor) was an integral part of the resilience-building process.

First, students reported that *emotional support and empathy* were important strategies for building resilience. The students' descriptions of their general support networks showed listening, validation, and empathetic behaviors were helpful to them when they felt low in academic resilience. One participant described how the emotional support and intervention of others allowed him to ultimately regain his resilience and motivation in the classroom:

> At that time, I was very, very close to suicide and I told that person. He told the counselor and that counselor pulled me into their office and called my parents . . . From there on, I got treated.

Another student described challenges at home and how two teachers noticed:

> . . . as they started talking to me telling me it was OK, this is a safe outlet, they are not going to tell anybody unless they absolutely have to, then I broke it down and told them everything that was going on. They were a comfort zone that I needed.

Heather discussed two important relationships for her academic resilience during a major life transition: "I felt like even though I had switched to a new school, they had made me feel included."

Students also described the role of instructors demonstrating *positive teaching behaviors* that helped them develop resilience, discussing behaviors illustrative of being immediate and approachable, giving constructive feedback, being engaging, and other desirable instructional behaviors (e.g., Nussbaum, 1992). Students, like Heather, often acknowledged that they knew this was difficult:

> I understand that professors have hundreds of students, but I feel like sometimes, for me, if you see me struggling, talk to me after class. Let me know that you know I'm struggling and you're willing to help me to overcome.

More generally, Jessica suggested that teachers "should really try to interact with us and get to know us. That would help a lot." Luther highlighted the importance of instructor enthusiasm, stating, "If you find somebody who is actually really interested in what they're doing, and what they're teaching . . . that definitely helps." A common thread in the effective teaching behavior stories included empathy and approachability, as stated by Cody:

> I think they need to recognize that every student wants to do well. I don't think there's any student that doesn't want to do well. They just need to be approachable so that students can feel comfortable asking them questions.

This approachability provided opportunities for students to seek *academic assistance* and to bolster their academic resilience. Students, like Louis, appreciated teachers who "were more focused on you understanding what needs to be understood" than on tests and assignments. Students identified academic assistance as a type of informational support. This academic assistance might come in the form of advice, tutoring, or study groups and came from a variety of sources. For example, Derek described how involving himself in academic assistance opportunities on campus helped his resilience, "I go to a lot of study groups to make sure my grades are on par so I don't fall by the wayside." Academic assistance could also come from parents. Joy described academic assistance from her parents as they helped with "getting applications ready." In some cases, academic assistance was also paired with emotional support. Rick said, "If we notice that someone within the class group or just our friend who needs help with a certain class, or if I do, someone reaches out and that's when the group comes together."

Finally, students reported finding a *role model* who helped to guide their attitudes, motivations, behaviors, and consequently, their resilience. Some, like Stacy, developed this habit early on: "I remember being very young, always looking to emulate someone that seemed perfect." In a more in-depth example, Derek witnessed his mother being resilient and considered her a role model in his life:

> It would be times at night where she would go to sleep without eating dinner just to make sure me and my sister ate. That right there, seeing that gave me something to base my hard work off of because I'm like, "Well, if she can do that, I can do it too." There's no reason for me to be sitting around not doing anything. You know what I mean? That's definitely where it [his own resilience] comes from.

University Community Level Communication Processes

Students wanted universities to help them develop *support networks*. Many students acknowledged that the university already did a good job of providing organizations where students could find a sense of connection. Cody highlighted a living learning program (LLP) as an important support network: "I'm in LLP, so I’m surrounded by academia a bit more. I feel more motivated to study, because I’m living at my school.” However, others thought that campus groups may not be genuinely welcoming. Brianna explained, “I don’t know. More like a welcoming community . . . Everybody is nice, but I feel like they’re not welcoming. They just say hi and bye. They’re not like, ‘Come join this,’ or, ‘Come do this.’”

Additionally, although students believed the university already provided ample resources to assist with academic resilience, they believed that universities should do a better job promoting them. Heather said,

> I feel there should be counseling a little bit. I know they offer that, but it’s more like you got to make a point of it. Make it known. I feel like it’s known, but I don’t feel like it’s known.

Douglas reiterated this point, recognizing the limited abilities of the university in encouraging students to utilize available resources:

> The problem is that [the university] does a lot of stuff for me that I just don’t care about, that I don’t realize that they’re doing. The problem also is that they can’t really do anything about that. I know that the college has a bunch of resources I’ll never utilize.

Students also described a need for the *normalization* of a lack of academic resilience by the larger university community. As explained by Barrett, “I think the community should be approaching it from a little more of an emotion aspect where it’s like, validate people in saying their struggles are normal.” Similarly, Rick explained,

> A lot of the people are struggling with the same kinds of things even if they don’t see it or show it to their friends. Everyone struggles at some point. Everyone just needs to recognize that and understand that . . . recognize the signs that you tried to hide but couldn’t condemn and then help them work through those problems.

Finally, students generally did not think that the university was successful at addressing some *specific threats* to academic resilience. In particular, students called out a culture of partying and alcohol abuse. Brianna detailed this concern:

> They should take care of drinking more. They have two stretchers already in [the residence hall] because they’re drinking and partying a lot. They need to know their priorities. I feel like, sometimes the campus doesn’t care about that because the frat parties at every house in campus, they drink. They [the university administration] need to have more control with that.

Discussion

This study examined communicative processes at individual, relational, and university community levels that may influence students’ academic resilience over time, and consequently, their persistence to graduate. Our findings suggest that while academic resilience has often been conceptualized at the individual level, there are also important developmental opportunities at the relational and university community levels. Of particular note, results revealed that only one relational-level theme occurred within the classroom: *positive teaching behaviors*; all other themes demonstrated that the development of resilience happens outside of the traditional classroom yet affects what happens inside the classroom. This finding highlights the need for instructional communication scholars to take a more holistic, multilevel approach to the way that we study and discuss influences on student learning and success. While most instructional research focuses exclusively on the impact of instructor messages and behaviors or instructor-student relationships on student outcomes such as motivation, affect, and learning, the current study demonstrates the wealth of influences affecting our students and their academic persistence and performance. As such, the following discussion will focus not only on practical implications of these results, but also on opportunities for instructional scholars to expand their research questions beyond the classroom—doing so will allow us to consider communicative processes across multiple levels as we endeavor to bolster students' academic resilience and success.

Consistent with previous research that conceptualized academic resilience as an individual variable (Li & Nishikawa, 2012), students emphasized what they had done, and should do, to develop academic resilience as an individual. In particular, students' narratives focused on developing a resilient mindset through finding and pursuing their passion and a focus on short- and long-term goals, as well as making conscious choices to challenge themselves. These themes are consistent with conceptualizations of grit and a growth mindset, supporting the role of these individual characteristics in enacting academic resilience. However, connections with others also exerted a powerful influence on academic resilience. Supportive communication was critical in two forms: informational support (i.e., academic assistance) and emotional support. Students often sought membership in social groups to meet these needs, which had the potential to positively and negatively influence academic resilience.

Students identified a university community that helped facilitate peer connections as integral to their academic resilience. Indeed, the strategies that universities would expect to be effective are being recognized as valuable by students (e.g., Living and Learning communities, tutoring, counseling). However, students also offered insight into what universities can improve (e.g., increasing awareness of these resources). Taken together, the results of this study provide a foundation for several practical implications that can inform campus-level approaches to academic resilience. With students' declining academic resilience (Gray, 2015), it is critical that a three-pronged, interdependent approach be employed to address the problem. Individual, relational, and university community levels of resilience-building all have the potential to be integrated into training, programming, and curricular opportunities at higher education institutions.

Practical Implications

Instructional Training

Although graduate teaching assistants and instructors receive training in some disciplines, Robinson and Hope (2013) found that approximately 80% of faculty members had never received teacher training. Student narratives in the present study suggest such training should focus on prioritizing behaviors which can signal approachability, engagement, and empathy for students to enhance academic resilience. For example, instructors should be trained to be perceived as emotionally supportive of students through immediacy, clarity, and communication competence (Titsworth et al., 2013). Further, the examination of the turning points that students navigate during high school and college may serve as an illuminating and empathy building exercise for instructors.

Campus Resource Referrals

Our participants believed helpful campus resources were provided and that they were given adequate opportunities to develop support networks. However, they did not believe campus resources were as effective as they could be or reached the students who need them. Instructors interact with students regularly and may be the first line of defense in terms of recognizing when students need referrals to the appropriate people or offices on campus (e.g., tutoring, counseling center, food pantry). Even in instances where instructors or advisors may not be equipped to deal with the negative event a student is experiencing, substantive training and a positive relationship with students may allow an instructor to connect them with needed resources (Petress, 1996; Sidelinger et al., 2016).

Foster a Resilient Mindset

Academic resilience was strengthened when students discovered their passion, whether through an extracurricular experience or a particular class. This passion helped students think beyond the short-term obligation of passing classes and prompted them to plan for a future that excited them. Exposing students to experiences with which they might not initially be familiar is an important point of a liberal arts education and general education requirements (Hanstedt, 2012). At the institutional level, encouraging students to explore different academic areas might help them find their passion while providing them a sense of agency over their coursework. Within the classroom, simply providing flexibility in assignment or topic choices allows students to tailor their work to their own interests and goals and can help motivate them (Goldman & Brann, 2016). Relatedly, helping students see the "bigger picture" as a guide in setting both short- and long-term goals seems beneficial for building academic resilience. Wolters and Hussain (2015) point out that instructors should encourage students to view learning, and ultimately graduation, as significant personal accomplishments. At the campus community level, maintaining active campus career centers to help students discover meaning, increase their confidence, and enhance their ability to achieve goals (Thompson & Feldman, 2010) would help foster individual resilience.

Normalize Academic Assistance

An important aspect of encouraging students to be resilient comes in the form of normalizing struggles. Students talked about how important it was for them to realize that they were not the only ones who experienced decreases in academic resilience, and that it would be helpful for those struggles to be normalized. This might reduce the stigma of seeking assistance; in other words, seeking help when one needs it is a normal part of the learning process. Instructors and advisors can help to normalize the fluid nature of academic resilience by engaging in self-disclosure about their own experiences or challenges they may have faced during transitions (Eisenberg et al., 2016). Disclosures and the normalization of struggles may help students to develop academic strategies consistent with self-regulated learning (Pintrich, 2004). Demonstrating and providing resources for these learning behaviors might be helpful for those who are struggling to keep up with their academic workload.

Encourage Students to Utilize Support Networks

Consistent with previous resilience, retention, and transition theory research (T. D. Afifi, 2018; Schlossberg, 1981; Theiss, 2018; Tinto, 1987), multiple themes highlighting the importance of support and communal coping to build resilience emerged. This support can come from intimate relationships, families, peers, and institutions and communities (Eisenberg et al., 2016), all of which were mentioned by interviewees. Our results suggest that academic resilience may be associated with interpersonal communication skills for building support networks. Participants identified both academic and social/emotional support as communicative resources that bolstered their academic resilience and discussed positive changes in academic resilience when they surrounded themselves with like-minded and motivated friend networks. Because social groups provide a source of friendship, social support, and even peer learning (e.g., Ackermann & Morrow, 2007), the students who find a positive social group may be at an advantage.

Build an Inclusive Community

Some participants described the college community as welcoming and inclusive. Others, however, identified weaknesses in the campus community and feelings of isolation that were detrimental to their academic resilience. These narratives highlighted the importance of building an inclusive community at every level of higher education, both interpersonally and organizationally, to foster academic resilience. Incorporating additional opportunities and spaces for students to interact with their professors is one way that institutions can help foster these connections (Selingo, 2018). Several participants talked about student organizations that were positive ways to get involved, develop peer support networks, and feel a connection with the campus community. However, others said that they did not think they were always marketed well. Promoting these organizations and any of their sponsored events would help students identify groups they might be interested in joining.

Encourage Self-Care

Although engaging in self-care (e.g., physical activity, adequate sleep) has been associated with student success, performance, and retention (Eisenberg et al., 2016; Moses et al., 2016), traditional college students do not typically engage in sufficient self-care (Hermon & Davis, 2004). Educators should provide self-care education in college settings based on the strategies that students identified here. For example, it is possible that compartmentalization, or the organization of positive and negative thoughts and events into separate categories (Showers, 1992), may better allow students to engage in self-care. If students can successfully compartmentalize negative turning points and life events, then they may be able to continue effective academic functioning in transitions. Further, instructors can encourage students to engage in self-care and compartmentalization by modeling the importance of work-life balance and providing self-care activities or resources for students as part of a course. At the university level, providing well-promoted resources and workshops that focus on student self-care is an important supplement to academic and social resources provided by the instructor.

Our participants emphasized that they want instructors to acknowledge and empathize with the often-overwhelming range of life experiences and responsibilities they are managing. The necessity of validating students’ lives and experiences outside the narrow scope of our classrooms is highlighted when we look at the changing population of students in our classrooms. For example, reports have identified 52% of students are now first generation, 51% are low to moderate income, 44% are over the age of 24, 28% are taking care of children or other dependents, 26% are working full-time jobs, and 18% are non-native English speakers (Miller et al., 2014). Some students are unable to meet basic needs, with 36% of all students (57% of Black students and 56% of first-generation students) experiencing housing and food insecurity, which affects their ability to perform and persist academically (Dubick et al., 2016). Communicating to students that we recognize them as individuals with full and complicated lives is a powerful way to validate their experiences and empathize with them, thereby enhancing academic resilience.

