

**VOLUME 45**

**2022**



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**GENERAL INTEREST**

*An Ethical Revelation of the American Revolution: An Analysis of Communication Ethics and Hypertextuality in the Musical Hamilton*

*Communication Apprehension in High School Students with Professional Practices As Your Writing and Reading Teacher*

*The Evolution of Antiracist Pedagogical Work: Pushing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to Undermine Oppressive Structures in Our Communication Classrooms*

*Request Strategies Used by English Language Learners: Student-Professor Email Communication*

**OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCE (OER) TEXTBOOK REVIEWS**

*Review of Arguing using critical thinking*

*Review of Communication in the real world*

*Review of Exploring public speaking*

*Review of Humans r social media*

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*Review of Small group communication: Forming and sustaining teams*

*Review of Theatrical Worlds*

*Review of Writing like a PR pro: Why writing is still crucial in a digital and visual world*

**COMMUNICATION AND THEATER ASSOCIATION  
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## CTAM JOURNAL MISSION STATEMENT

The *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal (CTAMJ)* is the scholarly journal of the Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota (CTAM). The journal is an outlet for articles related to issues of discipline-related importance including articles discussing innovative teaching methods. All theoretical and methodological approaches are welcome.

*CTAMJ* encourages contributions from scholars and practitioners, who comprise all segments of the journal's readership, including K-12 educators, graduate school, community college, and college or university groups. The journal welcomes theoretical and applied articles from both the theater and communication disciplines. Capable scholars in the appropriate field will blindly review all general manuscripts.

No work will be accepted or rejected purely on the basis of its methodology or subject. Author sex, race, ethnic background, geographical location, or work affiliation (secondary/college level, department, etc.) of the author(s) are never considered in making editorial judgments. The demands of the disciplines of speech communication and theater are key factors in the editorial judgments made. All editorial decisions attempt to balance these demands with the needs and interests of the journal's readers.

The journal is guided by three key principles:

- *To provide an outlet for the expression of diverse ideas.*
- *To publish high-quality scholarship in the disciplines of Speech Communication and Theater.*
- *To meet the journal-related needs of CTAM and its members.*

## EDITORIAL POLICY

Authors should submit an electronic copy of their work as a Word document by e-mail to the editor. A separate, electronic title page should include a 100-125 word abstract of the article, author's name and professional title, job title, the school or institutional affiliation of the author/s, a mailing address, and an e-mail address. Care should be taken that author identification has been removed from the manuscript itself for review purposes. **All manuscripts should be prepared according to current APA or MLA guidelines.**

All articles are read anonymously by at least two associate editors. All author identification markings are removed from the articles and no editor reads the work of a colleague. Associate editors may submit articles to the journal, but their work must go through the process of blind review, just as any other submitter. The journal editor facilitates the process and makes final decisions based on the associate editors' recommendations and comments. If there are any questions about the process, please direct them to the journal editor.

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## FROM THE EDITOR

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When I applied to be the editor of the CTAM Journal, I wanted to build on the value of our state journal for early-career academics. State journals are an inclusive place for all sorts of publications; they have served as a steppingstone into the world of academic publishing for me and many other authors. The contents of our state journal are also a valuable place for readers at all levels in their careers to stay on top of the communication and theater work being done in Minnesota. I appreciate the work of our authors to edit and refine their articles to create a strong set of publications to represent the field.

My passion for early-career academics comes from my experience growing up in a working-class family. I never imagined myself in the world of academia growing up. My dad spent over forty years doing maintenance in a plastic factory, and my mom spent most of her life working as a lunch lady (and sometimes working a second job at night). My parents worked hard to provide a comfortable life for my siblings and me. The only piece of education advice my dad provided me was to go to college, so I did not have to work as hard as he did.

I wound up in the field of communication studies because those were the classes I liked the most during my first semesters in college. I fondly remember Aimee DuBois' interpersonal communication class at Normandale Community College where I took classes as a PSEO student. When I graduated and transferred to St. Cloud State University, I was most engaged in Dr. Diana Rehling's introduction to communication class. I did not know what I wanted to major in, so I went with the classes where I felt at home. As an introvert, I thought communication was an odd choice, but the classes were practical and enjoyable. I knew I was where I needed to be.

As I continued my journey into graduate school, I continued to be reaffirmed that I was taking my career in the right direction. Dr. Kristi Treinen was a great mentor overseeing the teaching assistants at Minnesota State University, Mankato where I built my passion for teaching. To transition from a blue-collar family into a white-collar profession took significant support from many faculty members across multiple institutions. Not everyone is as lucky as I am to receive support every step along the way.

I want the CTAM Journal to be a place where others can feel affirmed regarding their place in academia as well. Academia can be a challenging place, especially for first-generation college students like myself. I regularly follow the hashtag #AcademicChatter on Twitter where many graduate students and early-career faculty vent about the difficulties in finding a place in the academic world. While our state journal may be small, I want everyone to know they are welcome in this corner of academia.

I want to thank our associate editors for their kind and detailed feedback to our authors to help the articles move toward publication. Even if we are an inclusive place, we still want to ensure we are producing a high-quality journal for others to enjoy. We have four general interest articles and eight open-education resource (OER) textbook reviews. As the editor, I appreciated the opportunity to see these articles be revised and improved into their current respective states.

The OER textbook reviews served as a great way to get new authors an easy publication while providing value to the many educators who read our journal and may be interested in adopting free textbooks for their students. As a student, I remember shopping for textbooks one or two editions out of date to make them affordable for me. By promoting OER textbooks in this forum, I hope more educators will give their students equal access to education by using the high-quality OER textbooks available in the field.

Thank you again to our authors and associate editors for creating a high-quality journal that can be enjoyed by many people in our field. As readers, I hope you enjoy the final product for this year's journal. As we intend to be an inclusive place for all authors, I hope you consider submitting an article to future issues.

