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Using Assessment to Improve Teacher Efficacy in the Actualization of Student Outcomes: An Instrumental Case Study Approach

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The student co-authors participated in this project as part of the requirements for Research Methods in Communication. They worked tirelessly in observation, collection of data, analysis of data, review of literature, and writing. All of the students graduated as majors or minors in the field of Communication Studies.

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Using Assessment to Improve Teacher Efficacy in the Actualization of Student Outcomes: An Instrumental Case Study Approach

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The present study was designed to explore the relationship between perceived teaching style (PTS) and student outcomes in the classroom at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. A case study method was used to explore the relationship between PTS and learning outcomes. Quantitative data in the form of both survey assessment and posttest measures provided information about student outcomes; this information was coupled with a phenomenological inquiry process that was used to explicate PTS. The data suggests that student perceptions regarding “care” significantly relate with affective, behavioral, and cognitive outcomes; these findings fill a gap in the literature on the topic of face support, care, and empathy as it relates with student learning outcomes. Extrapolating these findings beyond the small Midwestern liberal arts college must be done with caution, and while the authors are certainly aware of this exigency, the feedback provided was used as part of an assessment cycle to guide the development of new faculty.

Key Words: Communication apprehension, teaching style, outcomes, case study

A study released by the Pew Research Center affirms the popularly perceived importance of communication ability, arguing these skills are more valued than “reading, math, teamwork, writing and logic” (Goo, 2015, p. 4). Facilitating the development of communication skill is a daunting prospect; particularly in light of the fact that the fear of speaking remains the top phobia for Americans (Tully, 2015). Fear (a.k.a. affect or emotion) might stand in the way of important gains for many individuals. If we can find a way to reduce apprehension toward communication skill acquisition in the classroom, the benefit is indisputable.

Most fear is developed over the course of a lifetime and often as a result of critical
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events. Counteracting an existence grounded in trepidation, while difficult, is not insurmountable. Cognitive restructuring, systematic desensitization, and visualization are all established techniques that a speaker can use to lower apprehension. However, few would refute the significant impact that support from a teacher may have on the negotiation of glossophobia (a.k.a.: communication apprehension).

The present study was designed to explore the relationship between perceived teaching style and student outcomes (particularly student affective learning) in the classroom at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. It has been argued that perceived teaching style can positively or negatively impact affective learning, which can influence behavioral commitment, internalization of ideas, and performance (Catt, Miller, & Schallenkamp, 2007; Chory & McCroskey, 1999; Frisby, Berger, Burchett, Herovic, & Strawser, 2014; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Kearney, 1994; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964; Sidelinger, Nyeste, Madlock, Pollak, & Wilkinson, 2015), yet there is much we do not know regarding face support, care, and empathy as it relates with student learning outcomes. As an instrumental case study, our research project was grounded in an inductive interpretive standpoint. It should be noted that as an inductive research project, an apriori framework was unnecessary—instead, the results were integrated within existing research at the conclusion of this project. The study is the culmination of several steps: 1) on the first day of a standardized hybrid entry-level course, students completed a pretest for affect (PRCA-24); 2) at the completion of the course, students were scored on affective, cognitive, and behavioral measures; 3) the data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential analysis; 4) following analysis of the data, a phenomenological method was used to arrive at an understanding of perceived teaching style (PTS) for the professors included in this project; 5) the results of this study were used as part of an assessment cycle and in the development of faculty. Teaching at a small liberal arts institution can be a significantly challenging experience for anyone making the transition from a large public institution; our study may provide a useful case for both a department and individual faculty.