Research Implications

Taken together, our study provides several novel contributions to the study of academic resilience from an instructional communication lens. Most notably, this study supports the need for a multiple pronged approach to academic resilience to support more effective student outcomes. Students experience a myriad of events over the course of their academic careers that influence their academic resilience and approach to learning and education. That so much of resilience-building happens outside of the classroom suggests that instructional scholars have an opportunity to supplement our knowledge of effective in-class instructor communication by focusing on students' holistic wellness. For example, instructional scholars may shift their focus to institutional-level messaging and campaigns, analysis of students' social and academic support networks and peer influence, and non-instructional messages focused on inclusiveness, empathy, and support for a deeper understanding of the influence on learning and retention. With this expansion of research foci come exciting opportunities for scholarly collaboration with researchers in interpersonal, organizational, risk and crisis, and health communication. The current investigation reinforces scholars' recent discussions of the vital importance of external influences on students' ability to focus and succeed academically (e.g., student precarity; LaBelle, 2020; Wright et al., 2020).

Theoretically and methodologically, the use of transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984) and the turning point approach proved useful for conceptualizing and investigating developmental processes and their impact on students' academic resilience. Many researchers view resilience as a developmental process (Egeland et al., 1993; Eisenberg et al., 2016) in which the strategies developed may transcend context and life stage. That is, the resilience developed in higher educational contexts, whether at the individual, relational, or community level, will provide strategies and network resources in students' coping arsenal to deal with adversity in family, work, social, economic, risk and crisis, or political situations beyond graduation. Conversely, our results support that adversities and transitions outside of the classroom also influence what happens inside the classroom. These results are consistent with transition theory, which maintains that individuals continue to adapt throughout their lifespan in response to transitions that can alter their perception of the self and the world (Schlossberg, 1981, 1984). Applying this theoretical framework and/or methodology in instructional communication can provide a practical means of addressing the need for additional understanding of developmental processes in instructional research (Goldman & Myers, 2017).

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study applied a novel theoretical, methodological, and multilevel approach to studying academic resilience, it is limited. One limitation is that these students were already persisting, or had returned to college after an initial dropout, indicating that this may be an inherently more resilient group. Lessard et al. (2014) suggested that many aspects of developing resilience are consistent across contexts and populations, such as asking for help when it is needed, establishing positive relationships, and engaging in effective planning. Future research should examine the resilience pathways of students who have not been admitted to college or who have already dropped out of college.

Additionally, a second round of data collection to increase our sample diversity and reach theoretical saturation was interrupted by COVID-19, leading to a different method of data collection for the researchers as well as a potentially stressful situation presenting a challenge to academic resilience for students. Surprisingly, however, the participants who were interviewed during the shift to online learning due to the pandemic did not mention this as a turning point.

Consistent with T. D. Afifi's description of the resilience construct as "elusive" (2018, p. 5), some participants conflated academic resilience with other constructs, including passion, grit, and motivation, even after a formal definition was provided. Future research should continue to improve conceptualization, and measurement, of academic resilience. More practically, the current research also identified multiple processes that contribute to more resilient pathways. Future research should utilize longitudinal research and turning points to examine how an understanding of the development of resilience may positively enhance students' academic experiences and their capacity for resilience beyond academic life including risk, crisis, family, financial, and other adversities they may face. Finally, in settings where additional teacher training or campus community-level programming is implemented, sound assessment plans should be integral to assess the influence of programming on academic resilience.

Conclusion

Academic resilience, and particularly its relationship with retention and graduation, is an important focus for higher education institutions. Student narratives of their academic resilience over time provide insight into the individual, relational, and organizational levels of academic resilience. Furthermore, these narratives highlight important communicative processes involved with academic resilience. Taken together, understanding students' resilience, in their own words, reveals several ways in which faculty members, staff, and administrators can help foster resilience and encourage academic persistence and success, as well as future opportunities for instructional communication scholars to collaboratively address students' academic resilience and outcomes, within and beyond the classroom.

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Toward a New Community of Care: Best Practices for Educators and Administrators During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Keywords: COVID-19, health communication, community of care, communication pedagogy, instructional communication

Abstract: The onset of COVID-19 left people feeling unsettled, confused, and afraid of what tomorrow may hold. As university professors specializing in health communication, we too were left with these same feelings. As health communication scholars, we focus on issues surrounding illness, risk, crisis, care, health inequities, and wellness. COVID-19 is a health crisis, yes, but it has also changed the way we operate not only in higher education but in daily life. We begin this essay with an overview of COVID-19 and its impact on students, educators, and administrators. Then, we suggest four best practices to foster a community of care in the classroom during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2021), "a novel coronavirus is a new coronavirus that has not been previously identified" (n.p.). Normally, coronaviruses cause mild illness and symptoms usually associated with the common cold. COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease where most people experience mild to moderate respiratory illness without requiring special treatment. The virus is spread through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person sneezes or coughs (CDC, 2021). In early 2020, people across the globe felt uneasy and afraid when the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, transformed a novel coronavirus into COVID-19 with his tweet (Twitter, 2020). Dr. Ghebreyesus made COVID-19 real, he gave it life, and whether they wanted to or not, people had to embrace this new term.

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As university professors of health communication, we quickly began to realize things were about to change dramatically within educational institutions. Although our primary mission of educating young minds would not change, the vision for executing our mission was going to be drastically redesigned. New COVID-19 policies initially forced all educators to transform into virtual modalities to complete the spring semester. As universities braced for the fall semester and the impact of virtual learning on retention, some institutions made the choice to offer all instruction in either a hybrid format (i.e., classes are held in person sometimes and online for others), a fully online format (synchronous or asynchronous), and some even decided to return to full-time in-person instruction.

These changes have challenged instructors to enhance our technological teaching abilities on platforms such as Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, or Google Classroom. When returning to campus, educators, students, and administrators had to adhere to new safety standards such as wearing masks, maintaining social distance, proper handwashing procedures, and even testing protocols. While these are the obvious changes in our jobs, in this essay, we discuss four best practices for educators and administrators to foster a community of care for students and fellow colleagues in the current era of COVID-19.

Best Practices for Creating a Community of Care

The year 2020 drastically changed the way in which educators operated both in and outside of the classroom. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a plethora of crises across the globe, in the workplace, and inside educational environments. More importantly, this global health pandemic constitutes both an economic and health crisis, and it is coupled with other more common natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, floods, wildfires, etc.) and social challenges (e.g., gender inequality, racism, poverty, etc.) (Kay, 2020; Stephens et al., 2020). To ensure educational spaces are utilized effectively, to ensure wellness of those working and existing at educational institutions, and to ensure those being educated feel valued, we developed four best practices for communication educators and administrators to foster a new community of care.

Although care, especially within a global health pandemic, is hard to quantify, Noddings (2005) asserts that the need to be taken care of is a universal characteristic. Caring requires a sense of mutuality and connection and is not accomplished without action and understanding (Chaskin & Rauner, 1995; Hayes et al., 1994). Therefore, our recommendations for best practices are as follows: (1) *employ supportive communication practices*; (2) *practice collective sensemaking*; (3) *foster inclusive pedagogical practices*; and (4) *engage in mindfulness*. As the context of this essay unfolds, we explore these four best practices more deeply.

Best Practice One: Employ Supportive Communication Practices

First, even under normal circumstances, students need educators, educators need administrators, and administrators need peers who deeply care not only about performance, but also about the well-being of one another. Research studies on caring in academic contexts argue that instructor-student relationships foster the degree to which students feel cared for and a part of the broader academic community (Osterman, 2000; Schussler & Collins, 2006). University instructors play a vital role in creating a community of care for their students because they provide the bridge between the academy and individual students (Bosworth, 1995). Moreover, the relationship between administrators and instructors is an important one, where instructors need the resources and support to engage in their work. Therefore, the need for supportive communication practices such as social support, effective listening, and high person-centeredness are all essential to success. These supportive communicative practices have become all the more important given the circumstances administrators, educators, and students are experiencing due to COVID-19. When everyone understands that social support is available to those who need it, this communicative practice often has positive effects on learning and well-being (Faulkner et al., 2020; MacGeorge et al., 2012).

Second, online instruction poses unique challenges for fostering a community of care. When approaching online instruction, pedagogy must shift to address some of the sociocognitive needs for our students. In an effort to explore some of the challenges the COVID-19 pandemic has posed on education, Mouchantaf (2020) surveyed 300 instructors across the United States and Lebanon to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of online compared to face-to-face instruction. They found that online learning was effective in eliminating barriers while providing increased convenience, flexibility, and feedback, which was consistent with prior research on the benefits of e-learning (Ni, 2013). However, the advantages may not be fully realized if the connection between the instructor and the student is lacking. In face-to-face classes, the instructor can more easily interact with students, which can reduce attendance and work completion issues. Therefore, instructors in online environments must make an effort to reach out to students that are falling behind even in asynchronous delivery modes.

Third, listening—an interactive process between two or more people—is key to employing supportive communicative practices. According to Brinkert (2019), "listening plays an important role in all forms of learning" (p. 168). Thus, educators must be able to effectively listen to communicative messages even in online classes (Brinkert, 2019; Faulkner et al., 2020).

Finally, high person-centeredness is another way to exhibit care and concern beyond what is usually displayed. According to Bodie et al. (2012), high person-centeredness occurs when people display more care or concern than low or moderate person-centered messages. A high person-centered message allows individuals to know they are valued, feel validated about their experiences and emotions, and it invites increased engagement (Bodie et al., 2012). If educators and administrators offer social support, engage in effective listening, and offer high person-centered messages, we believe the community of care in the university will be stronger regardless of instructional modality.

Best Practice Two: Practice Collective Sensemaking

Sensemaking is a dynamic process through which individuals and groups work to understand ambiguous, oblique, or novel situations (Weick et al., 2005). Through the sensemaking process, people develop accounts of reality that interpret or explain (Maitlis, 2005). Scholars outline three moves involved in the sensemaking process: (1) noticing or perceiving cues; (2) creating interpretations of those cues; and (3) acting on those interpretations to attempt to create or restore order. Within university spaces, individuals engage in collective sensemaking as they co-construct meaning (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2014). However, we could be even more successful by enhancing coordinated action. Organizational scholars who study sensemaking point to social interaction as a vital component in this process (Balogun et al., 2015; Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

In the case of COVID-19, instructors were posed with the unique challenge of engaging in this collective sensemaking process with their students even within a computer mediated environment; however, communication scholars have the tools to talk through, listen, and more importantly help to facilitate the construction of meaning even in crisis situations. Weick's (1979) model of organizing starts with ecological changes that can reconfigure our worlds and realities. Within this model the stages of *enactment, selection,* and *retention* can be useful for helping to make sense of the COVID-19 crisis. *Enactment* refers to the ability of actors to deal with uncertainty to gather new information and better understand their surroundings and environment. Next, these actors *select* explanations that can simplify and explain their environment. Lastly, *retention* allows for the utilization of the most viable explanation and allowing that to be preserved (Stephens et al., 2020; Weick, 1979). Thus, instructors must open dialogues about alternative perspectives for their students and administrators must make space for instructors and students to offer their perspectives and experiences. While this may require some vulnerability, thinking through alternative emotions in a crisis situation like COVID-19, affords everyone an opportunity to reimagine the world as well.

Best Practice Three: Foster Inclusive Pedagogical Practices

While COVID-19 impacted all communities, impacts were more severe among certain communities. Therefore, instructors, scholars, and administrators should engage in practices that recognize issues of difference, power, privilege, marginalized and intersecting identities, and the ways in which this has disproportionately impacted communities of color (Faulkner et al., 2020; Kay, 2020). Research shows repeatedly that across all national crises and disasters that the most disenfranchised among the U.S. population are disproportionately harmed physically, emotionally, and educationally (Fortuna et al., 2020; Kay, 2020). While systemic social determinants of health are not considered risk factors for COVID-19, they are a mediator of toxic stress (Adams et al., 2020). Therefore, the already existing sociopolitical, racial, and environmental stresses that communities of color were already experiencing and the increasing targeting of Asians and Asian-Americans in response to the outbreak only served to amplify this toxic stress.

In April 2020, the CDC reported national data on confirmed COVID-19 cases by race and ethnicity and found that Black Americans accounted for 34% of confirmed cases, even though they only account for 13% of the total U.S. population (National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases & the Division of Viral Diseases, 2020). Latinx populations saw similar statistics nationwide (Chavez & Mark, 2020). While these health disparities can be attributed in part to co-morbidities, it is highly likely that other preexisting inequities such as inequities in health care access and quality, lower rates of vaccination and cancer screenings, low wage employment, environmental racism, and a myriad of others had a bigger impact. Therefore, conversations within our communities of care (the university) must include open and honest conversations about these issues.