Take care and enjoy the journal,  
Bradley

Bradley Wolfe, Ed.D.  
Editor, *Communication & Theater Association of Minnesota Journal*  
Communication Faculty, Ridgewater College

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## GENERAL INTEREST ARTICLES

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### **An Ethical Revelation of the American Revolution: An Analysis of Communication Ethics and Hypertextuality in the Musical Hamilton**

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#### **Abstract**

*Since debuting in 2016, Hamilton has generated much scholarship on such topics as race relations and public memory. However, this article uses concepts of communication ethics and hypertextuality to situate the retelling of America's past for America's present. Connecting Hamilton to communication ethics proves paramount because it helps to situate the moral ground under which the characters stand, thereby serving as the epicenter for the show's ultimate message. Viewers are brought into a hypertextual world of two historical moments, America 'then' and America 'now,' and consider the juxtaposition of past and current ideas, tradition, culture and narrative commitments that all result in an ethical climax as the main character, Alexander Hamilton champion's an ethic of, "I am my brother's keeper."*

In August 2016, Lin-Manuel Miranda's musical *Hamilton* opened at the Richard Rodgers Theater on Broadway. Miranda's musical tells the story of one of America's least-recognized founding fathers as a telling of America then by a cast of minority actors representing today's America. *Hamilton* tells the story of the first United States Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, a founding father who is often forgotten. The musical provides a retelling of his life and intertwines his relationships with academic and political colleagues, fellow soldiers, lovers, and family. The majority of *Hamilton*'s storyline is propagated by historical facts, but Miranda did take artistic liberties in order to make the musical more entertaining. For example, Hamilton

met his friends and adversaries at different times throughout his life than depicted in the show and was not as needlessly violent as sometimes depicted. For example, there is no historical record of Hamilton ever punching staff at King's College. Furthermore, such details as Burr asking Washington for a leadership position in the Army is also not grounded in historical proof, but such incidents help Miranda to develop the ideological tendencies of each character, as is typical in historical fiction.

While much scholarship has been generated on the popular musical since its debut, missing from scholarly analysis is how the musical uses concepts of communication ethics and hypertextuality to situate the retelling of America's past for America's present. Connecting *Hamilton* to communication ethics proves paramount because it helps to situate the moral ground under which the characters stand, thereby serving as the epicenter for the show's ultimate message. Audience members are taken on a rhetorical turn as they become aware of the characters' ideas, tradition, culture, and narrative commitments.

Viewers are simultaneously brought into a hypertextual world of two historical moments, America 'then' and America 'now,' and are challenged to consider the juxtaposition of past and current ideas, tradition, culture and narrative commitments that all result in an ethical climax as the main character, Alexander Hamilton champion's a Levinasian ethic of, "I am my brother's keeper." Examining *Hamilton* through this lens serves as the ideal exemplar of hypertextuality and communication ethics that is desperately needed in present day so we as a society can better understand why and how we are still embedded in an ongoing racial divide and why political tensions continue to rise up.

As Americans becomes increasingly divided, *Hamilton* reminds us that our legacy, our story, is ever present and we must remember the Other, or our fellow Americans across all



environments, as we navigate our future. Amidst social, political and economic strife in a postmodern era, the musical proves not only be a civics lesson, but also a valuable example of a communication ethic and hypertextuality that reminds audiences the importance of understanding the perspective of the other, working together to protect and promote a common good. Throughout the first act, violence, specifically through war, is depicted as a necessary means for achieving freedom. Ultimately, however, at the conclusion of the show, audience members are reminded that differing communicative ethics can be protected and promoted through a dialogue that recognizes the Other instead of resorting to violent acts that driven by individualism. Hypertextuality, or the interconnectedness of messages that influences interpretation, shifts “perception from a modern or hypermodern conception of the self to competing narrative grounds that fight for an opportunity to undergird the life of a communicative agent” (Arnett, 2018, p. 4). In other words, hypertextuality provides insight into the various ways a single common good can be interpreted. Since communication ethics often address multiple questions that exist in different eras but are co-present at a given temporal moment, this article will show how *Hamilton* presents a hypertextual story of the Founding Fathers that “raises a glass to freedom” (Miranda, 2020, 0:25) with characters rooted in a narrative ground that protects and promotes America’s past, present and future, through a common center of freedom, neutrality, and democracy.

However, to achieve a thorough analysis of Miranda’s work, one must first have a clear understanding of communication ethics and hypertextuality. Part of what makes *Hamilton* compelling is the way in which it tells a pivotal story in American history, but also highlights that the historical moment depicted is rooted in conflict, crisis, and to some extent, evil. I will enter this theoretical analysis from the lens of Hannah Arendt and Ronald C. Arnett whose

respective scholarly work discusses how individualism tied to communication ethics helps us to understand the danger when a community is unable to work together in order to protect and promote a common center. This theoretical analysis is then used to discuss how individuality, narrative ground, the banality of evil and ethical first principles are used in *Hamilton* to provide audiences with the ever-important notion that, in a neoliberal, postmodern world, we cannot forget the Other.

### **Communication Ethics and Hypertextuality**

According to Arnett (2018), the foremost assertion of a postmodern/hypertextual understanding of communication ethics is that there is no single “correct” communication ethics. “Communication ethics” can be understood as a term to describe what an individual group, society, or culture considers as good(s) worthy of protecting and promoting. Therefore, this definition implies that when an individual brings their communication ethics into a conversation, all participants must be tentative to these values in order for the conversation to be able to move toward potential dialogue. For it is at this place of dialogue where change can begin to occur.

Incorporating Arendtian theory into this analysis guides the understanding of communication ethics as portrayed in *Hamilton*. This understanding of the ethical framework is ultimately what leads audiences to remember their own call to the Other. Arendt (1958) aligns work with action as action is “the foremost mode of human relationship” (p. 41). Communication ethics understood from this perspective consists of practices, stories, narratives, and collective concurrence on the importance of a given good or multiple goods. Furthermore, power arises when individuals come together and unite through promises in order to act together (Arendt,

1960). Ultimately, power exists when individuals unite and act together in community, but vanishes once this community returns to individualism.