The Small College Classroom and Assessment

Assessment, at any level, is at the heart of every educational process. The need for clear assessment practices is a serious issue for higher education and one that merits additional attention. As Cooper and Sietman (2016, p. 2) point out, “a lack of empirical evidence, confusion regarding the assessment process itself, and emphasis on teachers rather than student outcomes—suggest a need to assess the short-term gains as well as long-term effects of the basic communication course.” While the Higher Learning Commission (2017) has established standard expectations for the process of accreditation in higher education, it can be a challenge to translate these at the departmental level. The department that constitutes the “case” in this study uses a process that is consistent with Higher Learning Commission (HLC) best practices; specifically,
the cycle of assessment includes the stages of orientation, facilitation, measurement, and feedback/reorientation. This model is consistent with Tucker’s (1994) recommendation for a process that includes instructional objectives, instructional procedures, performance assessment, and a feedback loop (Tucker, 1994, pp. 113-115). Although these stages seem to logically work in every academic proscenium, the application of these assessment procedures can differ between departments—particularly if the department is housed within a small college.

The college classroom, whether situated in a small college or large university, is an organization (Richmond & McCroskey, 1992). Students and teachers work toward a common goal and the learning process occurs in a structured environment. Although each space is unique, often the identity of the classroom reflects and is reified by the mission of a department or (in the case of a small college) the institution. Additionally, each classroom may reflect the personalities of those who participate in the structuration of culture.

While there are many similarities between large universities and small colleges, the differences between these two learning environments are noteworthy. Much has been written about the student-centered orientation of the small college (with an emphasis on one-to-one interaction), so in the interest of brevity (and topicality) we will not dwell on these issues (e.g. Pascarella, Wang, Trolian, & Blaich, 2013). Unfortunately, compared to larger universities, less is known about the small college environment, particularly with regard to communication curriculum. McGee & Socha McGee contend that small undergraduate-centered colleges “have received much less attention in these narratives” (2006, p. 36). Although there are examples of research projects that include “small, private liberal arts colleges” in the research of communication processes, these studies “may mask features of small-college communication programs that are unique” (McGee & Socha McGee, 2006. P. 37).

The small college classroom, indeed, is an environment that differs from many large school counterparts. It is commonly expected that such institutions will feature fewer students and a low student teacher ratio (McGee & Socha McGee, 2006). Swoger, Brainard, & Hoffman (2015) found an example that reflects the unique type of student-teacher interdependent relationship at the liberal arts college in their investigation of scholarly communication programs. With regard to the research process, small college faculty are “continually finding ways to involve students in their research and publishing endeavors” (Swoger, et al., 2015, p. 10). At a large university, research is often independent of students; at the small private liberal arts institution, research is often “in line with what can be expected at an undergraduate college that places teaching and learning as a top priority” (Swoger, et al., 2015, p. 10). As an example, our study features the work of seven undergraduate students who served as trained observers and agents in the development of invariant structural descriptions through a phenomenological process implemented within a case study method; these descriptions were used to characterize PTS in our results section.
The small college that constitutes the “case” or “bounded system” in the present study is typical of many small colleges across the United States. The literature disseminated in mailings or through the internet by the admissions staff for this small college provides context for our investigation. Students are told, explicitly, they will receive a type of care and attention unlike the large university experience. In an attempt to convince prospective students that the small college experience is significantly better than the educational opportunities of a large institution, several claims are made. For many students, the point of first exposure to this small college comes from the webpage. Front and center on the main page you will find several specific messages. This is a college that “takes you places,” “challenges you,” and “inspires greatness.” Several hyperlinks are available in the middle of the main page. One notable link brings the reader to a page that explains the idyllic role of each person at the institution. Students are told they are an important part of the history and tradition. Emphasis is placed on family, solidarity, and connection. Other hyperlinks expose the reader to the faculty members and staff who serve the student and the college. Service is a key point in this message. The college is touted as ensuring success through networking, outreach, teaching, advising and support services. Individual mentoring is showcased on these pages. One quotation reads, “from the moment you step on campus as a visitor, we start working for you.” Twice on the college website the student/faculty ratio is quoted as 12:1. The opportunity to work with faculty one-on-one is also considered a key aspect of campus life. From the start, this small college sets up the expectation of immediacy, connection, personalization, and care.