Additionally, it has been well documented that there are some accessibility issues for students who are poor or live in rural communities. To address the issue of the digital divide for students in rural communities, Raledge et al. (2020) conducted meetings with a diverse group of rural higher education leaders and stakeholders. Two of the major suggestions they have for instructors is to make course material more mobile friendly and to reinforce a sense of community from afar. For several students, their cell phones are the only means they have for connecting to the internet. Therefore, overreliance on data rich resources like downloading PowerPoints or Zoom videos will not work for these students. There must be a concerted effort to utilize more web-based resources that do not require downloads. Moreover, community building is vital when individuals are in virtual formats. For students, things like online office hours, drop-in rooms, and synchronous discussion sessions and debates can assist students who may already be physically isolated. For administrators and instructors, interactive virtual meetings and discussions about issues within the university must be utilized. Failure to account for these socioemotional needs does little to preserve the value of our interactions.

Finally, individuals that come from disenfranchised communities are the same people whose families are at increased risk for illness, unemployment, and community exposure to COVID-19 (Belmonte, 2020). Thus, many of our students have parents who were unable to work from home, did not have work-leave benefits, and/or lost their jobs. This creates resource inequities and students are often called to pick up the slack for their struggling families. For administrators and instructors, many will be called to care for and support their immediate and extended family members. Recognition of these inequities is more than just talking about them, however; but it also extends to our approach to deadlines, attendance practices, and even issues like camera usage. Moreover, the targeting that has occurred for Asian and Asian-Americans especially with many including President Donald Trump referring to the disease as the *Chinese Virus,* has created fear because the threats of physical violence are real (Buscher, 2020). Therefore, discussions about the implications of rhetorical choices on the lived experiences of individuals is necessary for creating an inclusive space. As a community of care, we need to illustrate care for the individual and not just the course content or the work of the university.

Best Practice Four: Engage in Mindfulness

As COVID-19 continues to impact the daily lives of people across the globe, conversations surrounding mental illness are also on the rise (Russell & St. James, 2020). Mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, overwhelming anger, self-abuse, attempted suicide, and suicide, on college campuses have, sadly, risen globally too (El Morr et al., 2020). This spike in mental illness on college campuses is not solely due to COVID-19, but the global health pandemic has not helped move the statistics in the right direction. In order to combat mental illness on a college campus, it is essential to provide the appropriate level of care for individuals in need. The CDC (2021) recommends that schools continue to provide mental health support services to ensure the well-being of their students and that workplaces make space for employees to seek mental health resources. Although, in the midst of COVID-19, face-to-face services may not be available; therefore, colleges may need to invest even more of their time and efforts into combating mental illness in other ways such as virtual mental health support sessions (El Morr et al., 2020).

Within our communities of care, we also want to encourage our colleagues and students to engage in mindfulness practices. Mindfulness is an emerging mental health approach that encourages people to pay attention to purpose, to be present in the moment, and to value experiences as they unfold moment by moment (El Morr et al., 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Mindfulness techniques consist of meditation, breathing techniques, reflection, and acceptance practices. These techniques hold promise in reducing mental health challenges on college campuses (El Morr et al., 2020).

Currently, virtual communities are thriving, and scholars have reported on positive health outcomes when individuals are supported virtually. Evidence shows that access to virtual communities enable and empower people to become active participants in managing their own health conditions (Bender et al., 2013; Jadad et al., 2006). So, we are suggesting that colleagues take time to incorporate mindfulness techniques inside their virtual communities of care through Zoom, WebEx, or other virtual learning platforms. Colleagues could incorporate mindfulness breathing techniques before or after class, they could engage in reflection activities at the end of class, or they could even assign students to come up with their own mindfulness techniques or activities. Since many educators are forced to create learning communities virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions, it is our hope that they take this best practice seriously and incorporate mindfulness into their communities of care. We firmly believe that both our colleagues and their students will feel better after instituting these mindfulness practices.

Conclusion

As fear, confusion, and uncertainty continue to rise from ongoing uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, we propose four best practices to create and improve communities of care for students. Nobody knew COVID-19 would impact the world the way it has, but we can be sure that humans are adaptable. By incorporating these best practices into pedagogical practices, we are confident that the health and wellness of students will improve. Fostering a community of care is one way to address student uneasiness brought about by COVID-19. Moreover, when circumstances of COVID-19 are finally behind us, we hope teachers will continue to employ these best practices designed to reduce fear and create a better tomorrow for all.

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Encouraging College Student Democratic Engagement Through a Collaborative Voter Mobilization Project

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Keywords: college student voting, democratic engagement, experiential learning, peer-to-peer learning, instructional communication, voter mobilization

Abstract: Drawing on challenges I experienced when teaching a political communication course, I designed an upper-level undergraduate course with the objective of developing students' civic competence and democratic engagement. The major class assignment, which is the focal point of this best practices essay, was a four-step collaborative voter mobilization project designed and executed by undergraduate students. I use research, classroom conversations, and student observations to discuss four best practices for encouraging students to participate in electoral politics: (a) fostering political efficacy, (b) peer-to-peer learning, (c) experiential learning, and (d) learning through reflection. This essay breaks a four-step collaborative voting mobilization project down into easily implementable steps for those seeking to inculcate attitudes and behaviors that foster democratic engagement whether that be in schools, universities, or within the broader community.

Although Millennials—people born between 1981 and 1996—will soon comprise the greatest share of the electorate, they are far from being the largest generational bloc of actual voters (Fry, 2018). Having previously taught an upper-level undergraduate political communication course, I knew that fully engaging students in the democratic process would be challenging. Students in prior iterations of a political communication course had shared with me that they did not vote because they saw their vote as "wasted" or perceived that it "didn't matter." Consequently, students confessed that they were disinterested in political engagement. Their admissions aligned with a 2017 report produced by the

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Institute for Democracy & Higher Education (IDHE) that found that, in 2012, students attending The State University of New York at Fredonia (SUNY Fredonia) lagged 17% behind the national average with 29.9% of students and 43.7% of registered students voting in the presidential election.

As I reflected on conversations with students and the IDHE report, I wondered if SUNY Fredonia students' lack of democratic engagement was an anomaly. I discovered that despite being eligible to vote, college-age citizens are notorious for failing to engage in political participation (Hays, 1998; Ulbig & Waggener, 2011). Scholars argue that, since electoral engagement and a strong democratic system are connected, disengagement in the electoral process harms the nation as a whole (Barber, 1984; Lijphart, 1997; Pateman, 1970). In sum, students' lack of democratic participation could have detrimental effects. For instance, those running for office are less likely to take the concerns of young adults into consideration when building their political platforms, because that cohort is less likely to vote (Delli Carpini, 2000).

A report released by the Commission on the Future of Undergraduate Education (2016) found that almost 90% of Millennials who graduate from high school will spend some time in college. Despite being distinctly positioned to educate young people in nonpartisan ways, institutions of higher learning fail to provide students with information they need to partake in electoral politics (Brandon, 2014). Since there is a connection between education and political engagement, undergraduate courses offer an opportunity to instill in students an incentive for active political participation (Hill & Lachelier, 2014). This is an important endeavor because, as Condon and Holleque (2013) contend, people who participate in politics early in life are more likely to be politically engaged throughout their lives.

With the goal of providing students with an academic experience that would inspire them to become more politically engaged, I designed a semester-long assignment that sought to develop students' civic competence and participation in democracy. The major assignment in the class, which is the focal point of this best practices essay, is a four-step collaborative voter mobilization project designed and executed by undergraduate students. I subsequently discuss best practices for encouraging participation in electoral politics: (a) fostering political efficacy, (b) peer-to-peer learning, (c) experiential learning, and (d) learning through reflection. By outlining a voter mobilization project, I offer best practices that others seeking to politically engage citizens, whether in schools, at universities, or within the broader community, can implement to inculcate in the populace attitudes and behaviors that foster democratic engagement.

Political Efficacy

Of the 4,386 students who attended SUNY Fredonia in the fall of 2016, 16 were enrolled in my upper-level undergraduate political communication course. All of these students were communication majors with the exception of one communication minor (Business Administration major) and two non-majors (English and Political Science majors). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of course participants alongside demographic characteristics of the Communication Department and SUNY Fredonia. There were two course participants for whom demographics were not collected.

TABLE 1
Demographics

Demographic	SUNY Fredonia Population (*n* = 4,386)	Communication Department Population (*n* = 386)	Course Population (*n* = 14)
Race			
White	76.7%	76.2%	85.7%
Black, Non-Hispanic	6.9%	9.3%	14.3%
Hispanic	7.5%	8.3%	0%
Asian	1.9%	1.6%	0%
Multiple Races	2.6%	2.1%	0%
American Indian	0.6%	0.5%	0%
Unknown	2.1%	2.1%	0%
Gender			
Male	43.1%	41.2%	42.9%
Female	56.9%	58.8%	57.1%

Note. Academic semester (Fall 2016) data retrieved from Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment. Communication Department population and course data collected by Argos.

Scott Warren, a fellow at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University, observed that "young people want to make the world a better place" yet "they don't necessarily see politics as the way to do it" (Alexander, 2020, para. 4). To gain perspective on students' lack of political engagement, class participants and I discussed why they opt not to vote. Similar to those enrolled in previous classes, many expressed a belief that their vote did not influence governmental decision-making. Students' statements indicated that they lacked political efficacy. Political efficacy is defined as an impression that "individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process . . . the feeling that political and social change is possible and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (Campbell et al., 1954, p. 187). Established early in life, a person's sense of political efficacy is an important predictor of likely future democratic engagement (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2002). The fact that students felt they did not have political efficacy struck me as a critical hurdle to overcome in order to begin improving their overall political motivation. To foster political efficacy, the voter mobilization assignment adopted an experiential approach in which students learned about participating in politics by grappling with conditions and problems in the real world and proposing voting as the solution. Table 2 lists the responsibilities that comprised the voter mobilization project next to the percentage of the assignment each task was worth.

TABLE 2
Voter Mobilization Project Assignment Breakdown and Points Allocation

Assignment	Percent of Total Points
Research essay on past mobilization efforts	15%
Voter mobilization plan	40%
Campaign updates (2)	10%
Reflection essay	25%
Peer evaluation forms (5)	10%

Note. The voter mobilization project assignment had a total point value of 400 out of 1,000 total course points.

Students also shared that they did not participate in the political process because staying knowledgeable about politics was burdensome. Their assertions supported Delli Carpini's (2000) claim that young people's civic disengagement has created an epidemic of apathy toward the political process. Apathy is an unwillingness to exert some degree of effort to involve oneself in the political process (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1991) and associates negatively with efficacy and involvement, each of which contributes to political disengagement (Pinkleton & Weintraub Austin, 2004). When citizens vote, they confer a degree of legitimacy on democratic institutions; therefore, I wanted to find a way to spark student awareness of the 2016 election.

Research indicates that people are more likely to participate in politics when they have self-interest in a political program or issue (Chong et al., 2001). With this research in mind, I required that for the first step in the voter mobilization project, students identify five issues that they believed affected college students. The class list included college affordability, healthcare, job creation, the environment, and humanitarian issues. After the topics were written on the board, students ranked the subjects based on their interest in the issues and were placed into teams of three to four. To start the teams off with a sense of common purpose, these student-generated assigned topics became the focal points of their voter mobilization plans.

During the second part of the assignment, students began researching their assigned topics in order to better understand the personal relevance of and candidates' stances on the political issue. The teams also used library databases to research past voter mobilization efforts in order to identify

- communication strategies implemented by voter mobilization campaign designers,
- tools used by voter mobilization campaign creators while interacting with a campus community, and
- election-related information that voter mobilization campaign designers provided to students.

Once the research stage was complete, the teams synthesized findings while writing an essay that

- described the political issue and candidates' viewpoints on the topic,
- summarized communication strategies that mobilization plan designers used to spur voter participation,
- compared and contrasted past mobilization efforts' strengths and weaknesses, and
- explained how the team would use the aforementioned information to design and execute its voter mobilization project.

Throughout class discussions, students shared that they became more interested in political participation as they researched their topics and admitted that investigating a political issue was not as difficult as they had originally anticipated. As students gained familiarity with aspects of political communication and skills acquisition, they became engaged citizens who established perceptions of their own political efficacy. An engaged citizen is one who follows democratic norms and principles, maintains empirically-based understandings about the social and political spheres, has knowledgeable opinions on public matters, and engages in actions intended to affect the welfare of oneself and others (Delli Carpini, 2004). The knowledge gleaned while researching past mobilization efforts informed the team's voter mobilization plan and positioned students to become leaders on campus who were familiar with democracy and voting.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

Participants in previous political communication classes reported feeling poorly informed about political issues and candidates, and were unsure how to fill out an absentee ballot. University students are inexperienced voters whose social network is primarily composed of peers who also have never voted (Bogard et al., 2008; Niemi & Hanmer, 2010). Consequently, they lack access to peers who are positioned to answer questions about voting. To offset this problem, the crux of the assignment incorporated peer-to-peer learning. This method of learning occurs when "students learn with and from each other without immediate intervention of a teacher" (Boud et al., 1999, pp. 413–414). As young people interact with their peers, they provide valuable information to a demographic that may be unsure how to register and cast a vote, uncertain about where to find information on candidates, and/or feel disillusioned with the electoral system. While speaking with peers, course participants encouraged fellow Millennials to recognize that their voices could contribute meaningfully to political discourse and that, in various ways, their political contributions could shape public policy.