Arendt (1958) believed that a political institution cannot establish power through force, but rather it can gain power when people recognize the institution in the public realm. In addition to the public and private realms, there is a third category called the social where both the public and the private convene into a shared space (Arendt, 1958). In other words, the rise of the social is the process by which private needs, interests, and concerns assume public stature. A society existing in the social process is defined by a hierarchy in which an administration is a stabilizer and citizens who act together are laborers, consumers and taxpayers (Arendt, 1958). Society thrives amongst the masses, not individuals, thus generating a sense of conformity and uniformity.

### **The Communication Ethics of *Hamilton*: An American Musical**

To begin, it is important to recognize that the musical holistically functions as a hypertextual artifact in the sense that it tells the story of America's past through the lens of America today. This hypertextuality allows multiple perspectives of America's founding to coexist in one moment. Audiences experience a dramatic yet historically significant telling of the country's founding, but they are also invited to consider the notion of progress, or possibly lack thereof, by experiencing this historicity told through the America of today. This notion is personified through a cast comprised largely of minority actors and a score of Hip Hop music that pays tribute to a vibrant American culture that has notoriously fallen victim to prejudice even before the Battle of Yorktown occurred in 1781.

While critics have rejoiced over *Hamilton*'s hypertextual read of the founding of America and lauded the musical with a near record-breaking eleven Tony awards and Miranda with a

Pulitzer Prize for Drama (Schrader, 2019), several scholars have discussed the implications behind using a minority ensemble to portray a group of Caucasian people. Galella (2018) noted that viewing actors of a different skin color than that of the character they portray “gives the audience permission to think about achievements, not the fact that they’re slave owners” (p. 365). Herrera (2018) noted that this racially conscious casting tells a story bound by race, but acknowledges that Miranda explains in various interviews that he was unable to represent all aspects of history with a due diligence in a two hour and thirty-minute production. As a result, Miranda had to omit certain well-known aspects of the Founding Fathers’ stories such as the fact that they were all slave owners and also dramatize other elements to increase entertainment value. In other words, despite telling the story of America’s founding, Miranda (2020) finds ways to interject themes that were pertinent in the late 1700s, but does so in a way that is relevant to today’s postmodern society and spoke to the social disparities of 2015.

This hypertextual read of the musical contains several implications for the communicative ethic that drives the plot and individual character development. Communication ethics and culture are linked through material conditions and practices that shapes a person’s perception of the world, which encompass social, economic and symbolic capital and prompt a person to value certain elements over another. This perception-creating link helps to situate a person within a culture and also helps to shape the culture itself. While Arnett (2018) cautioned that this habitus can often be taken for granted, Miranda (2020) extrapolates this notion and makes it a focal point of primary character development. Hamilton is a “bastard, orphan. Dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean (0:20)”...who, even in his ascent to greatness is “penniless and flying by the seat of his pants” (2:32). Conversely, while Burr is an orphan, he was born into wealth and privilege and never had to overcome adversity to gain

access to the best education and social status. As America in present day stands in a clash of racial and social privilege, Burr's embedded narrative ground prompts him to function from a vantage point of privilege that calls forth the audience to understand the nation's history as well as this historical moment a little better in which the issue of race and social class is calling forth our attention to examine unreflective privilege. This unreflective privilege results in Burr's character being grounded in individualism and prevents him from establishing a community with a common center, which Arnett (2018) cautioned is the threat of individualism. Although Burr's character forms political allies to help him advance his power and agenda, his communicative ethic grounded in individualism posits him to "talk less and smile more" (Miranda, 2020, 1:04) Burr never used his beliefs to lead his community toward a common center; an action that would ultimately prevent him from advancing politically.

Each characters' recognition of their own material conditions and practices help to shape their view of themselves, their peers and their purpose in the revolution. These perceptions thereby create a link between the character, their culture, and their communicative ethics. Alexander Hamilton, often verbose, will speak his mind to whomever is nearby. He is passionate about his abilities, his goals for himself and his vision for America. Born impoverished and orphaned by the age of twelve, he feels he has nothing to lose and everything to gain. Burr, on the other hand, has prestige and cultural capital. Burr believes that his prestige is enough to succeed. Upon meeting Hamilton, Burr urges him to "talk less, smile more, don't let them know what you're against or what you're for..." (Miranda, 2020, 1:02). While Hamilton has his feet firmly planted in narrative ground and understands the Other, Burr's desire to be liked supersedes his ability to ground himself in morals or beliefs, causing him to simply speak to a phenomenological version of himself. While Hamilton fulfills his own destiny and works and

writes for the Other, or from a Levinasian stance, Hamilton works from a “derivative I” in which he is able to recognize the other instead of being absorbed in individuality (Arnett, 2017). By establishing communication ethics through narrative ground at the onset of act one, Miranda presents his characters through differing ideological frameworks that provides a cautionary tale on the importance of dialogue vs. monologue and the dire consequences of ignoring the Other.

It is important to note that Hamilton’s story is told through various narrators, allowing for different perspectives of multiple goods to emerge throughout the show, allowing the notion of multiplicity to be celebrated in this postmodern era. In the opening number, each cast member tells a part of Hamilton’s origins and notes their role in his life. Angelica and Eliza: “me, I loved him,” George Washington: “me I trusted him,” and Aaron Burr: “...me, I’m the damn fool that shot him” (Miranda, 2020, 3:34). Offering these different perspectives implies that there are various characters who see Hamilton as a friend, a spouse, a brother-in-law, a protégé, a father, and a political adversary, noting his positive characteristics, but also his flaws (Schrader, 2019). The audience is able to recognize how a single communicative ethic, that aimed to promote and protect a common good, helped to create a culture. This culture that Miranda builds around Alexander Hamilton exposes the petite narratives of each character to tell their motivations, values, or lack thereof, and how Burr’s and Hamilton’s inability to unite as a whole for the betterment of a single good, the progress of America, ends in the loss of his life, forcing others to tell his story.