**Perceived Teaching Style**

When measuring the PTS of an instructor, it is important to keep in mind that self-report measures are often fallible. Every professor likely enters the classroom intending to actualize an academic version of the Hippocratic Oath, “Do no harm.” Few of us realize if the techniques we are using in the classroom might be counterproductive to the intended outcome for our classes. Surprisingly, few beginning professors receive formal classroom management skills training (Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, & Leutner, 2015). Therefore, while we could simply ask the professors involved in this study how they might characterize their teaching styles, our intent was to
ascertain the PTS from students in the classroom.\(^1\)

In this way, our study is premised on the notion that intent and effect are not necessarily equated. At the conclusion of this research project, we used a common qualitative technique known as “reflexivity” to ask the professorial participants for responses about their PTS. This technique is a well-known approach for judging the validity (or, better known in an inductive framework as credibility) of a research project. If, in fact, our professor participants were able to see themselves in the descriptions generated by the students who participated in their classes, it would validate the use of “perceived teaching style” as the best measure of the independent variable in this project.

**Teaching Style and Student Outcomes**

The outcomes that were delineated in our study were affective (how they feel about learning), behavioral (what they can achieve), and cognitive (what they know). Research suggests that the approach of a professor during classroom interaction has a significant impact on student outcomes (Frisby, et al., 2014; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). In a comprehensive review of literature over the past 25 years, Wubbles and Brekelmans (2005) point out several important findings. A summary of their meta-analysis suggests that an effective teacher makes use of specific nonverbal behaviors, spatial positions, proximity, rapport and ethos. Wentzel (2002), interested in examining the utility of parent socialization models for understanding teachers influence, found that control, maturity demands, democratic communication, and nurturance all play a significant role in student outcomes and academic performance. Most notably, high expectation, also known as maturity demand, was a consistent positive predictor of student goals and interests. Conversely, lack of nurturance was the most consistent negative predictor of academic performance. Micari & Pazoz (2012) found this is especially true in “highly challenging courses.” Few classes provide more challenge than one that explicitly expects students to confront communication apprehension. Similar to the work of Wentzel (2002), our research project attempted to expand on these findings by exploring the role that affect and rapport might play in the realization of student outcomes, most notably an increase or decrease in communication apprehension.

As recently as 2014, researchers have been calling for “heightened research pertaining to the best practices for assessment of…public speaking courses” (Hunter, Westwick, & Haleta, 2014, p. 124). Additionally, as Cooper & Sietman note, “since many factors can affect communication competency, multiple observations of student performances in diverse situations must be assessed” (2016, pp. 169-170). We are particularly interested in the impact that PTS has

\(^1\) Hagenauer & Volet (2014), in particular, assert that perception of teaching styles is multi-dimensional and context dependent, strengthening the rational for an inductive and emergent approach toward the understanding of teaching style.
on learning outcomes (cognitive and behavioral) and the reduction of communication anxiety (affect). This research is significant because communication apprehension has been found to negatively correlate with a number of skills and attributes that particularly impact college students, including (but not limited to) leadership, first-year adjustment, appreciation for diversity, foreign language use, interpersonal attraction, learning, and adaptability to new situations (Blume, Baldwin, & Ryan, 2013; Hirai, Frazier, & Syed, 2015; Guntzviller, Yale, & Jensen, 2016; McCroskey, Teven, Minielli, & Richmond McCroskey, 2014).

Conversely, reducing apprehension is beneficial for students. For example, Ledbetter & Finn (2013) learned that reduced apprehension was a predictor of learner empowerment. While it is well known that exposure therapy, cognitive modification, inoculation messages, and skills training all work to reduce public speaking apprehension (Hunter, et al., 2014; Jackson, Compton, Thornton, & Dimmock, 2017), several researchers have noted that additional investigation is needed to determine how instructor face support, care, and empathy relates with a host of other student, classroom, and learning outcomes (Frisby et al., 2014; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Although much has been written about communication apprehension, the use of management and negotiation techniques—particularly in the academic proscenium—merit additional research, largely due to the constantly evolving nature of communication practices in the postmodern world. Therefore, one primary research question guided this project: What relationship, if any, exists between the PTS of instructors and reduction of communication apprehension in the small college classroom?