Students' voter mobilization projects centered around providing their peers in the wider campus community with information on voting. For instance, while executing their voter mobilization campaign, face-to-face mobilization efforts helped students establish personal connections with their peers and with the electoral process. To achieve this objective, students used information they learned while writing the past voter mobilization efforts essay to create print materials that they handed out as they spoke with SUNY Fredonia students. Like Sam Houston State University's Political Engagement Project tabling endeavors (Ulbig & Waggener, 2011), students from one team sat at tables in high traffic areas on campus while distributing their colorful brochures. Another team read that students at the University of Southern California and at a college in Florida went door-to-door in campus dormitories to speak with students about voting (Hill & Lachelier, 2014). This team chose to disperse their brochures while implementing their own "dorm storming" strategy.

While researching others' voter mobilization efforts, one team read Ulbig and Waggener's (2011) study that found that providing students with basic information prior to voting increased their likelihood of casting a ballot. Accordingly, the students designed table tents that discussed candidates Clinton's and Trump's positions on healthcare-related subjects and shared the information with students. To inform students about the political issues, the team placed its election-themed centerpieces on tables in campus cafeterias and took turns speaking with their peers about the 2016 election. In these instances, students taught potential voters about political issues, how to vote, and the importance of participating in the democratic process.

As teams executed their voter mobilization plans, peer-to-peer learning held students accountable while also fostering ownership of learning and building a deeper understanding of course concepts. One way they did so was through campus media outlets, including the school's newspaper and its radio and television stations. The media the students chose coincided with their programs of study, such as video production, journalism, radio/audio, or public relations. Consequently, students incorporated their disciplinary knowledge into this project. For instance, one team appeared on a campus radio show to discuss the connection between healthcare and voting while a second team generated a radio advertisement using the school's production studio. Additionally, the editor of the school newspaper wrote an op-ed, and a video production major directed a commercial that aired on campus television. Through campus media, students facilitated peer-to-peer learning while helping to dispel the idea that a college student's vote did not matter.

In sharing their political knowledge, these undergraduates became engaged citizens who contributed to the political process. One student stated, "Learning so much on the topic and being able to talk about it in depth has made me passionate about what was happening and has made me want to share that with my peers." Another student noted that seeing his peers "out campaigning for causes normalized the idea of politics for college students' political engagement." One student sought to positively affect his peers' quality of life: "As a group, we hoped to inform Fredonia's students on the importance of voting and picking the right candidate who would better represent them when it came to their health care." Students' statements indicated that while speaking with peers, they gained practice in articulating their understanding of a politically consequential topic. In turn, SUNY Fredonia students joined those executing the voter mobilization projects in understanding where they stood on important issues in the 2016 election and becoming a more engaged citizenry.

Course participants also discovered that their new experiences conflicted with their prior understandings and beliefs. For instance, one student told the class, "This experience has changed my interest and opinion of political communication," and another wrote, "This experience altered my definition of political communication in that it heightened my interest in persuading the public." A course participant also admitted to seeing politics as "more than just old men arguing in stuffy rooms, it's about trying to get people to believe in something and try and change their future." Someone else shared that her team's voter mobilization efforts enabled her to "better understand what political campaigns were doing." Students' statements suggested that, as they spoke with the SUNY Fredonia student body, they expanded their understanding of the role communication played in the political process and shifted their beliefs about the nature of our political world.

Experiential Learning Theory

Making up 27% of the eligible voting population in 2016 (Fry, 2018), Millennials constituted a voting bloc that was large enough to shape election outcomes and the future of our participatory democracy (Tufts Institute for Democracy & Higher Education, 2020). Instructors, therefore, should create assessments that foster political efficacy so as to prepare students for effective participation in democracy. Using Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory as a guide, I designed the voter mobilization project such that learning occurred through active, hands-on methods (e.g., activities and projects) rather than through passive learning strategies (e.g., listening to a lecture). This distinction is important, because as Boud et al. (1993) contend, "learning can only occur if the experience of the learner is engaged, at least at some level" (p. 8). Kolb (2014) similarly argues that adult learners, like those in a university classroom, want to know the relevance and application of what they are learning. One way to enhance student learning is by the integration of teaching and practice.

The voter mobilization project was an experiential learning exercise in which students took initiative, made decisions, and became intellectually engaged with political communication material. For instance, one team's slogan, "it's your health, care," was placed next to a picture of the American flag while another team generated its own mascot, named "Plant of Action," and positioned their slogan "Vote for the Earth! It's rooting for you!" next to its campaign logo. In these examples, teams used theories and concepts discussed in class, including the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Rhetorical Situation, ideographs, and Narrative Paradigm Theory, along with research on past mobilization efforts, to design its main messages and publicity materials. In these ways, students demonstrated an ability to integrate more conventional classroom learning with the pragmatic, hands-on aspects of the project, learning to juxtapose scholarship and praxis.

Course participants further demonstrated their understanding of the political process while using online social networking sites to generate political participation. Social networking platforms, such as Twitter, enabled students to engage in a two-way, reciprocal learning process as they communicated with their peers virtually. For example, students majoring in public relations and communication studies used knowledge gleaned from a social media course to create and disseminate surveys on political issues via Twitter and posted self-produced informational videos on Facebook. Students also generated status updates to increase voter turnout. Similarly, a student majoring in visual arts created a comic that featured a mascot she designed. Her team then posted the comic to their Instagram Story. With their creative approaches, students sought to expand their peers' understanding of political issues and tapped into their own abilities to use social media to energize a population characterized by disinterest in political participation.

Kolb's (1984) four-stage learning cycle served as a basis for students' weekly 10-minute oral updates. During the presentations, teams explained the activities they completed that week, challenges, and successes. Students subsequently reflected on whether what they found in the research corresponded with their experiences. Students also shared what they learned from their mistakes and achievements. Then, keeping in mind these experiences, teams offered a new idea or alteration of an existing one followed by a description of how they planned to apply the new idea over the next week. When each presentation finished, the class offered oral feedback. On the day following the presentation, teams began active experimentation while applying new knowledge as they proceeded.

Participation in experiential opportunities have been linked to students' development of a range of transferable skills (Griffin et al., 2010). For example, the voter mobilization project appears to have helped students hone their abilities to establish their credibility with their peers and, as one student put it, "provide people with all the facts and letting them make an informed decision." Another course participant shared that he now knows how to "successfully present unbiased information even when I very strongly favor one side over the other." Reflecting on how best to build credibility with peers, one student wrote, "We hoped that we would establish a sort of ethos with other college students: if we cared about voting, then so should they." Other students refined their social media skills. For instance, one student attributed the "likes" her group received online to their use of "personal statements combined with humor and modern slang." Each of these skills is transferable to other settings, where students may recall how to present information in a balanced manner while using language and examples that appeal to an intended audience.

Teamwork is an integral part of workplace success, yet 36% of managers found that new college graduates lacked interpersonal and teamwork skills (PayScale, 2016). With the goal of developing this particular soft skill, I designed the assignment such that a team's success was dependent upon team members exerting similar levels of effort. Research indicates that when people merge their contributions into group work, they may accomplish less than may be expected based on the sum of their individual capabilities (Karau & Williams, 1993). Since individual outputs were evaluated collectively, I suspected that some students might perceive the occurrence of social loafing within their team. Social loafing, which occurs when people make less effort when they work collectively than when they work alone or coactively (Karau & Williams, 1993; Latané et al., 1979; K. D. Williams & Karau, 1991), has negative consequences that can hinder a team from achieving its goals (Latané et al., 1979). A person's perception of social loafing can negatively affect a group member's motivation (K. Williams et al., 1981). Knowing that teams could experience a reduction in potential productivity, I incorporated individual peer assessment measures of teammates' efforts.

Every time students completed one of the assignments, I distributed a Google Form that prompted teams to reflect on each person's additions to the project. This form requested feedback that accounted for other team members' contributions and asked how effectively the team was working. I aggregated the individual feedback and presented it to the whole team when I returned the graded assignment. I then held brief conversations with groups to discuss the individual feedback, my feedback on the team's assignment, and any dysfunctional interaction patterns, such as perceived social loafing. These team meetings aimed to provide information to students for the purpose of increasing performance and decreasing ineffective behaviors. Our conversations indicated that peer feedback exercises helped students gain a richer understanding of their tasks and monitor and regulate their work. After we discussed the feedback, teams gathered to reflect upon the information and design a plan for correcting their future approaches. By providing opportunities for practicing their collaboration skills, teams learned how to accept others' perspectives, listen to feedback, and respect diverse approaches to completing work.

In sum, as they made connections between research and real-life involvements, students' experiences became focal points of learning. A student maintained, "By examining past political data and research conducted on student voting patterns, we created a plan that had both success and failures in which we learned from." Thus, the voter mobilization project emphasized experience as a means for testing the ideas students learned about in the research. For example, a few course participants observed that successful mobilization techniques discussed in the research, such as distribution of flyers, did not seem to work. On the other hand, another student discovered that "it is easier to reach young adults online than through traditional media," just as the research suggested. Some students felt that the research made mobilizing college students seem easy. Course participants, however, found it challenging. One student admitted, "I didn't think it would be this hard to mobilize students," and another stated, "I now understand how hard it is to mobilize the college student body to do something." A third student revealed, "It was quickly learned how difficult it really is to motivate politically uninterested people. However, I now know the better methods to mobilizing and persuading people to get involved." Responses indicated that involvement in politics played an important role in the learning process: ideas concerning civic engagement resulted from and were modified by experience. As they developed into engaged citizens, students constructed meaning from real-life experience and shared that meaning with their peers.

Learning Through Reflection

Once the polls closed on November 8, 2016, teams concluded their voter mobilization plans. Reflection based on prior knowledge is a key component of experiential learning (Estes, 2004), so I gave students a week to contemplate their experience before writing a reflection essay. I decided to have students write an essay because writing is an effective tool for measuring a student's ability to express knowledge and cognitive development (Bennion et al., 2020) and creates deeper understanding (Kellogg, 2008). In experiential learning, reflection transpires within the person (Joplin, 1995) so students wrote their reflection essays individually. To guide their written reflection, I asked students to:

- assess the team's decisions and use of peer-to-peer learning,
- consider whether their level of political self-efficacy and, if relevant, apathy, were affected as a result of completing the project, and
- reflect on the relationship between experience and learning by considering whether the disciplinary knowledge and information garnered while reading research transferred to a real-world situation.

By pondering what happened during the project and evaluating their experiences, students constructed knowledge from real-life events. Their responses revealed a new sense of civic competence and willingness to be involved in the political process.

For instance, some students expressed a belief that they gained a sense of political self-efficacy in that they felt like they helped American democracy by executing a voter mobilization plan. To this point, one student wrote, "I would like to think that voter mobilization plans like the ones we worked on in class had a huge hand in the increase of youth voter turnout." A second student expressed her belief that "even though no statistics are out yet on the percentage of Fredonia students that voted in this presidential election, I am confident that our campaign increased the awareness and acceptance of the importance of voting among college students." The possibility exists that as these young people make voting a habit, they may be more apt to participate in elections (Gerber et al., 2003) and, in turn, have their voices heard.

Implications

Those seeking to engage citizens in the democratic process can use the four best practices outlined in this essay, including fostering political efficacy, peer-to-peer learning, experiential learning, and learning through reflection, as a guide for designing their own voter mobilization campaigns. In what follows, I suggest ways in which organizations and instructors can implement voter mobilization projects altered to fit their needs.

First, voter mobilization projects can be adapted to demographics that have lower voting rates, such as Hispanic or Latinx populations, along with communities that are historically underrepresented in the polls (Krogstad, 2016). Facing language barriers and lacking connections to the political system, there exists a strong belief within the Hispanic community that their votes do not matter (Parlapiano & Pearce, 2016). A voter mobilization campaign could help dispel this belief by fostering political efficacy. For example, in Dunkirk, New York, the town adjacent to Fredonia, 30% of residents are Hispanic (United States Census Bureau, 2019). Local organizations, such as Hispanic Organization for Progress and Education (HOPE), could implement a voter mobilization plan grounded in a matter affecting the Hispanic population and propose voting as the way to create change. The issues could include those self-reported as important to the community, including "crime, crumbling housing, [and] empty storefronts" (Rosas, 2016, para. 9). HOPE could have a prominent member of the Hispanic community, such as Dunkirk's mayor, who holds the distinction of being the first Hispanic mayor in New York State, to establish personal connections with eligible voters as a way to generate political participation. Similar to students who spoke the language of Millennials, HOPE could train citizen leaders who communicate with the public in Spanish via the Dunkirk radio station WDOE, flyers posted at local restaurants and grocery stores, and HOPE's social media. By establishing that the benefits of being politically active outweigh the costs, as my students sought to do for their peers, the voter mobilization project could strengthen the Hispanic population's capacity to engage in civic and political endeavors.