In “My Shot,” Marquis de Lafayette “dream(s) of life without a monarchy”, but questions whether “the unrest in France will lead to anarchy” (Miranda, 2020, 1:40). Hercules Mulligan explains that he is a “tailor’s apprentice” and wants to “join the rebellion cause cause it is his chance to socially advance instead of sewin’ pants” (Miranda, 2020, 1:55). Miranda (2020)

positions Hamilton as a leader who listens to his friends and creates a call to heed a common goal. The character of Hamilton recognizes his own abilities in a hypertextual culture that allows room for others to rise up together, as a community, thereby functioning from a Levinasian derivative “I” (Arnett, 2017). Hamilton and his friends are situated within the same communication ethic as they aim to protect and promote a common good: the American revolution. Although they cannot predict or control the outcome of action, they encourage audience members to become invested in their communicative ethic and proverbially stand with them on their narrative ground as they will never throw away their shot to promote and protect the betterment of the nation and its citizens. However, each character is engaged in their own fight for power throughout the unfolding of the American revolution. As aforementioned in “My Shot,” the members of the revolution dream of a not only a better future for the nation, but also for themselves. This notion makes their communicative ethic particularly powerful as it demonstrates how to improve an individual life without being embedded in individualism. Hamilton and his allies fight for power, but also never usurp the other, thereby preventing them from being engulfed in the banality of evil.

### **Narrative Ground as Portrayed Through the Characters of Hamilton**

When examining this theoretical framework in our current temporal moment, Arnett (2018) clarified that the “juncture of postmodernity does not center on the self or totally ignore the self” (p. 8), but rather when situated in postmodernity and hypertextuality, identity emerges as a subset through narratives that “situate, embed, and ground the self within sources that shape identity. A postmodern, hypertextual lens illustrates an embedded and situated self and rejects a reified version of the self...but also acknowledges the existence of competing goods and practices” (p. 8). Arnett (2018) also explained the importance of narrative ground and its

relationship to the understanding of the self. “Narrative ground of particularity constitutes and situates the soil, nurturing goods and practices that frame a storied understanding of self” (Arnett, 2018, p. 7). Narrative ground is composed of ethics, culture, and rhetoric which work together as a trinity to form human identity. Identity and understanding of oneself come from the narrative ground on which we stand. Any practice that a person does or does not follow also helps to shape their identity. Arnett (2018) continued to explain narrative ground through its relationship with monologue. Monologue is the narrative ground under which people establish their identity. “People do not live for, die for, or kill for dialogue; they live, die, and kill for monologic ground that sustains identity” (Arnett, 2018, p. 13). While narrative ground is certainly not the only understanding of identity, for the purpose of this exploration of communication ethics, narrative ground specifically speaks to the goods that an individual attempts to protect and promote as their values and ideological framework is embedded in their narrative ground.

From the onset of the musical, Miranda situates Hamilton and Burr on two different narrative grounds. This theme transcends throughout the show as Burr continuously ignores the monologic narrative ground that matters to Hamilton. Burr dismisses Hamilton’s efforts to engage the Other, either his colleagues or his country, and instead approaches dialogue from a “disposition of narcissistic expectation that the world conform to our singular demands” (Arnett, 2018, p. 13). Hamilton, however, approaches dialogue in a way that acknowledges how narrative ground is connected to identity, thereby serving as the precipice of dialogue. In “Yorktown” as Hamilton recognizes that it takes a collective effort to emerge victorious, he motivates his troops to defeat the British by encouraging them to work smart and work together. He speaks in a way that acknowledges others’ accomplishments, not that of his own and notes that “public service



calls him” (Miranda, 2020). As he rallies his troops he says, “Laurens is in South Carolina redefining bravery, we will never be free until we end slavery” (Miranda, 2020, 1:35). The first part of that line shows Hamilton’s narrative ground at work as he speaks of his lauded comrade “redefining bravery,” but then comments on slavery (Miranda, 2020). While the script highlights Hamilton’s understanding of the importance of the other, the comment on slavery stands as a hypertextual juxtaposition to bring the show into the postmodern present day. The battle of Yorktown in 1781 was decades before the Civil War in which an established America fought for the abolition of slavery. The notion of equating freedom to the end of slavery in 1781 when many of the soldiers were slave owners, may not have been a driving metaphor of the battle. However, Miranda’s (2020) writing interweaves the goals of the battleground with the disparities of the battleground of present-day America to create a social commentary embedded in the narrative ground of the other from historic and current perspectives simultaneously.

As immigrants fighting for America’s freedom, Hamilton and Lafayette represent the vision, ideology and values that sought to be promoted and protected in the founding of a nation composed of immigrants. While Alexander Hamilton himself was proud of his immigrant status and embedded his feet in an ethic of hard work and dedication, never forgetting his origins, immigrants today, who often physically resemble the actors on stage, are often persecuted and denounced of the unalienable rights that the Founding Fathers, of immigrant descent, fought so hard to achieve. Again, this hypertextuality represents Hamilton’s fight for the other as his brother’s keeper, while also reminding a present-day audience that immigrants are just as equally “American” as natural born citizens.

In examining the show holistically, two major themes of the way in which hypertextuality engages in a kind of social pragmatism in which given stories are privileged over others are

“who lives, who dies, who tells your story,” and “history has its eyes on you” (Miranda, 2020). These themes again thrive in hypertextuality as the Founding Fathers tell the “story of tonight” while modern Americans spend their night in the theater. George Washington and Alexander Hamilton both personify these metaphors in the numbers “One Last Time,” and “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story.” In other words, by situating the metaphor of “who lives, who dies, who tells your story” (Miranda, 2020) in Arnett’s (2018) definition of communication ethics, the audience is able to understand Hamilton’s story through petite narratives told by his friends, foes, and family, who, despite their stories or perspective, all seek to promote Hamilton’s legacy and situate his story in the historical moment.