Method

A case study method was used to explore the relationship between PTS and student outcomes, particularly affective learning. Creswell (1998, p. 61) points out that “a case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case over time through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information in rich context.” The case, or bounded system, was a small Midwestern liberal arts college; more specifically, classes in the communication department, making this a “within-site” study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Three different professors (all with equal academic background) facilitated the classes—they are identified as professors A, B, and C. One defining characteristic of case study is the collection of data through multiple sources. The current study used numerical data in the form of survey and posttest measures coupled with observations and descriptions provided by seven student co-researchers (using a phenomenological approach) to develop a qualitative typology of PTS. Patton (1990, p. 54) contends that case studies are “particularly useful” when the aim is to

The current study used numerical data in the form of survey and posttest measures coupled with observations and descriptions provided by seven student co-researchers (using a phenomenological approach) to develop a qualitative typology of PTS.
“capture individual differences” or “unique variations.” Creswell (1998, p. 62) would characterize the type of case study conducted for our assessment as “instrumental” because the case is used instrumentally to illustrate an issue—in this situation the relationship between PTS and student outcomes in affective, behavioral, and cognitive domain areas.

The first phase of the study relied upon numerical data to articulate the potential impact that PTS might have on student outcomes. The second phase of this study was phenomenological and involved trained undergraduate student-researchers using Wolcott’s (1994) process for the transformation of qualitative data to develop themes that reflect the various teaching styles evident from professors who were observed in this research project.

**Stage One: Student Outcomes Measured at the End of Semester**

Before we could explore the relationship (if any) that existed between the professor’s PTS and student outcomes, we needed to document the results for affective, cognitive, and behavioral measures in a standardized entry-level hybrid communication course at the end of the semester. We were particularly interested in exploring the affective domain as it relates with PTS. The second phase of this study more clearly elucidates the various teaching styles represented in this study (as perceived by the co-researchers), as well as the potential connection to student outcomes.

**Sample:** The case study began with the collection of data from first-year undergraduate students (n = 164) who were required to enroll in a communication studies course during the first year in college. Due to the voluntary nature of participation, the actual sample size varied during each phase of this stage and is reflected within the data summary tables.

**Measurement:** A pretest and posttest design was used to ascertain the amount of reduction in communication apprehension for participants during the semester of study. Based on the work of McCroskey (1982), communication apprehension was assessed using the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (a.k.a PRCA-24) in four domains: group, meeting, interpersonal, and public speaking. Participating students enrolled in the basic course with one of three primary professors. The result of change in the affective measure can be found in table 1.

Simultaneously, students were assessed behaviorally on their ability to present a fundamentally solid speech via a posttest design. This type of assessment is consistent with Rhodes (2009) and actualizes policies developed by the American Association of Colleges and Universities. The exemplary speech was coded and met conditions in four major areas: Content, composition, verbal delivery, and nonverbal delivery. These four areas are also aligned with the NCA Competent Speaker Evaluation Form (Morreale, Moore, Surges-Tatum, & Webster, 2007). More specifically, the exemplary speech would demonstrate a student’s ability to meet the

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2 An institutional requirement.
following criteria: Defend a thesis and explicate the topic thoroughly; provide content that is valid & linked to the topic; use supporting materials that are sufficient and credible; cite source material accurately; sources are easily verified; create an introduction that captures attention; give a thesis that states the topic and purpose; convey the significance of the topic; communicate main points that are previewed and follow a logical pattern/order; use an ending that provides summary and closure; utilize transitions that illustrate how ideas connect; projection/volume/rate convey confidence, speaker is easily heard; tone & pitch suggest enthusiasm; presentation is extemporaneous (neither read nor impromptu); language is accurate, precise, varied and engaging; almost no disfluencies used (verbal/vocal fillers [e.g. “um,” “uh”]); movement and gesture has clear purpose; speaker is competent and confident; eye contact is maintained and creates rapport with listener; notes are limited and provide no distraction; and dress is appropriate & professional.