Second, Warren shared a belief that young people's political disengagement stems from a failure of civics education (Alexander, 2020). Civics education presents students with opportunities to engage in classroom activities that model democratic processes through hands-on learning (Levesque, 2018). A similar voter mobilization project in primary and secondary schools could contribute to a civics education curriculum by using peer-to-peer learning to engage middle and high school students in politics. This assignment would be particularly useful in school districts with an educational goal of promoting high civic qualities among their pupils. To develop students' civic skills and dispositions, students enrolled in government participation courses could select a topic relevant to people their age and design a voter mobilization campaign that encourages peers to take action. Examples might include voting in a mock election or participating in a letter writing campaign. Peer-to-peer learning, thus, would be a useful method of knowledge transfer by drawing on students' insights into their own demographics. Being involved in activism and simulations would help students learn how to be civically engaged and potentially deepen young people's knowledge of public affairs.

Third, this experiential learning activity could serve as a foundation for a political campaign's internship program. Student interns could apply academic knowledge while using a candidate's stance on a policy as a focal point for a voter mobilization plan. The intern could learn from industry professionals by presenting weekly briefings to campaign staff. Additionally, local organizations seeking campus-community partnerships, such as the League of Women Voters or the U.S. Census Bureau, might use a modified version of the assignment as part of an internship program that integrates knowledge of theories learned in the classroom with practical application in a student-run grassroots campaign. For instance, interns may produce online content, such as websites or blogs, which voting blocs could access to learn about steps in the voting process. Online tools, such as Canva, could assist interns in designing demographically distinct infographics and newsletters that inform different segments of the population about democracy. In these instances, students would acquire a range of hard and soft skills as part of their employment experience and gain valuable proficiencies. Then, while writing reflection essays, interns would describe tasks they completed, identify opportunities employers presented them, highlight challenges they experienced, and ascertain lessons learned. By contributing to or overseeing a voter mobilization campaign, the interns would gain an understanding of how democratic processes work and also garner a heightened political awareness.

Fourth, the voter mobilization project outlined in this paper can be applied and adapted in other instructors' pursuits, beyond a course in political communication, to reduce students' aversions to investing themselves in the democratic process and to teach students how theories can inform their creation of communication materials and interactions with peers. Based on my experience, I recommend teams of at least four so that more students are working toward shared goals. Group size may be an antecedent of social loafing; therefore, when a larger number of students are assigned to a group, the instructor should hold regular check-ins with teams to assess, motivate, and support positive team behavior. To reduce students' proclivities for social loafing, I recommend following Karau and Williams's (1993) suggestions including monitoring individual performance and having group members assign meaningful tasks to one another. Since students will likely use campus printing services to reproduce flyers and brochures, I encourage instructors to help teams secure funding to cover the cost of printing. I also found that teams' voter mobilization plans lacked depth and foresight. Consequently, I labeled teams' initial plans as drafts, provided detailed feedback, and gave the teams 48 hours to use the feedback to revise their proposals. Instructors may see more comprehensive voter mobilization plans if they require that teams submit a draft of the document prior to turning it in for a grade.

Conclusion

The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement (2012) maintains that institutions of higher education have begun to emphasize the importance of encouraging students' civic involvement. For this reason, instructors need assignments, such as a voter mobilization project, that they can use to foster behaviors that lead to democratic engagement in young citizens. The voter mobilization project described in this essay was an experiential learning exercise in which students became actively engaged with their surroundings and applied knowledge in an impactful way that enabled them to feel like they were influencing their community and the democratic process. Student responses indicate that the project had positive real-world implications, and I propose that this assignment could be successfully adapted and applied in various contexts within other populations, as well. In doing so, we could contribute to a healthy democracy that includes an informed and active electorate.

In the end-of-term course evaluations, students identified the voter mobilization project as their favorite part of the class. One student wrote, "What I enjoyed best about this classroom experience was the GOTV campaign. That helped me learn a lot about campaigning." Another student appreciated the "interesting class discussion arising from the voter mobilization campaigns and creative freedom for the mobilization campaign." I would add that since students knew they were responsible for educating their peers on a political issue, the candidates, and the voting process, they worked harder and were more strategic about how best to reach SUNY Fredonia students.

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Toward an Invitational Andragogy: Articulating a Teaching Philosophy for the Andragogic Classroom

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Keywords: invitational rhetoric, andragogy, instructional communication, nontraditional students, teaching philosophy, classroom communication

Abstract: Students older than 25 years are a growing population on our campuses. However, separating these students and labeling them as "nontraditional" further isolates them from campuses that are already geared toward younger learners. This reflective essay explains the need for a philosophy of invitational andragogy—a classroom approach rooted in invitational rhetoric (S. Foss & Griffin, 1995) and Knowles's assumptions about older learners (1980, 1984). While inviting transformation is important in all classrooms, it is especially important for older learners who often feel separated from the campus at large. To explain how an invitational approach to the andragogic classroom can be achieved, we identify opportunities to apply the strategic prongs of invitational rhetoric: (a) offering perspectives and (b) creating external conditions that promote safety, value, and freedom.

Adult learner. Older learner. Nontraditional student. Colleges and universities have many names for students who did not attend college immediately after finishing high school, who work full- or part-time, who may have children or other dependents, and who bring a wealth of life experience to the classroom. Naming this growing student population has been a source of controversy (Gulley, 2016), with some arguing that the term *nontraditional* both "others" and isolates these students. Andragogy, the method and practice of instructing adult learners (Knowles, 1980, 1984), provides descriptive language to address this cohort's unique needs. Invitational rhetoric (S. Foss & Griffin, 1995; S. K. Foss & Foss, 2012) provides prescriptive knowledge for creating an inclusive environment for students who are often left out of *traditional* college experiences.

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The authors began teaching "adult accelerated" courses while still attending graduate school. As a result, all students were older than the instructors, most had families, and two even had children the same age as the instructors. Two cared for a parent in their home and all had full-time jobs. Despite training in the principles of andragogy, we struggled to connect these principles to practice without an instructional framework and were further hindered by administrative language (in policies, web copy, or other materials) that labeled these learners as nontraditional. This reflective essay provides the framework for a reflective teaching philosophy rooted in invitational andragogy we eventually created.

Differentiating Between Andragogy and Pedagogy

Andragogy, the method and practice of instructing older learners, was introduced by Malcolm Knowles (1980) as a means to distinguish the unique needs of adult learners from that of younger learners (Chan, 2010). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) defines adult learners as those who fall into one or more of the following categories: individuals who delayed entry into higher education, those with children or other dependents, single parents, full-time employees, those who are financially independent from their parents (AACU, 2011). This manuscript focuses specifically on those who are 25 years old or older, as they are a major recruitment target for colleges and universities in the United States (Ritt, 2008).

According to Knowles (1980, 1984), andragogy differs from pedagogy in its unique assumptions about older learners. These learners are characterized by: (a) self-directedness, (b) need to know, (c) use of experience in learning, (d) readiness to learn, (e) orientation to learning, and (f) internal motivation. Since Knowles's introduction of these concepts, they have been used to shape the education of older learners across various disciplines including agricultural communication (Coldevin, 2001), police training (Paterson, 2011), health literacy (Champlin et al., 2020), and others.

The Five Assumptions of Andragogy

1. Self-directedness and internal motivation: Just as children are intrinsically motivated to learn and understand the physical environments and social situations around them (Ryan & Deci, 2016), adult learners are intrinsically motivated to apply learned knowledge to their unique lived experiences in the workplace, home, and community. According to Knowles (1984), "Andragogy assumes that the point at which an individual achieves self-concept of essential self-direction is the point at which he [she, they] psychologically becomes an adult" (p. 45).
2. Need to know: Learners seek knowledge based on what they need to know for the various roles in their life (work, family, community, etc.) and becoming credentialed.
3. Use of experience in learning: Learners have unique areas of expertise from which to draw on while learning new content.
4. Readiness to learn: As individuals mature, their readiness to learn increases as they apply what is learned to their various roles.
5. Orientation to learning: Older learners are oriented toward using knowledge to solve problems.

These assumptions about older learners complement the tenets of invitational rhetoric (S. Foss & Griffin, 1995), which include creating relationships of equality, the immanent value of all living things, and the self-determination of individuals.

Invitational Rhetoric

Knowles's assumptions about older learners complement the tenets of invitational rhetoric (S. Foss & Griffin, 1995), which include creating relationships of equality, the immanent value of all living things, and the self-determination of individuals. Aristotle defined rhetoric over 2,600 years ago as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Furley & Nehamas, 1994). S. Foss & Griffin (1995) coined the term "invitational rhetoric" to critique the theories of persuasion that limit rhetoric to an expression of power. They explain, "As far back as the Western discipline of rhetoric has been explored, rhetoric has been defined as the conscience intent to change others," (p. 2), which infantilizes the audience as it positions the rhetor as empowered and the audience as submissive.

Implicit in S. Foss & Griffin's (1995) argument is the understanding that all forms of communication include a persuasive element. This includes the classroom wherein the very process necessitates the acceptance of a persuasive claim that the material is both correct and useful. We extend S. Foss and Griffin's argument by claiming that invitational rhetoric is uniquely positioned for the andragogic classroom.

Invitational rhetoric is grounded in three key principles: equality, immanent value, and self-determination. The authors explain that the goal of equality is to eliminate "the dominance and elitism that characterize most human relationships" (S. Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 4). To do so, instructors must decenter themselves as the sole arbiter of the education at hand. Of immanent value, the authors explain, "every being is unique and necessary" (p. 4). This principle highlights the validity of lived experience in the (co)construction of learning. The authors explain that self-determination is "grounded in a respect for others . . . Self-determination involves the recognition that audience members are the authorities on their own lives and accords respect to others' capacity and right to constitute their worlds as they choose" (p. 4). In the andragogic classroom, learners are recognized as fully functioning members of society with a multitude of unique responsibilities based on life experience.

Taking these principles into account repositions rhetoric from a display of power to an invitation to understand where the learners are invited to share in knowledge creation. The role of teacher-as-rhetor also requires them to suspend personal judgment on student contributions. For example, in invitational rhetoric, "rhetors recognize the valuable contributions audience members can make to the rhetors' own thinking and understanding, and they do not engage in strategies that may damage or sever the connection between them and their audiences" (S. Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 6). In essence, the roles of teacher/student or rhetor/audience are fluid and the teacher knows they will likely learn as much from students as students learn from them.

Instructors that adopt an andragogic philosophy employ two key strategies: offering perspectives and creating external conditions. Offering perspectives is described as a process that operates "not through persuasive argument, but through offering—the giving of expression to a perspective without advocating its support" (S. Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 8). Understandably, this requires a more subjective approach to the dissemination of information that may not be appropriate for all disciplines. However, communication studies should be a particularly fruitful site for this type of discourse. Offering perspectives occurs when "they enter the interaction with a goal not of converting others to their positions, but of sharing what they know, extending one another's ideas," and focusing on lived experiences, for example, "I tried this solution when it happened to me . . . or what would happen if?" (p. 8).

The creation of external conditions involves cultivating safety, value, and freedom. Safety involves the perception of being free from harm, either physically or mentally. In the andragogic classroom, learners' ideas must be met with respect and care, especially if learners already feel "othered" on campus. Value has to do with honoring the lived experiences of students as what makes them a unique and productive member of the educational process. Finally, freedom involves not imposing unnecessary limitations. In other words, "participants can bring any and all matters to the interaction for consideration; no subject matter is off-limits, and all presuppositions can be challenged" (S. Foss & Griffin, 1995, p. 12).

Applying Invitational Principles in the Andragogic Classroom

Although both authors were trained in the principles of andragogy, much of this training was not specific to the communication discipline. We had previously taught *units* about invitational rhetoric in advanced public speaking and persuasion courses but had not developed a teaching philosophy informed by invitational principles. Thus, this section explains how we use the strategic components of invitational rhetoric as our organizing structure (creating external conditions and offering perspectives) and provides examples of invitational andragogic principles in action. We focus specifically on courses in communication theory, interpersonal communication, and group communication.

Creating External Conditions

We begin each class with the assumption that all learners have unique areas of expertise that can inform coursework. To foster *relationships of equality* that highlight the *immanent value* of learners' experiences and thoughts, we focus specifically on ways to incorporate learners' *self-directedness* (assumption #1), *need to know* (assumption #2), and *use of experiences in learning* (assumption #3). While we believe all course content is important, we know that learners are most likely to engage with content they need to know to carry out their roles in home, community, and work settings. To support learners as they apply course concepts to their own experiences, we highlight and reinforce the external conditions that make this approach fruitful: safety, value, and freedom.