Miranda (2020) is also telling a story in the present day and uses “history has its eyes on you” as a modern-day call to reestablish common ground and operate from a communication ethic that understands the importance of the other and listens to each other. In a powerful scene in Act II, Hamilton and Washington sit down together, “one last time” to discuss Washington’s resignation from the Presidency. Washington sings:

I wanna talk about neutrality. I want to warn against partisan fighting. I wanna talk about what I have learned. The hard-won wisdom I have earned...If I say goodbye, the nation learns to move on. It outlives me when I'm gone...Though, in reviewing the incidents of my administration. I am unconscious of intentional error. I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects. Not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. I shall also carry with me...In the midst of my fellow citizens, the benign influence of good laws. Under a free government, the ever-favorite object of my heart and the happy reward, as I trust of our mutual cares, labors, and dangers. (Miranda, 2020, 1:11)

In this moment, Washington warns Hamilton and the audience against partisan fighting and urges listeners to learn from their mistakes. Washington uses a rhetoric that supports creativity and acknowledges cultural and ethical diversity and then calls forth a “tenacious, patient learning that embraces direction more akin to stumbling uncertainty than to unquestioning assurance” (Arnett, 2018, p. 18). Washington’s departure lands as a milestone for America in its early years as it said goodbye to its first leader, but also as a stark reminder for society today that “history has its eyes on us,” meaning that our actions today will be remembered and retold for years to come. By situating hypertextuality as the recognition of multiplicity, audience members are left to consider how these themes allow *Hamilton* to shift the perception of the privileged nature of these stories into a dialogue about America today, *with* America today. What Miranda (2020) achieves in *Hamilton* is the creation of a modern, relevant retelling of America’s history, but grounds his theme of “history has its eyes on you” in a narrative rooted in the key values of modernity while presenting it as a cautionary tale for an audience sitting in postmodernity where multiplicity is sought to be celebrated.

### **Ethical First Principles: How *Hamilton* Teaches Audiences to Reconcile Communicative Differences**

According to Arnett (2018), hypertextuality asserts that when a person views communication ethics as the protection of a social good, they also understand that others will present competing social goods with their own rational narratives. Acknowledging hypertextuality permits a space where individuals can come together and discuss and promote a diversity of goods that represent differing communication ethics (Arnett, 2018). A postmodern, hypertextual analysis of *Hamilton* from the vantage point of communication ethics follows the rule that there is no one correct conception of communication ethics, but rather acts as a

conceptual starting ground to highlight what goods a person, community, or society wish to protect or promote. Recalling Arnett's (2018) definition of communication ethics as the protection and promotion of goods that matter in everyday engagement, allows audience members to analyze how the characters of *Hamilton* use dialogue to either protect and promote or ignore the narrative ground of the Other. In other words, recognizing a person's communicative ethics helps to illuminate what motivates their actions. Once all participants understand what good(s) their peers wish to protect or promote, this conversation can now potentially advance toward dialogue.

When examining communication ethics, understanding the protected goods merely initiates a conversation and fails to yield immediate or obvious answers or resolve. Arnett (2018) cautioned that claiming that something is "unethical," simply reduces a good that another seeks to protect and promote as insignificant. Instead of tritely dismissing something or someone's behavior as "unethical," a person should instead attempt to discern the goods another seeks to protect or promote and then "consider their implications," not to necessarily achieve an optimum agreement, but to reach a point of better understanding. This point of understanding as ethical first principles, could still advance a conversation rooted in communication ethics toward a dialogue, which arouses a better possibility of reaching an agreement rather than creating a stagnant impasse of "unethical" accusations. Arnett (2018) explained that differing parties using "lofty language of correct action" breeds contention, thus creating a problem centered on communication ethics.

However, a stark contrast of two characters using the ethics first principle while standing upon differing narrative ground is evident in the relationship between Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson. Even though Hamilton and Jefferson agreed on the importance of implementing the

Constitution, they were not homogenous on how to implement and protect the particular good, which in this example is taxation and the role of the Federal Reserve. As a result, Hamilton and Jefferson have a debate, which in the musical is termed a “Cabinet Battle.” The title is a nod to iconic Hip Hop battles from MC’s at the onset of Hip Hop culture in the 1980s. Jefferson speaks first and exclaims:

But Hamilton forgets, his plan would have the government assume state's debts. Now, place your bets as to who that benefits. The very seat of government where Hamilton sits. Oh, if the shoe fits, wear it. If New York's in debt, why should Virginia bear it? Uh, our debts are paid, I'm afraid. Don't tax the South 'cause we got it made in the shade...Stand with me in the land of the free and pray to God we never see Hamilton's candidacy. Look, when Britain taxed our tea, we got frisky. Imagine what gon' happen when you try to tax our whisky.  
(Miranda, 2020, 1:15)

Hamilton responds with:

If we assume the debts, the union gets new line of credit, a financial diuretic. How do you not get it, if we're aggressive and competitive, the union gets a boost, you'd rather give it a sedative? A civics lesson from a slaver, hey neighbor, your debts are paid 'cause you don't pay for labor...And another thing, Mr. Age of Enlightenment, don't lecture me about the war, you didn't fight in it. You think I'm frightened of you, man? We almost died in a trench while you were off getting high with the French...Hey, turn around, bend over, I'll show you where my shoe fits. (Miranda, 2020, 2:25)

In this example, Jefferson and Hamilton choose vitriol over veracity. Miranda’s characters understand that they need to protect a common good, the Constitution, and the advancement of America. However, because they disagree with the best practice to protect the good in question,

they simply reduce the other's behavior and beliefs to something "unethical" and focus on the faults of the other instead of the betterment of the country. Had the characters understood "ethical first principles," they would have been better fit to put their differences aside, listen to one another, generate a dialogue, and while not necessarily agree with the other's ideas, understand their perspective and respect the importance of the petite narrative each sought to protect in the ultimate good that is America. While Hamilton's character does remain true to his communicative ethic and act as his brother's keeper throughout the musical, Miranda exposes Hamilton's hubris in his relations with his colleagues. Whether Hamilton's character is suggesting to his family that "John Adams doesn't have a real job," (Miranda, 2020, 3:33) or offering to see if his shoe fits in Jefferson's posterior, Hamilton's verbose tendencies did occasionally impede his ability to listen to the Other, thereby resulting in a political impasse instead of needed resolve. This expose serves as a cautionary tale to the audience as Miranda shows how even a character with the purest of intentions to move a community toward a common center can still possess a level of hubris that can ultimately prove tragic. Hamilton's character personifies what de Tocqueville (2012) refers to as selfishness, the opposite of individualism, because his behavior is social and involves consideration of others, even when using others to his advantage such as during his military pursuits. However, while Hamilton's character is verbose, he is never without the intent to help the Other, whereas his political adversary, Aaron Burr, is unable to move away from his embedded ground of individualism.