Like the affective measure, results for posttest comparison were organized by class section and professor (A, B, & C); these results are displayed in table 2. Unlike the affective measure, behavioral results are descriptive and represent class averages. The behavioral data was collected in a standardized basic speech class and each professor has been trained to facilitate the class in a uniform manner. Recorded speeches were coded by the instructor of each class and checked for reliability by an independent external reviewer; interclass correlation indicated strong agreement between coders ($r = .93$).

A cognitive instrument was used to assess what students learned during their time in the class. The cognitive measure is a summative test developed in-house and has been used to determine knowledge gained and retained at the completion of the course. Once again a posttest design was used to analyze the data. All outcomes are organized by class section/professor (a.k.a. A, B, & C) and can be seen below in table 3.

**Results:** The within-site case study reveals that student learning was similar in behavioral and cognitive domains but distinct with regard to affect. Without using a pretest and posttest design to determine the amount of change in our sample, the results in cognitive and behavioral measures were compared using descriptive statistics. The most salient measure for our institutional assessment was affect; and the three sections varied significantly with regard to change in this area.

Results in the affective domain were analyzed using a $t$-test and suggest that students in sections taught by professor “A” did not significantly reduce apprehension for speaking assignments. Conversely, students who were in sections taught by professors “B” and “C” did evidence a significant decline in apprehension toward speaking. Table 1 displays these results.

Descriptive statistics suggest a similar trend with regard to the behavioral domain. Students in section A were outperformed by their peers in sections B and C. As previously noted,
the exemplary speech was coded and met conditions in four major areas: Content, composition, verbal delivery, and nonverbal delivery. Descriptive results are displayed below in the table 2.

Finally, a cognitive instrument was used to assess what students learned during their time in the class and posttest data was used to make comparisons. The descriptive statistics are organized by class section in table 3 below. Data collected during stage one of this within-site instrumental case study suggests that student outcomes were distinct by section.

**Stage Two: Perceived Teaching Style of Professors**

As previously mentioned, the second part of this study involved a determination of teaching style as a result of qualitative student observation measures. Generally speaking, the trained student-researchers used an approach that was phenomenological in nature (and grounded in the work of Wolcott, 1994). If phenomenology is the study of essences, the second stage in this project was intended to inquire about “the very nature of a phenomenon” or “for that which makes a some-‘thing’ what it is” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 10). The world does not exist separate from society. We, as members of a society, speak the world, and the world, in turn, speaks us—a process known as co-constitution. Communicating about experience with the world allows the phenomenologist to uncover the essential structure of experience through reflection. As Moustakas (1994) states, phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomenon just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness (p. 49). It is through communication that we reveal appearances and experiences to the phenomenologist. As a methodology, phenomenology is centrally concerned with how a pre-reflective lived experience emerges through the reflective communication of those who have lived and/or are living and experience. Given that communication is central to the process of phenomenology as both a philosophical movement and a methodology, discourse notes and observations of behaviors were used to elicit the meanings of the pre-reflective lived world experience for the trained student-researchers.

The following steps were used in the procedure of data collection for this phenomenological investigation. First, human subject consent was required. Second, the student-researchers were immersed in the classroom. Finally, data was analyzed from a phenomenological perspective. The analysis of data was consistent with the work of Carter (1985), Colaizzi (1966), Ihde (1977), Merleau-Ponte (1974), Moustakas (1994), Pilotta & Mickunas (1990) and included the following four steps: epoché, description, reduction, and interpretation.
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**Epoché:** Prior to entering the classroom, the student co-researchers were required to undergo the epoché process. Epoché is a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain. During the epoché process, the researcher becomes alert to presupposition; the epoché is a warning to be alert, to look with care, to see what is really there, and to stay away from everyday habits of knowing things. It is during the epoché process that we set aside our pre judgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). As beings within the world, we learn to hold certain beliefs or attitudes about what is and is not true regarding phenomenon. Prior to beginning a phenomenological study, the researcher already has an intuitive grasp of the phenomenon (Spiegelberg 1984). The *bracketing* of this attitude is a first step in phenomenological inquiry (Pilotta and Mickunas, 1990). During the bracketing stage, the students were asked to provide all possible explanations for the difference in student outcomes between professors A, B, and C. These observations served as a credibility check at the end of the investigation.