We saw these assumptions applied in a 400-level communication theory course where learners were asked to use a theory to analyze a specific communication problem and then present solutions to it. Learners were encouraged to use their own experiences for self-directed topic selection, rather than case studies or examples from media or culture (though case studies certainly have their places in the classroom). To support learners as they analyzed communication problems in their own lives, we highlighted the safety of the classroom by describing the importance of lived experience to learning, the idea that no learner's experience was unimportant, and a set of learner-developed guidelines for discussing difficult topics.

One learner, Debbie (pseudonym), worked as a certified nursing assistant in a nearby assisted living facility. Debbie reflexively took notes during and after one of her shifts, focusing on her communication with patients. Using communication accommodation theory (Giles, 2008), her analysis categorized the examples of convergent and divergent communication she either used or witnessed during a typical shift. Debbie concluded that she and her colleagues frequently used "elderspeak" when addressing patients and argued that this negatively impacted the caregiver-patient relationship. She proposed a two-pronged solution wherein she spent a shift deliberately trying to avoid elderspeak and noting any improvements in her interactions, followed by sharing her findings with her supervisor in hopes of presenting the findings to her colleagues.

Debbie used her *need to know* and understand her patients to guide her interactions, and her *use of experiences in learning* helped develop tangible solutions to a communication problem in assisted living facilities. Without stating it, Debbie also highlighted the immanent value of her patients, thus extending the invitational classroom environment outside our four walls. Another learner, who was a caregiver for an ill parent, recognized her own tendency to use elderspeak in interactions with her parent and her plans to become more aware of her communication. This interaction was supported by the safety learners felt and the freedom to choose to use Debbie's findings, if appropriate, for their own experiences.

In another 400-level group communication class, the semester-long project centered on identifying a problem within an organization and creating a proposal to fix it, while cooperatively learning tactics for successful group communication. Given time constraints of the accelerated 7-week course, the assignment was tailored to highlight their common experience in the adult classroom; namely, their collective experience of attending a university in a "school of adult learning." In order to engage with the assumptions #1–3, the assignment description provided little direction on how to find a problem at the university other than to engage their own experiences as a student.

Based on group discussion, the following problems were identified: parking on campus, access to student organizations, and the lack of proper attention to vending machines. As a professor, I was familiar with complaints about the first two issues, but not the third. One learner explained that most people in the program come from jobs that end at 5:00 p.m. and need to be in class by 6:00 p.m. Dining services hours of operation are limited and typically crowded with learners who do not have evening classes, so students are forced to rely on vending machines. Faculty and staff were not aware that vending machines were not located appropriately throughout the university or that supplies were often depleted by this time of day.

Interestingly, learners' unique *experiences* (assumption #3) and *self-directedness* (assumption #1) fueled their motivation and *need to know* (assumption #2). As the project progressed, groups were led to explore the organizational structure of the university and identify resources to foster change. Thus, learners were reflexive as they used their agency and experiences to solve a problem specific to their life roles as older learners and employees. The creation of external conditions that promoted safety, value, and freedom led to a shared experience that incorporated group communication concepts, highlighted an organizational problem at the university, and provided the rhetor/professor with new knowledge of how to help a particular population of learners.

Offering Perspectives

As noted earlier, offering perspectives is an invitational practice where the instructor shares experiences and perspectives on subjects in ways that encourage listeners to consider them and share their own. This strategy highlights learners' *readiness to learn* (assumption #4) and *orientation to learning* (#5). Though many scholars have highlighted the ways in which teachers and learners use social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and active learning (Prince & Felder, 2006), older learners have historically been excluded from these analyses, despite their growing presence in the classroom. According to the principles of andragogy, older learners' readiness to learn is incredibly high because they are able to draw from the many roles they hold in their lives (e.g., student, spouse, parent, caregiver, employer, employee, community member). Important to note here is that we do not advocate transforming every class in these ways. Rather, the accelerated courses taught in the evenings may better serve the learners that enroll in them by peer-to-peer learning and group-based projects that take place during class. To encourage perspective offering, we tell learners that class time is for discussing and applying concepts. Reading materials and watching videos should take place outside of class.

We experienced this in a 300-level 7-week interpersonal communication class. The evening class, which lasted 4 full hours, necessitated that a variety of activities, discussions, and assessments take place during class time. During the week when we discussed in-group/out-group communication and social identity theory, learners were asked to plan and lead a discussion about a group they were a member of and how the group uses communication to distinguish members from nonmembers. To begin the perspective-offering process, I shared a brief presentation about language, accent, and dialect (ways groups identify members) in Appalachia (where I am from, but do not currently live or teach). I shared the example of pronouncing "Appalachia" as an indicator of in-group status. In the southern region of Appalachia, it is commonly pronounced Ap-uh-latch-uh (with some regional variations, though most keep the short third "a"), while those from outside this region may say Ap-pa-lay-shuh. I followed this with discussion questions about how language, dialect, and accent can "other" individuals. I shared my own experiences of being stereotyped and how I had evaluated others as in-group or out-group based on their pronunciation choices, in hopes that doing so would highlight safety and freedom to share their offerings in the classroom as well.

After a short discussion, Lakeith (pseudonym) used his time as discussion leader to offer perspectives on his experiences with colorism in his Jamaican American community. This led to a conversation about the differences between colorism, prejudice, racism, and discrimination. Another learner, Laurie, shared her experience of working in a large financial company and the ways clothing was used to differentiate between custodial, administrative, managerial, and C-suite employees. She asked questions about gendered experiences around what constitutes "business attire." In each instance, learners felt comfortable sharing their experiences of being evaluated as an in-group or out-group member and how these frames shaped their evaluations of others, as well.

Some of our most fruitful discussions stem from the rhetor/professor first offering perspectives of their experience, and framing these offerings as opportunities for engagement, rather than textbook examples of "the way it is." While we frequently also share concrete definitions, we encourage perspective-sharing by using our own experiences as jumping-off points rather than the focus of the discussion.

Creating External Conditions and Offering Perspectives Before Class Begins

Whereas the previous examples focus on in-class activities, we now offer a few suggestions to consider when planning the course. We focus these suggestions on the syllabus, course LMS, language, and teaching philosophy.

The syllabus: To create the external conditions necessary for learners to feel safe offering perspectives, we recommend including a statement about the nature and structure of the class, clearly stating that perspective-offering is not just helpful but also *welcomed*. This can be done by using possessive pronouns and "we" language that highlight the collective nature of the class, such as, "we will discover," "our class focuses on . . . ," and similar statements.

The course LMS: Online learning management systems are ubiquitous. To begin the invitational process, we recommend including designated locations in the LMS (e.g., discussion board) where the rhetor/professor offers their plan for the course and invites feedback and questions. This will mirror the invitation to offer perspectives that will occur in-person and allow learners who may be nervous to ask questions during class.

The language: Labeling and defining key concepts is standard practice in communication studies. However, potential research on the impact of identifying a group of learners as “nontraditional,” “accelerated learners,” or “adult learners” has been met with mixed reviews. To operate within this lacuna in literature, we suggest inviting learners to self-identify. In the communication classroom, the topic of language has universal importance and so it is a prime site to explore student views. We often introduce the importance of language by opening a discussion about how the learners feel they are labeled or named by the university. Taking this discussion a step further and encouraging learners to decide how their cohort will be identified within the classroom promotes agency as well as insight into an important concept in the study of communication.

The teaching philosophy: We recommend including a brief summary of your teaching philosophy in the syllabus or on the course LMS. This provides an opportunity to explain what an invitational approach looks like and how this approach will benefit learners in their specific situations.

Finally, we encourage everyone to review assignment descriptions, course navigation, and required readings to look for additional ways to invite learners to offer perspectives. This approach is an ongoing reflexive process that we engage in continually from the point of drafting syllabi to entering final grades.

Conclusion

By exploring the tenets of invitational rhetoric and the assumptions of andragogy, we hope that those who teach in programs targeted at adults, older learners, or those individuals who are otherwise separated from the larger undergraduate population will develop an andragogic classroom philosophy. An invitational andragogy is rooted in both theory and practice. As this unique population continues to comprise an increasingly larger percentage of our campuses, practices like these will honor their lived experiences by fostering a climate that embraces equality, the immanent value of all, and the self-determination of individuals.

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Lessons From the Pandemic: Engaging Wicked Problems With Transdisciplinary Deliberation

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Keywords: transdisciplinarity, health communication, COVID-19 pandemic, instructional communication, wicked problems

Abstract: Some crises, such as those brought on or exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, are wicked problems—large, complex problems with no immediate answer. As such, they make rich centerpieces for learning with respect to public deliberation and issue-based dialogue. This essay reflects on an experimental, transdisciplinary health and science communication course entitled *Comprehending COVID-19*. The course represents a collaborative effort among 14 faculty representing 10 different academic departments to create a resource for teaching students how to deliberate the pandemic, despite its attending, oversaturated, fake-news-infused, infodemic. We offer transdisciplinary deliberation as a pedagogical framework to expand communication repertoires in ways useful for sifting through the messiness of an infodemic while also developing key deliberation skills for productively engaging participatory decision-making with concern to wicked problems.

Some crises, such as those brought on or exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, are *wicked* problems—large, complex problems with no immediate answer. As such, they make rich centerpieces for learning with respect to public deliberation and issue-based dialogue. We argue that the pandemic exposed serious limitations inherent in mono-disciplinary approaches to instructional communication. We contend further that *transdisciplinary* learning—learning based in the transcendence of disciplinary boundaries to focus on a shared issue—emerges as an opportunity to understand the messiness of a given crisis. To clarify, a transdisciplinary approach fosters "deliberative mindsets" based on participatory

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decision-making (Carcasson, 2017, p. 4). When implemented effectively, a transdisciplinary approach to communication and instruction might also help students manage anxieties related to the pandemic by empowering them to look to their communities to work through decisions and to get support (Frey & Loker, 2020).

Unfortunately, the rapid dissemination of information about the novel Severe-Acute-Respiratory-Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) was wrought with misinformation based on unfounded theories, misinterpretation of actual data, and mal-information that spread wildly across social media (Enders et al., 2020). Here we reflect on an experimental, transdisciplinary health and science communication course entitled *Comprehending COVID-19*. The course represents a collaborative effort among 14 faculty representing 10 different academic departments to create a resource for teaching students how to deliberate the pandemic, despite its attending, oversaturated, fake-news-infused "infodemic" (Zarocostas, 2020; see also WHO, 2020).

We drew our inspiration for the course from Dannels's (2001) insight about teaching communication across the curriculum in ways that integrate communication skills with discipline-specific knowledge. Rather than integrating learning about communication within or between specific disciplines, however, the course focused on one large communication problem from the perspectives of multiple disciplines that share stakes in responding to that problem. The problem—learning how to navigate the COVID-19 infodemic (both as a sender and receiver of messages)—cannot be addressed merely via "proper articulations" and "fact-checking." Solutions exist in the discovery of a multifaceted array of knowledge domains relevant to productive deliberation of the pandemic. Thus, disciplines represented in the course include art, biology, business, communication studies, economics, health education, English, geography, and public health. The faculty outlined key issues regarding the COVID-19 pandemic related to perspectives of their disciplines (e.g., stay-at-home orders, social distancing, wearing masks). Informed by our work on this course, we offer transdisciplinary deliberation as a pedagogical framework uniquely designed to expand communication repertoires in ways useful for sifting through the messiness of an infodemic while also developing key deliberation skills for productively engaging in participatory decision-making with concern to wicked problems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Transdisciplinary Deliberation and the Messiness of Wicked Problems

The term "disciplinarity" manifests across a spectrum, spanning intra to multi to inter to trans (Park & Son, 2010, p. 84).[1] Each type denotes the degree to which disciplinary boundaries are maintained or transcended.

Intradisciplinary → Multidisciplinary → Interdisciplinary → Transdisciplinary

*Intra*disciplinary courses in communication studies are those that teach about the discipline (e.g., communication theory). *Multi*disciplinary courses might bring in perspectives of different disciplines on a shared theme (e.g., sociological perspectives on communication). *Inter*disciplinary courses are those that capitalize on opportunities for bringing concepts *to* or *from* communication studies (e.g., biological communication). *Trans*disciplinary courses take interdisciplinarity a step further, capitalizing on the opportunities of cross-pollinating for specific disciplines—such as communication studies or biology—while also transcending those disciplinary boundaries to produce emergent knowledge beyond the traditions of those specific disciplines (e.g., a rhetoric of biology). Transdisciplinary courses also emphasize student-driven learning, characterized by collaboration within a shared conceptual framework (Park & Son, 2010, p. 84). In other words, whereas multidisciplinary classes are about demonstrating the breadth of perspectives that exist on a given theme and interdisciplinary classes are about encouraging thoughtful expansions of particular disciplines, transdisciplinary classes are about creating new knowledge regarding a particular problem based in real-world application from multiple disciplinary perspectives.

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[1] Park & Son (2010) do not use the modifier "intra." We have added this for clarity.