### **Aaron Burr and the Banality of Evil**

In the space of society which Arendt (1977) termed the Social, we become increasingly unable to think for ourselves, act for ourselves, and accept responsibility for the consequences of what we say or do. In other words, we trade our true humanity for a banal simulacrum of what it means to be human, and in that process, we can do great harm to ourselves, each other, and the

world. This is how Arendt (1977) defined the “banality of evil.” The banality of evil lies “within the space of habitus, thoughtless practices and unexamined assumptions drive decision-making” (Arendt, 1999 p. 113). “The banality of evil,” Arendt (1977) defined as “evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced back to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was a perhaps extraordinary shallowness” (Lederman, 2019, p. 199). Thoughtlessness leads one to function according to the rules of the state, regardless of what they may be. Arendt (1977) connected thoughtlessness with the banality of evil by explaining that individuals commit egregious crimes, but do so unthinkingly and forgetfully, thereby becoming hyper focused on themselves and ignoring what they have done, or how they have hurt the other. This act of ignoring the harm imposed on the Other suggests that the individual is grounded in individualism, which according to de Tocqueville (2012), is the sin of the West. It is a provincial idea that has become the banality of evil. Concern about individualism is not new. However, we must recognize that unreflective praise of the individual from their peers invites a communicative “banality of evil” that provides a guise for tyranny without altering its potential for destruction. Arendt (1977) presented a phenomenological challenge to individualism by highlighting that individualism is a human deformity, an existential lie (Arnett, Fritz, Holba, 2007). In other words, by understanding individualism separately from individuality, individualism can be framed as a point on the horizon of the banality of evil.

Therefore, an individual must understand culture from a postmodern/hypertextual to recognize that there is room in a community or society for multiple practices to coexist. While the individual does not have to agree with varying perspectives or practices, hypertextuality can create a culture in which there are multiple stories simultaneously vying for attention. prevents

turning inward, thereby again representing “the banality of evil.” In heeding a call against thoughtlessness, Arendt (1999) noted that morally and even politically speaking, indifference, though common, is a great danger to society. Privilege and the sovereign self are a banality of evil as it has the power to decimate communities. Out of, privilege, the sovereign self, or the unwillingness or inability to relate to others through judgment, lies the banality of evil.

Communication ethics and culture both contain goods and practices that are important to a group or person. However, because culture contains different ethics, contention between varying ethics and opinions is inevitable. When a person acknowledges the goods and practices of identified importance or what matters to themselves and others, the individual begins to have rhetorical influence on their audience.

According to Arendt (1958), political action should be settled through argument and discussion. By the end of the musical, it becomes clear that Hamilton and Burr stand at a communicative impasse. Burr’s contention for Hamilton peaks when Hamilton votes against him during the Presidential election. It is in this moment that Hamilton shows his truest communicative ethic, standing strong in his narrative ground as he states, “while I do not agree with his beliefs, at the end of the day Jefferson has morals, Burr has none” (Miranda, 2020). Even though Burr was Hamilton’s first “friend” when he arrived in New York City, Hamilton remained loyal to his own beliefs and ethics, and voted for the candidate who also had an understanding for the other, even if they vehemently disagreed in previous Cabinet Battles. As a result, instead of Burr’s character realizing that dialogue could alleviate their differences, he doubled down and challenged Hamilton to a duel, which ultimately proved fatal.

In “The World Was Wide Enough,” Burr reflects on his past while Hamilton looks to the future, as he always does, “imagining death to the point that it feels like a recollection, rather



than a fear of what's to come" (Silva, Sheeren, 2017 p. 193). Burr's own self-centered story and lack of narrative ground under which he stood placed him outside of Hamilton's story, and in a sense outside of history. While Hamilton who is "past patiently waiting," spends his entire life living as if he is running out of time, Burr patiently waits for an opportunity to arise that allows him to advance his political status (Miranda, 2020). However, Burr's hesitance, potentially propelled from his born privilege, allows Hamilton to surpass him in professional gain to the point that Hamilton casts the deciding vote to prevent Burr from winning the Presidential election. As the duel arises, he actively blames Hamilton for his own shortcomings and being rejected from "the room where it happens." Burr, who spent his whole life "wait(ing) for it" says "before their duel, "it's either him or me. The world will never be the same...this man will not make an orphan of my daughter" (Miranda, 2020). Given the fact that Miranda has situated Burr's character on a ground of individualism throughout the show, audiences are likely not surprised when Burr views this duel from a "him or me" vantage. This is a pivotal moment for audience members as they recognize that communication has failed to advance to dialogue, thereby denouncing the opportunity for progressive change. Therefore, Burr's sense of a narcissistic self is likely going to provoke a violent outcome serving to remind viewers of the dangers of ignoring the Other as a communicative agent.

Even though we are situated in postmodernity, terms such as the "reified self, the sovereign self, the authentic self, and the narcissistic self" are all defined in hypermodernity (Arnett, 2018, p. 7). In hypermodernity, the self does not stand on a particular narrative ground, but instead works from the "position of a minimal self, self-adorned with its maximal fascination of influence" (p. 7). As it relates to the self's identity, Miranda (2020) situates the Burr's character in a hypermodern context. He is narcissistic in the sense that he only cares about his

own advancements and does not see the value in working with the other unless it is to achieve his own political gain. Burr does not stand on a narrative ground as Hamilton does. He is displaced as an orphan but relies on his individualism to succeed.

Burr's jealousy and personal frustrations prevent him from talking to Hamilton to realize that they can understand each other and coexist and instead serves as the trigger that prompts Burr to pull the trigger. According to Silva and Sheeren (2017), Burr's character becomes a victim of his own recurring tragedy. He blames others for his loss and is unable to comprehend how his approach to communication ethics of talking less, smiling more and not allowing others to know "what you're against or what you're for" (Miranda, 2020, 1:04) has resulted in the system to work against him. As a result, Burr is condemned to a position on the outskirts of the historical moment.