**Description:** After observing and taking notes from the classroom, the student-researchers initiated the second stage of data analysis known as description. Description involves classifying and naming perceptions that constitute the phenomena (Spiegelberg, 1984). As Colaizzi, (1966, p. 25) notes, “the typical phenomenal study investigates its content by proceeding in an empirical way: it gathers descriptions provided by a plurality of subjects. Such descriptions can be conveyed according to any of several empirical modalities.” Using Krippendorf’s (1980) typology, students generated 1,101 syntactical units for their descriptions. In this study, interviews were used to collect descriptions. Description includes the basic stages of horizonalization and identification of invariant themes (Moustakas, 1994). Following the collection of data, all meaning units were considered equally important, in accordance with Moustakas notion of horizonalizing (1994, p. 122). Through horizonalization, the researcher is “perceptive to every statement of the co-researchers experience, granting each comment equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Granting each statement equal emphasis requires a suspension of belief that is again achieved through the epoché (Ihde, 1977). As Cooks and Descutner (1994, p. 254) explain, description at this level requires that the researcher “intentionally seek to identify the widest number of thematic topics and thematic descriptions.” The second step of description involved selecting key words or phrases that encapsulated invariant themes or non-repetitive, non-overlapping constituent clusters (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). Ideally, the concepts developed in analysis grow naturally out of an interaction between the kinds of action noted in the field and the theoretical ideas with which the analyst began the study (Lindlof, 1995, p. 217).
Reduction: During the third stage of data analysis, phenomenological reduction, the phenomenologist relies on intuition and the participants own words to construct a composite description of the phenomena of experience. The descriptions are “integration, descriptively, of the invariant constituents and themes” for the participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 180). Cooks and Descutner, (1994, p. 255) explain that reduction is the process in which the researcher attempts to “extract from…discourse the words and phrases that function as existential signifiers.” These words and phrases are generated through the process of imaginative variation. During imaginative variation, the task of the phenomenologist is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of references, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). As Carter (1985, p. 62) notes, imaginative variation involves a “systematic addition and omission of the parts of the phenomenological description to discover the essential structure” of the phenomena of experience. During the phenomenological reduction, the phenomenologist relies upon eidetic intuiting to classify individual experiences as instances of more general phenomena (Spiegelberg, 1984). Lindlof (1995, p. 217) contends that, although making detailed descriptions of discourse is a goal of any qualitative project, most analysts also enter into research with the intent of understanding the “coherence of meaning” in the case under study. During phenomenological inquiry, this understanding occurs at the point of reduction. At the conclusion of this step, the invariant descriptions provided by the trained student co-researchers resulted in 355 syntactical units.

Interpretation: The final step of data analysis in this phenomenological study was interpretation. According to Cooks and Descutner (1994 p. 255), interpretation, sometimes called the hermeneutic step, involves two stages: 1) review the phrases derived from the reduction step, and 2) identify the statements in discourse that effectively renders explicit the meaning that formerly was implicit in the discourse. Additionally, interpretation involves investigating how the experience relates with the broader cultural milieu and themes. During the interpretation stage, the phenomenologist considers the interplay between the composite description obtained through horizontalization, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation with the cultural milieu and contextual themes found during the study. The end result of phenomenological inquiry is the production of a description that captures the essential structures of experience, in this case, the essential structure of perceived teaching for the professors witnessed during this study. In simplest terms, the participants observed teachers in the classroom over the course of a semester and developed an essential invariant structure of description (i.e. perception) for the teaching style of each professor.