The orienting framework of the *Comprehending COVID-19* course is what we conceptualize as *transdisciplinary deliberation*, a pedagogical approach to building deliberative skills, which does not shy away from the social complexity of a wicked problem. Rather, it embraces the messiness by capitalizing on opportunities to "thicken" experiential learning opportunities, which may manifest in emergent knowledge between, within, and beyond disciplinary boundaries. Although deliberation is a communication-based activity, it is served by acknowledging that myriad disciplines share a stake in the formation of informed, responsible citizens prepared to productively engage public matters. Moreover, in the case of the wicked problems brought about or exposed by the pandemic, the need for transdisciplinarity became apparent. Consequently, *Comprehending COVID-19* was conceived as a course in *pandemic deliberation*, a transdisciplinary collaboration bound not simply by a shared topic, but a shared goal in cultivating informed citizens, versed in the contexts and lines of argument that converge on the pandemic.

Each module was grounded in a particular discipline; however, each one also shared a specific set of key tensions, which when stitched together as components of a course meant to cultivate skills in deliberating the pandemic, became components of a learning experience oriented toward producing transdisciplinary knowledge. The course objectives and student learning outcomes were:

- Navigate the complexities of information about COVID-19 as a biological, geographical, cultural, and economic phenomenon.
- Consider the various cross-cutting issues relevant to the scientific and social impacts of COVID-19, including the values that make them matter.
- Analyze relevant data and value commitments in order to draw conclusions about the available options for responding to the pandemic.
- Reflect on one's personal experience of the pandemic, while assessing the upshots and pratfalls of specific responses, based on applicable information and commitments of value.

Moreover, they are based on Gastil's (2008) four stages of deliberation:

1. Building a basis of information regarding the issue.
2. Pinpointing the valuative commitments involved in the issue.
3. Discovering the array of available options for responding to the issue.
4. Assessing the upshots and pratfalls of each response based on the information and commitments of value (p. 9).

Instead of relying on quizzes or exams for evaluation and assessment, we engaged each module with a semi-public discussion that afforded participants opportunities to practice deliberation throughout the course. To prepare students for this experience, we introduced the course by strategically framing content to facilitate metacognition of what students are doing: learning how to responsibly and productively engage shared decision-making amid wicked problems, with the pandemic as a congealing centerpiece.

Discussion prompts were consistent across modules in that each one instructed students to (1) complete a task representative of the disciplinary perspective of a given module (e.g., analyzing a map geographically or consulting public data on health disparities), (2) make sense of that information while synthesizing it with their personal experiences/observations, and (3) conjecture about possible courses of action based on the information they found. Thus, the course design offered a "repeatability" of practice, helping students gather their learning over the course, iteratively building a communication repertoire, specially ported to the problem of the pandemic, and tied to the sharing of individual experience, synthesized with multiple knowledge domains as they intersected on the pandemic. For example, the process that clinical trials must follow before vaccines can be approved, which was covered in the biology module, would later be made relevant to discussions of the economic impacts of the pandemic. "I've seen this, but it was different before."

Finally, *Comprehending COVID-19* was a course meant to serve the entire university. To increase accessibility, it was offered for free to incoming freshmen and transfer students and delivered in an online format comprised of eight modules completed in 3 weeks (Table 1). Each module consisted of pre-recorded lecture videos, short activities, and student discussions. To emphasize the deliberative nature of the course, discussions were made central as the only graded component of each module (see Appendix A). To facilitate curricular alignment, a common rubric was used across modules and adapted to address the particular prompt (see Appendix B).

TABLE 1
Summary of Course Topics

Module	Topic	Discipline
1	The Biology of SARS-CoV-2	Biology
	Pandemic Literature	English
2	The Geography of Coronavirus	Geography
3	The COVID-19 Infodemic	Communication
4	Health Disparities and COVID-19 in the U.S.	Health and Exercise Science/Education
5	Economics vs. Public Health Amid COVID-19	Economics
6	Crisis Management and Coronavirus	Business
7	Poverty and Entrepreneurship in a Pandemic	Business
	Building Back Better After COVID-19	Business/Geography
8	Urban Life and Public Space after COVID-19	Geography/Art

Cultivating Pandemic Deliberation Skills: Reflexive Appraisal

This section highlights some reflections—products of hindsight—we observed for others to consider as they design transdisciplinary modules and/or courses to cultivate skills for deliberating the messiness of wicked problems. We frame the discussion around the topics of wicked empathy and the Mobius strip.

Wicked Empathy

By framing discussion questions as opportunities for deliberation with classmates, we were pleasantly surprised at students' eagerness to practice demonstrating empathy as they worked through wicked problems together. More than learning how to communicate with peers during the pandemic, students gained an enhanced appreciation for listening and empathizing while discussing core concepts relevant to the pandemic from diverse perspectives. In one business module, for example, students reflected on the impact of the pandemic on small businesses and entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurial mindset, or the ability that empowers individuals "to come up with new ideas, solve problems, generate creative solutions, and take action to pursue opportunities" (Kuratko et al., 2020, p. 2), complements the deliberative mindset relevant to wicked problems as promoting creativity, empathy, human-centered action, and social connectivity. Thus, students developed skills stemming from an entrepreneurial mindset amid a pandemic. In other words, creating innovative solutions is a necessary piece toward discovering responsible actions. Specifically, entrepreneurship was framed within poverty, which is itself a wicked problem (Peters, 2017). The scarcity of resources, knowledge, and social segregation experienced by those in low-income conditions (Santos et al., 2019), coupled with the pandemic's inherent challenges, required students to develop their ability to create empathy and perspective-taking with a different reality and differences of experience with the pandemic.

By deliberating the layers of complexity inherent to COVID-19 *together*, students were not simply learning how to "make their case," but also how to listen and empathize with different lived experiences. For example, in the health disparities module, a *wicked* empathy emerged that was informed not solely by various issue points, but also by how these issues cut across domains. "I get it now. Thank you for your story."

The Mobius Strip

As Cypher and Martin (2008) observed, the pedagogical entanglement with and for critical thinking is essentially a Mobius strip wherein participants and their assumptions turn in on themselves through active deliberation and reflection. Students would "try out" their skills in each of the eight modules and, consequently, iteratively "thickened" their understanding of what it means to be an effective and responsible participant in decision-making processes. For example, scapegoating, fear appeals, and misinformation were covered in the communication module. In that module's discussion, students were asked to discuss recent articles and encouraged to focus on the consequences of *how* one speaks, as well as *what* one talks about. Students ran the Mobius strip (i.e., starting in one place and then ending up in another place that looked very similar to the original starting place) when deliberating about communication, about the role of sustainability amid COVID-19, and shifting understandings of place and space during (and after) the pandemic, among others. This iteration over the course offered students chances to revisit theirs and others starting places—to reflect on the assumptions, anxieties, and ideologies that each person (including oneself) brings to the deliberation and complicates unknowns of the pandemic.

With regard to teaching during the pandemic, Arnett (2020) said, "The coronavirus may temporarily, or perhaps for the long-term, recalibrate much of what we do, but it cannot, and will not, destroy the importance of learning, studying, practices, and care for one another in the midst of the unknown" (p. 9). One vital skill necessary for approaching problems like the pandemic is the ability and tenacity to try and try again—to be prepared to run the Mobius strip, to loop through the various knowledge domains and issues, which intersect within a given crisis in efforts to “start again” with others. As they practiced, students animated the importance of deliberation during crises for “the development and deployment of group cognitive processes demonstrate the wide range of ‘organizing’ that shapes resilience processes” (Williams et al., 2017, p. 748).

Lessons Learned: Concluding Remarks

As is the case with any experimental course taught for the first time, there are things we would have done differently if only “we had known then what we know now.” For example, we would augment the cultivation of wicked empathy with peer-review assignments. In them, students would offer feedback to one another, reflecting on their demonstration of empathy in each module discussion as a means of tracking the evolution of their thinking about empathy throughout the course. The power of reflection is bottomless. We would also expand the framing of transdisciplinary deliberation (from the outset of the course) with an emphasis on the Mobius strip, coupled with a recurring item in the module discussions where students are asked to consider their “starting point”—their assumptions, ideologies, and anxieties—at the outset of their discussion response. Finally, we would build module-specific office hours into the course, wherein each participating faculty would take the lead on holding virtual office hours as pertinent to their respective content, further underscoring that faculty are available for direct discussion, augmenting course content with additional avenues for students to pursue their own interests and questions.

Ideas for improving the course notwithstanding, the experiment in transdisciplinary deliberation was a success. In fact, it went beyond our goal of introducing students from across the campus to this unique approach/orientation to health and science that comes from communication studies. Based on student discussions, the course did a service to the student body for at least two reasons. First, it underscored the wickedness of the moment for students in a way that helped them build sensibilities that support working with others to make sense of the ever-shifting touchpoints between the social, economic, and biological systems that made the pandemic matter. And, second, the course provided a platform for students (who were largely isolated from others during the pandemic) to share and reflect on the things that mattered to them, in turn, trading vantage points, kindness, and energy with each other as they worked together to build a communication repertoire in pandemic deliberation. These are lessons learned that could improve pedagogical processes in higher education during future pandemics, as well as part of the new normal in higher education.

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Appendix A

EXAMPLE MODULES				
Module	**Topic**	**Content**	**Minor Activities**	**Discussion**
1.1	Biology of SARS-CoV-2 (The Novel Coronavirus): From Virus Replication to Global Dissemination	What Is SARS-CoV-2 and Where Does It Come From?	Look at an Interactive Map of SARS-CoV-2 Genomes and Mutations	What Is COVID-19? What Does the Pandemic Mean to Me?
		COVID-19 Pathology, Transmission, and Testing	Explore the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center	
		Antiviral Therapies and Vaccine Development	Consider the World Health Organization's Coronavirus Page	
7.1	Poverty and Entrepreneurship in a Pandemic	What Is Entrepreneurship?	Meet Famous Entrepreneurs Who Grew up in Poverty	What Is Innovation Amid a Pandemic?
		What Is Poverty?	Take the Global Poverty Quiz Review the World Bank's Global Data on Poverty and Prosperity	
		Entrepreneurship: A Different Solution to Poverty	Mini-Case Study—Yolanda Smith, a Poverty Entrepreneur	
		COVID-19 and the Challenges for Poverty	The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals	
		Poverty and Entrepreneurship in a Pandemic	Explore Examples of Pivoting Businesses During a Pandemic	
		What's Next? Navigating Through COVID-19	Learn the SPODER Framework to Foster Entrepreneurship in Crisis Contexts	

Appendix B

DISCUSSION RUBRIC	
No Marks	**Full Marks**
No assignment posted, or posted content is inappropriate, false, and/or irrelevant to prompt.	Post directly addresses the prompt. Content contributes factually correct and thoughtful information. Some effort is made to incorporate information across modules (where applicable). Comments productively advance discussion and respect other points of view.

REFLECTIVE ESSAYS

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A Professing Parent's Reflection on the COVID Classroom and Research Illustrates the Full Utility of Communication Pedagogy

Robin Smith Mathis

Keywords: compassionate communication, ethnonarrative, phenomenology, instructional communication, organizational communication

Abstract: This essay uses an ethnonarrative method to illustrate why and how to communicate compassion in the K–12, college, and workplace classroom during a pandemic. Reflecting on my experiences as a parent and professor, my students' journal entries March–May 2020, and field research notes, I conclude that the feeling of powerlessness in the classroom and compassion within the organization creates an innovative ethnonarrative research opportunity for the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy* reader. Ultimately, my reflection as a parent and professor emphasized the value of communication pedagogy. Ultimately, I argue that practitioners in traditional classrooms, as well as the workplace, can advance communication pedagogy through multifaceted ethnonarrative approaches that are uniquely suited to meet the complex challenges exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Student journal entry (March 17, 2020)—"*I think this will blow over in a few short weeks.*"

A week makes a huge difference.

Next journal entry (March 24, 2020)—"*Well, this is getting more serious than I initially thought.*"

Yes, it did not blow over. In fact, it blew up. My extroverted first grader sobbed, "I don't get to go to P.E. anymore, and I didn't even get to hug my friends goodbye." Her introverted brother responded, "I could

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get used to this online school." COVID-19 has impacted every aspect of our lives with a pronounced bearing on pedagogy. Teaching in the school of communication, observing my own children, and acknowledging the changing nature of organizational communication in my research afforded me a valuable opportunity to conduct a layered exploration of the role communication pedagogy plays in our lived experiences.

In this reflective essay, I discuss challenges and opportunities related to the COVID-19 pandemic from my perspective as a professor, parent, and organizational communication researcher by focusing on student journal entries, research field notes, and my own lived experience from March 16, 2020–mid-Fall 2021. I discuss, briefly, the convergence of pedagogical and practical challenges within my research context. More specifically, my reflection on parenting, teaching, and researching uncovered a vulnerability of students, instructors, children, parents, and professionals that expands communication pedagogy in the primary, secondary, and workplace learning contexts. Ultimately, I focus on opportunities to renegotiate power and communicate compassion in a pandemic, as well as expand methodological practices for conducting research on the dynamic interaction among them.