Hamilton, on the other hand, lives with the perspective that death is imminent which propels him forward each day. Every day he is alive is a gift, a victory won, where he can work toward building a better, sovereign nation, and building his story or his legacy. Hamilton sees himself within a world where he has a clear call to heed. He moves the nation along for the betterment of others. He is his brother's keeper. As the duel commences and Burr fires towards Hamilton, time stops, the room is silent except for Hamilton's voice. He declares once more that he believes in the betterment of the other and up to the moment of his death, his feet remained steadfastly grounded in a narrative that sought to help others and recognized the benefits of multiple perspectives.

Burr, my first friend, my enemy. Maybe the last face I ever see. If I throw away my shot, is this how you'll remember me? What if this bullet is my legacy? Legacy, what is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see. I wrote some notes at the beginning of

a song someone will sing for me. America, you great unfinished symphony, you sent for me. You let me make a difference, a place where even orphan immigrants can leave their fingerprints and rise up. I'm running out of time, I'm running, and my time's up. Wise up, eyes up. (Miranda, 2020, 1:43)

He knows that history has its eyes on him in the sense that his actions will likely be remembered after his death, and while he cannot control the outcome of action, he does not want Burr's bullet to be his legacy. In his final moments, Hamilton permits Eliza and subsequent generations to rise up and tell his story. Hamilton questions to both himself and the audience, "if this bullet is (his) legacy." Hamilton points his gun to the sky and Burr's bullet strikes Hamilton in the chest. Hamilton threw away his shot, remaining true to his narrative ground and always maintaining an ethics first principle until his last moment.

Arendt (2004) explained that, at times, action results in violence instead of rhetoric. When this occurs, violence does not have a home in the political or public realms because it often occurs unnecessarily and without reason. For Arendt (1958), political action should be settled through argument and discussion instead of violence. While violence has been used to resolve political conflict, according to Arendt (1958) dialogue in political action is the preferred alternative to violence as it provides a solution-focused foundation for a more idealistic society. In other words, action, nor progressive change, can exist to its potential without a public space, and it is within that public space that conversation can move to meaningful dialogue.

However, Arendt (1963) conceded that in some circumstances, within both the private and public realms, there are situations in which violence may be the only reasonable course of action. There are some instances in which violence, instead of argument, speech or consideration of consequence is the only way that an individual perceives the opportunity to

achieve justice. Burr's character embodied this sentiment, as he believes that Hamilton and he have reached a communicative and ideological impasse, thereby killing his foe. Within an Arendtian understanding of the public realm, Burr believed that the world could not accommodate both Hamilton and him, thereby prompting him to shoot Hamilton instead of engaging in dialogue to resolve their differences. He ignored the other, thereby putting his own identity and place in history at risk. His motivation for doing so lies within his inability to acknowledge a hypertextual culture, thus personifying Arendt's banality of evil.

Burr's anger toward Hamilton and envy of his success and power prevented him from relating to Hamilton on an ideological level. This jealousy and disdain caused provided the antecedent to his decision making, ultimately resulting in Hamilton's death. Situated on a narrative ground of privilege and individualism, Burr committed an egregious crime, but did so unthinkingly and forgetfully, thereby becoming hyper focused on the individual. Individualism as the sin of the West is a provincial idea that has become the banality of evil, with Burr's character personifying this sin. This representation of the banality of evil in Burr's character is followed by feelings of guilt as he realizes too late, that "the world was big enough for Hamilton and for me" (Miranda, 2020, 4:20). Only then does the audience get a sense that Burr's character has found a way to identify with the other and understand a hypertextual culture and perspective.

### **Conclusion**

As Miranda concludes the musical, the cast reunites to sing together just as they did in the opening number. In this moment, even those who opposed Hamilton because his beliefs did not align with their own, recognized his brilliance and contribution to the protection and promotion of America. The uncertainty in human action or the notion of the unexpected, lends

itself to the idea of fate or destiny. Human action “almost never fulfills its original intention; no act can ever be recognized by its author as his own with the same happy certainty with which a piece of work of any kind can be recognized by its maker” (Weisman, 2020 p. 148) After Hamilton’s death, his widow, Eliza, laments about how she attempted to make sense of Alexander’s innumerable notes as he always wrote as he was “running out of time” (Miranda, 2020). Recognizing that she could never fully return to pure authorial intent, Eliza personifies the theme of “who lives, who dies, who tells your story,” and is able to continue to tell Alexander’s story, posthumously. Eliza recognizes that stories matter.

As a musical debuting in 2016 that continues to thrive in 2021 as it reached an entirely new audience with the 2020 release on Disney Plus, *Hamilton* holistically challenges America for a third act where social justice and true inclusion are center stage. What happens when individuals in society do not see the other? Unlike the characters of Aaron Burr or Thomas Jefferson, Hamilton understands that it is necessary to recognize the Other and stands upon a narrative embedded in a community and not individualism. As America ventures on in a neoliberal, postmodern world, individualism continues to usurp and ignore community, tradition, and culture. As a result, generations of Americans are dying and with them, so are their stories, their culture, and their traditions. This death of stories leaves individuals without a community to proverbially “push off” of and become embedded in a common center or identity. *Hamilton* serves as a warning that Americans are losing communities and being left with the individual. Aaron Burr’s character represents the banality of evil that will begin to represent Americans if we continue to protect and promote the notion of individualism instead of community. *Hamilton* uses a historical framework to speak to the ideological peril of America’s present day. Communication ethics matter. The narrative ground embedded under the feet of the

Other matters. Beyond race, ethnicity, or gender, as Americans, we must attend to the Other. Miranda's characters remind audiences to attend to the particular because we have an obligation to a world that is not yet born to protect and promote communities instead of resorting to violence and vitriol.