Sample: Participants ($n = 7$) for the qualitative phase of the study were drawn from an undergraduate research methods class at a small Midwestern liberal arts college. Each participant logged more than 45 hours of observation and recorded their impressions regarding the teaching behaviors of three professors with earned doctorate degrees in their respective content area. The
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professors were approached by the lead researcher and invited to participate in this study. Participation was voluntary on the part of both the student co-researchers and professors. Informed consent was provided and is on file with the Committee for Human Subjects Research at this institution.

**Measurement:** Student-researchers were trained by the lead researcher in the collection of qualitative data. Field notes were used to record teaching experiences. Consistent with a phenomenological approach in data transformation (e.g. Wolcott, 1994), the data was used to arrive at “description” through the process of “horizonalization” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). After arriving at a description that characterized the classroom environment for each professor, student-researchers identified variant and invariant structures of the experience. Working at first in teams of three, the student-researchers ultimately arrived at consensus through a constant comparative process for the final essential invariant structural experience of teaching styles discerned through the qualitative portion of this study.

**Results:** The student-research teams were able to comfortably arrive at an invariant structural representation (or essential structure) of teaching style for all three professors in this study. These three professors were studied for perceived teaching style and subsequently described, themed, and identified through an essential structural representation. Generally speaking, this invariant structural representation is characterized by a dialectical contradiction that has been identified in other studies. Ultimately, using a single word to summarize the invariant representations, all of the student-researchers noted that the professors differed perceptually in a phenomenological construct labeled as, “care” or “caring.”

Unlike research grounded in an apriori framework, the research team arrived at the essential invariant structure through an inductive emergent process—this approach has been encouraged by other researchers (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014, p. 373). The construct identified by the research team as the “essential structure of a professors teaching style” resonates with previous research in the area (Frisby et al., 2014; Goldman & Goodboy, 2014; Wentzel, 2002); synonyms for the invariant representation include confirmation, affirmation, support, and immediacy. Specifically, the perception of nurturance positively associated with desirable student outcomes and lack of nurturance (at least in perception) negatively associated with student success. Admittedly, the amount of difference is slight (yet significant with regard to the reduction of communication apprehension). Below are the final invariant structural descriptions for each teacher as developed by the student-researcher team.

**Professor A:** “Professor A is incredibly knowledgeable. Professor A seems very well-prepared for each class. Unfortunately, Professor A is often difficult to understand, not good at compromise, seems distant, not able to distinguish between real life and academic paradigms.”

The most important finding with regard to the perceived teaching style of “Professor A,” as described by the research team, was that this professor “seemed incredibly disconnected from
Professor B: “Professor B is very organized and always clear about the direction of class. Professor B is tremendously passionate and enthusiastic, really good at engaging students.” Professor B was also perceived as, “perhaps a bit overwhelming for some students. Not a pushover. Very high expectations.” In the final summation, the invariant description provided by the trained student co-researchers notes, “Professor B is a father-like figure. Very caring and sympathetic.”

Professor C: “Professor C establishes a warm classroom environment. Professor C has a motherly approach to teaching. Anything a student says will somehow fit into the class. No one feels embarrassed as a result of participation.” In the final invariant descriptions, the co-researchers wrote, “Although warm and motherly she does demand the attention and effort of her students.”

The invariant structural descriptions for these professors suggested that a parental approach and embodiment of nurturance yielded positive results in student outcomes; particularly with regard to communication apprehension.

**Discussion**

This study is a cornerstone of the assessment process for our department. As noted earlier, the stages of assessment for our team consist of orientation, measurement, feedback, and reinforcement. Following the collection and analysis of data, our department collectively interpreted the findings in order to make a determination regarding teaching efficacy. As implied by the previously listed stages of assessment, the feedback obtained through this study initiated a new cycle of mindful engagement and a “re-orientation” phase. Every professor represented within the “case” has used these findings to mindfully evaluate their pedagogical practices.