Pedagogy Context

I began my teaching career at the high school level in the summer of 2000. Thus, by the time I began graduate school in the fall of 2003, I realized how much the field of "instructional communication" could have helped my teaching over the past 3 years. I had an "oh, that's why that happened"; "that's why I felt that way"; or a "well, I should have done that" reaction to everything I was reading and learning. Through my master's program, I became a better teacher. I also realized that an instructional lens could enhance organizational development and learning research. Later, I found that instructional communication research helped me understand my children and their teachers regardless of the grade level. Now, as I reflect on 2020 and move forward into 2021 and beyond, I bring that same sense of awareness to my current professional and personal experiences. In addition to my experiences and instructional knowledge, my parenting lens adds a degree to my understanding and to my compassion that will be explored further in this essay. My parenting lens also highlights the contextual piece within communication pedagogy. A field that historically has examined communication within a quantitative paradigm is in need of a paradigm shift to fully grasp the communication and contextual challenges now facing us in the future.

The majority of this essay reflects on the initial stage (March–May 2020) of a crisis that would persist for months to come. Within a year, five million working mothers had to quit their jobs to manage competing responsibilities brought on from the pandemic (Gilbert et al., 2020). As I reflect on my own experiences, I am not surprised as I also struggled with childcare and decisions that revolved around my family. I realize that I am part of a two-parent household, which lessened my stress because we could share the burdens. Single parents, single-person wage earners, and those with different support structures bore the entire burden. I listened on Zoom and Teams, and I saw comments on social media about the parent struggles, particularly the mothers in my bubble, when they did not have the support they needed. In addition, I witnessed the working mother struggles in my research. Finally, my children are primarily taught by working mothers, and some of my students are working mothers or primary caregivers. Though all of these relationships have power dynamics and need to communicate compassion, the lived experiences shape what this tension looks and sounds like. Nevertheless, my experiences highlighted what communication pedagogy research has to offer teachers in K–12, higher education, and workplace settings as we navigate a pandemic now and a new normal going forward.

The unique partnership of instructional and organizational communication is not a new concept (Kearney, 2008). This revelation was not born of mine or others' COVID-19 communication challenges. However, my reflection provides direction on how communication pedagogy can respond. In my research, I have explored communication within the organizational training classroom (Mathis, 2020). In addition, since May 2020, I have analyzed communication adjustments of a state district court in adapting to technology within the formal legal system. I saw a few women, maybe spouses and mothers, appearing in court professionally dressed and prepared to present their case. Interesting note, most of the participants outside of the court reporter were middle-aged to senior men. Outside of my research context, in my usual day-to-day, I see an instructional/organizational partnership as a communication professor within the norms of the university organization. However, during the pandemic, I saw all organizational members, administration, faculty, staff, and students forced to maneuver the dialectical struggle with communication and technology in a completely different way.

The silver lining of a crisis is the opportunity to learn and build on what we know. Dannels (2015b) suggested questions teachers should ask. I structured my reflection and thoughts on pandemic professor/parent experience and during my pandemic professor/parent experience to advance communication pedagogy on one of her questions—**How can I make a difference**?—moving students and organizational stakeholders from worry to trust *during the rapid transition to remote learning.* As we move through to the end (hopefully) of the pandemic, there are a number of lessons learned to establish trust among teachers, students, and the workforce in what is already being called a new normal.

After the social and health climate of 2020, it stands without much debate that communicating concern, dealing with communication anxiety, engaging students, managing perceptions, negotiating perceptions, and overcoming cultural differences are extremely relevant today. Training in education and in organizations must prepare stakeholders to communicate concern within the boundaries, limitations, and challenges of today—easier said than done. Where do we begin? Reflection on conversations, journal narratives, and research notes centered around these questions converge professor/student, parent/child, colleague/colleague experiences to highlight needs and potential answers to new interpersonal and organizational learning challenges.

The classroom and workplace are filled with war stories of the struggles of those that paved the way before us, but how do we conduct research, teach, and train in a time when we no longer have a historical point of reference? We will become the reference. The pandemic of 2020–2021 will shift communication pedagogy for the classroom and the workplace. March 2020 gave us an experience very few parents or teachers could reflect on with familiarity and know how to encourage, motivate, or redirect their student. We have shared emotions impacting engagement in the past; however, for the first time in over a century, everyone in the institution and organization found themselves vulnerable in an entirely new way. We are impacted by the same multidimensional and multimodal world Dannels (2015a) described in 2015; yet, with a shared sense of compassion and concern. Through this shared anxiety, worry, and fear came a shared sense of powerlessness among teachers, professors, parents, and organizational stakeholders. I do think there was a shared powerlessness among the educator and the educated, as well as the supervisor and the supervised that initiated a power/powerless conversation.

Power and Pedagogy

I have written about communicating power in an organizational context (Mathis, 2020). Particularly, I argued for the extension of Relational Power and Instructional Influence (Mottet et al., 2006). We know that power in the classroom is a negotiated process. Others have used multidisciplined organizational theory such as Leader-Member Exchange to examine perceived justice in the classroom (Horan et al., 2013). However, the COVID-19 context brought to the forefront a new need to communicate power and Leader Member Exchange (LMX) constructs (respect, trust, loyalty). Perceptions of justice and power are embedded in the macro levels of multilayered organizations where our trust is foundational. The intricate power levels of our workplaces added another degree of complexity.

As we wrestled with anxiety, uncertainty, and technology, instructional communication provided a lens to understand what was happening in my classroom, my children's educational experience, and the workplace. However, they also highlighted a need. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened stress for all of us based on uncertainty regarding our health, employment, and families as they hit rapidly and at the same time. As an educator and parent, I found established literature in instructional communication a lighthouse in a moment of educator ineptness and desperation. It was my experience that instructor clarity and compassion was even more critical to student success within the pandemic context. Yet, communicating mutual respect and trust had shifted. It was imperative to communicate clarity about the context with compassion.

Compassionate communication within both traditional nontraditional classrooms such as the workplace pointed me to organizational communication. Miller (2007) conceptualized compassionate communication at work into three main categories: noticing, connecting, and responding. First, you notice a need for compassion about the details of others' lives. I mentioned that not only did my reflections inform my teaching and parenting, but it also highlighted communication pedagogy's impact on the workplace through my research. As a professing parent, I determined responding and connecting to students, colleagues, administrators, lawyers, clients, defendants, judges, court reporters, and family members vitally complicated. For me, experiencing the pandemic through a teaching, parenting, and researching lens accentuated that the organizational and interpersonal mutual influence is a complex and multilayered context that only communication pedagogy can work to improve. In the process of connecting, we communicate empathy and perspective-taking. Then, within the boundaries of our context, we respond.

Over a decade ago, a shift in our economy that impacted workplace communication prompted Miller (2007) to research compassionate communication. Though the economy has continued on the path that Miller introduced (i.e., less manufacturing and more service), we have a new shift in many areas including organizational demographics, political climate, perceived social justice, and a pandemic. My children attend a private school, and I teach at a public state institution; both are consumer-driven. With it comes a desire to please the parent and/or student in a way that is consumer- rather than learner-focused. All of these macro influences create a new take on "emotional work." Miller (2007) wrote, "emotional work springs from the job, not from relationships with coworkers or roles outside the organization" (p. 225). Yet, there is little to no training doing emotional work. Burnout is less likely to occur when there is high empathic concern and low emotional contagion. It is then that the organizational member, teacher, parent, or administrator can communicatively respond to the need.

Teaching under normal circumstances is emotional work. Communication anxiety was managed when "our professor has put together what I call an action plan of moving forward which has helped a lot with stress" (student's quote). Professors' level of engagement was noticed by students, "One responded well, while the other hardly responded at all." Life is a constant struggle of moving from worry to trust.

Students worry about class, worry about graduation, worry about finding employment, and others worry about staying employed. One student stated,

> I'm honestly a little overwhelmed with school right now . . . my teachers have exceeded my expectations on how they would be during online school . . . I would say all of my teachers have done a great job . . . I always get an answer back from my teachers when I have questions.

This statement from a student's journal indicates concern, compassion, and clarity. Empathic concern is feeling for the student, and emotional contagion is feeling with them (Miller, 2007). Understanding effective communication pedagogical choices in the midst of a global pandemic requires innovation. Exploring communication pedagogy through a traditional lens to bring understanding to a nontraditional experience is inadequate.

Research published in the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy* illustrates it is open to broadening the scope in ways that include innovative methodologies that meet a changing and challenging time in the traditional and nontraditional area of communication pedagogy (Arnett, 2020). A new exploration of power in the classroom during a pandemic (or social change) command a methodological revolution and an extension of Arnett's autoethnographic insight.

I found myself fully immersed in the organizational and instructional communication spheres of health care, government, institutions, and classrooms. Research in communication pedagogy will serve our educational institutions; moreover, the organizations that now find themselves needing training to accommodate the learning curve of a heightened political and pandemic time period. We have the perfect blend of instructional and organizational communication scholarship and innovation necessary to teach how to communicate compassion and concern in myriad contexts.

I am not suggesting one lens is superior to another. Every paradigm has informed my own research epistemology. I am arguing that I have virtually zero influence to determine if my government works together, if businesses are functioning, and little more when it comes to my institution; however, we as scholars can work collaboratively to gather a rich understanding of the powerful and powerless in a pandemic/post-pandemic classroom and organization. Therefore, we create scholarship and best practices for the classroom, virtual classroom, and organizational training. One paradigm will not address all challenges discussed on this issue. Institutions of learning are fluid; therefore, a method developed to study a system that mirrors the cardiovascular system is insufficient (Daft, 1983). It is a rich and creative methodology that allows communication pedagogy to bloom outside the classroom. What methodology can tease out the experiences of all the stakeholders within a complex culture?

Pandemic and Pedagogy Is a Phenomenon

Phenomenology is a methodology that has historically allowed organizational social scientists to dissect the essence of an experience by making the implicit, explicit (Sanders, 1982, p. 354). If we want to know more about how to communicate compassionate concern in an evolving vulnerable context, phenomenology may be a logical place to begin. However, I argue that phenomenology alone isn't enough and that ethnonarrative, which includes discourse and context analysis, enhances its utility (Hansen, 2006). In ethnonarrative, researchers examine both the students' and/or educators' expressed narratives and the ethnographical context of organization because "words are only half the story"

(Hansen, 2006, p. 1072) when attempting to solve multilayered instructional challenges. I see dialectical challenges in my experiences during the pandemic. To unpack this phenomenon's tensions, the ethnonarrative takes into account the organizational/professional cultural assumptions of the research. Particular tensions adding to the phenomenon are technology and COVID-19.

To clarify, Brummans (2014) argues that nonhuman actors play a key role in interpretation. COVID-19 has created a vulnerable state where meaning is co-constructed by the organizational members, teachers, students, administration, macro-administration, employees, clients, and non-human actors (COVID-19 and ZOOM). Qualitative research is uniquely suited to embrace the unexpected. The ethnonarrative of the COVID-19 phenomenon examined through an interpretivist lens allows the act of researching to be communicative, thus, seeing the world in which we work and teach to inform our way of teaching and organizing.

If we want to know why people do what they do or what they are thinking, then we have to know the narrative construction (Hansen, 2006, 2011). "Where discourse studies would interrogate an organizational script, ethnonarrative seeks to see the play" (Hansen, 2006, p. 1063). When I read the mission and vision of *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, I was compelled to write this essay clarifying why and how JCP could be an ideal outlet for furthering communication pedagogy by using this innovative approach to examine the lived experiences of the educators and the educated. Many fields use qualitative methods to solve organizational problems (e.g., public relations, religious leaders, investigators, insurance adjustors, attorneys, and the military) (Gailliard & Davis, 2017). There is a prime place for doing so in instructional communication research, as well.

Conclusion

On April 4, 2020, a student wrote, "my professors are also trying to kill me this week" and a few days later (April 8, 2020) claimed, "[m]y professors must have heard all my tears and boo-hoos because a few of my due dates were extended for projects." While the student may be correct, as a professing parent myself, I believe it is more likely that the professors were weak and weary from their own exhausted "boo-hoos" and extended the deadline. The student did not fully comprehend that power had shifted and teachers were also feeling vulnerable in a way we had never felt before. Stories do not discriminate as they identify organizational goals, heroes, and shared messages (Kent, 2015). The stories also clearly reveal the exposure of classroom and organizational power. Russell's (2018) storytelling approach addresses a classroom need she observed regarding various social problems. I argue the same observation can be applied to our research needs. I challenge us to innovatively and compassionately research in order to tackle the concern of communicating vulnerability. In sum, this reflection bares a compassionate ethnonarrative approach that will produce rich findings from all the stakeholders. Furthermore, emotional work requires communicating empathy with concern. The appropriateness of this message looks different in first grade, sixth grade, 12th grade, college, health care, and the courtroom warranting a contextually bounded method. When power shifts as illustrated here, an emotional contagion is on the brink. If we do not fine-tune the power dynamics and appropriate empathy/concern, mental health challenges and burnout are possible. Thus, this professing parent closes with the argument that this approach will complete the circle of compassionate communication pedagogy from child to adult learner and from parent to professor.

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