It is clear from the results that students in this study believe that an important relationship exists between PTS and empirical outcomes on the cognitive, behavioral, and affective levels. Most notably, professors who were perceived as caring witnessed improved student outcomes in three domains. One obvious implication should be taken from the revealed construct of caring — parental pedagogy is a proverbial double-edged sword.

In this specific case, an obvious advantage of a parental perceived teaching style is the significantly higher outcomes that were associated with the sample. It seems possible that students performed well as a result of perceived parental attributes. Nurturing, supporting, understanding and forgiving were all terms mentioned as syntactical units when descriptions of professors B and C were provided. A follow-
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up to this study should use touchpoint method, grounded in phenomenology, to better understand the explanation of care from a student-centered perspective. Kuis & Goossensen (2017) provide an overview of touchpoint, explaining that touchpoints represent the key moments in the experience of receiving care. In education, a touchpoint approach could be used by investigating the incidents when a student recalls being impressed emotionally or cognitively.

Unfortunately, more research is required to determine the long term drawbacks of a perceived parental teaching style. While there are seemingly short-term benefits for students who completed a course with the parental and caring perceived teaching style, these benefits may come at a long-term cost. As Thompson and Robinson (2013, p. 38) point out:

To date, a majority of extant educational and instructional research has primarily focused on the importance of the teacher in instructional environments. Although the teacher is an important aspect of the teaching learning process, the emphasis on instructor ability and responsibility in empirical research has diminished the perceived role that students have in educational contexts whereby creating an imbalanced learning equation that ignores student responsibility for their personal, affective and cognitive development.

In other words, a parental style may help students achieve instrumental outcomes (cognitive, behavioral, affective), but these gains may wane once the student has left this environment. This, in fact, reinforces the need for instructors to facilitate self-efficacy as a long-term mindset in life-long learning—an extremely important objective for any program wishing to fulfil the NCA recommended learning outcomes in communication (LOC).

Although the information discovered through this instrumental case study is inherently useful, the results were most fruitful in providing feedback for the professors included within this study (and the development of their teaching techniques). Our goal, as implied by the title of this article, was to facilitate the development of teacher efficacy in the reduction of student communication apprehension and cognitive/behavioral outcomes. Professor “A” gleaned the most from the results of this project. Using the data collected for this project, the department was able to engage in a mentoring protocol through the department chair with the intent of improved instruction as indicated by student outcomes. The resulting plan HELPED Professor A navigate the promotion process; one that explicitly places teaching effectiveness at the heart of faculty retention.

While the findings from the present study are useful for our department and faculty members, this approach could also prove fruitful for other departments. Assessment is often lamented if not resented by those who are not fully engaged and/or committed to the process (Hunter, et al., 2014). Our results provide useful information that will help faculty members identify perceived deficiencies in face support, care, and empathy. Hopefully, this information can be used to improve student and teacher facilitation. This process, in turn, will provide useful tools to make determinations in both the tenure and promotion proceedings at other institutions.
The findings of this study can also begin to address areas considered vital to the function of higher education (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014, p. 371), including the effect of teacher-student relationships in retention, instructor affect, and quality of teaching.

Extrapolating our findings beyond a small Midwestern college must be done with caution. Teaching at a small college, as noted previously, may present a fair amount of challenges. If a student is courted by an institution with promises about small classes, personal connection, and one-on-one interaction, it is logical to assume that expectations might predispose students to expect a caring interaction between pupil and professor. If the professor is perceived as not teaching in accord with these expectations, their feedback about instruction might be skewed. While we are certainly aware of this exigency, the feedback provided by students allowed us to make informed decisions about our teaching in the future. Therefore, the process, more so than the product, can provide a strong foundation for both assessment and future decisions with regard to pedagogy.

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3 The tools in this study have also been used to assess co-curricular programs (see: Grace, K. & McDonald, A. [2017]. Assessment through Video and Excel: Building a Case for Outcomes and Work Ethic. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Communication Association, Philadelphia, PA.).
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