In closing, Arnett (2018) reminds us that “when a communication ethic dwells in an environment of habitual practices and repetition, the power and significance of a given narrative produces a more comprehensive and pervasive milieu—a culture” (p. 8). Cultures contain multiple narratives and goods, not all of which agree or mesh with one another. Culture creates a space for understanding and identifying goods that should be protected or promoted. May America be a comprehensive culture that protects the value of our nation. Although we may not always agree with one another, just as Hamilton and Burr did not agree, may we be able to stand on our narrative ground while accepting others' differences and using unique platforms to advance our understanding of the other. May we understand in the present what Aaron Burr failed to realize until after Hamilton's death: that the “world was big enough for Hamilton and me” (Miranda, 2020).

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## Communication Apprehension in High School Students with Professional Practices

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### Abstract

*Popularized by McCroskey (1970), the term “communication apprehension” is the broad term that refers to an individual’s “fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 2001, p. 40). Research on high school students has been limited as well as testing on specific programs to decrease communication apprehension in high school students. With this in mind, the authors examined students at a high school program designed to train professional skills were surveyed before and after their training on presentations. Results indicated students associated less anxiety with public speaking after one semester of professional practice instruction.*

Public speaking is not a skill that comes naturally to all. After all, McCroskey (2009) found that 70% of Americans report feeling apprehensive about public speaking. Some people have the confidence within their personality, whereas others need to practice being able to speak in front of both large and small group settings. Students during their high school career are an excellent snapshot of the variety of confidence levels a person has naturally versus what needs to be learned and practiced. While most public high schools focus on a variety of skills in the liberal arts tradition, some schools embrace professional or college preparation curriculum.

One such school is the Minnesota Center for Advanced Professional Studies (MNCAPS). This Center is a partnership of education, industry and community, immersing all students in

profession-based learning experiences. At MNCAPS, high school students are given the opportunity to learn professional skills and explore a potential career pathway of interest while receiving the class credit they need in order to graduate. The student body is made up of junior and senior year students who all show interest in a hands on learning environment where they can develop professional skills that they can continue to use after graduation. Each participant is part of a career focused pathway that consists of two to three courses that they attend in the first or second half of their school day. Students fill the other half of their school day with traditional high school classes or often pair MNCAPS with other college credit or work program opportunities. The pathways include: Healthcare (year one); Healthcare (year two); Introduction to Education; Foundations of Business, Marketing, and Analytics; Marketing and Design; and Direct Selling. On top of career focused classes, every student also receives instruction on basic professional skills and is presented with several real life experiences to practice these skills. Such skills and experiences can include: mock interviews, professional meetings, and building professional portfolios.

The communication skills these students get in this program can help them greatly in their future careers. Unfortunately, some research indicates that high-school students may not be receiving effective instruction in public speaking, which would benefit them academically, personally, and professionally (Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000). Typically, people first encounter public speaking instruction in their high school education which is crucial for two reasons: First, for students who do not pursue higher education after high school, "elementary and secondary schools represent the only opportunity for formal communication training" (Morreale, Cooper, & Perry, 2000, p. 5); second, for students who do pursue higher education,

effective public speaking instruction at the high school level is necessary to prepare them to succeed in college communication courses.

The reduction of public speaking anxiety (PSA) is a primary concern for many basic communication courses (Kinnick, Holler, & Bell, 2011) and the goal of MNCAPS is to give their students the best career preparation possible. While public speaking is indeed important, reducing all forms of communication apprehension is the goal for a comprehensive business skills program like MNCAPS. This research takes a closer look to see if MNCAPS is able to reduce communication apprehension (including PSA) for students through the curriculum. So we ask the question: Does the MNCAP program effectively reduce communication apprehension for its students?

### **Literature Review**

McCroskey (1970) first used the term “communication apprehension” (CA) and allowed teachers to describe what they saw in many public speaking students. Even though public speaking anxiety (PSA) is still regarded as the most identifiable genre of CA, the research has evolved beyond public speaking and into a variety of communication contexts.

Scholars began studying CA outside the public speaking classroom and found those with more intense communication apprehension can struggle in academic (McCroskey & Anderson, 1976; McCroskey, et. al., 1989), vocational (Baldwin, et. al., 1983; Daly & McCroskey, 1975), and even interpersonal (McCroskey, et. al. 1975) aspects of their lives. For example, McCroskey and Richmond (1979) found that those with high level CA tend to not flourish in organizational settings, citing a decreased chance of good interpersonal relationships and general employment satisfaction.

Public speaking anxiety (PSA) in higher grade level students is a well-researched topic because the majority of communication courses in the United States have a public speaking element (Morreale, Myers, Backlund, & Simonds, 2016). With the goal of speaking anxiety reduction in mind, several institutions have designed their public speaking courses to include common remedies of speech anxiety (Richmond, Wrench, & McCroskey, 2013). The most common elements of anxiety reduction are skills training, exposure therapy, and cognitive modification (Bodie, 2010). Skills training focuses on the competencies inherent within most public speaking courses that are designed to increase speaking ability (Kelly, 1997).

Additionally, research has shown anxiety generally decreases when the speaker is more familiar with their audience (Vevea, Pearson, Child, & Sendlak, 2009).

LeFebvre, et al (2019) studied anxiety levels at the beginning of a communication course versus anxiety levels at the end, with results indicating anxiety decreased significantly by the end of the course. This is a common assessment technique to determine teaching effectiveness for the basic course. At MNCAPS, students are assessed not only on specific coursework but also on professionalism. Professionalism is assessed by instructors as well as professional mentorships and professional relationships through applicable real-world projects. Practicing talking to professionals in multiple formats happens through the semester and students are engaged early on with the importance of growth in these skills. To assess if the MNCAPS program is reducing communication apprehension, this study uses a pre-test and post-test that is often used in basic communication courses.

### **Method**

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (McCroskey, 1982) survey was used to measure the CA of the students before and after the semester. The PRCA-24

is the instrument which is most widely used to measure communication apprehension. It is highly reliable (alpha regularly  $>.90$ ) and has very high predictive validity. There are 24 Likert scale prompts which students responded with standard 1-5 ratings based on their feelings (1-strongly disagree, 5-strongly agree). There are 6 prompts assigned to each category: Group Discussions, Meetings, Interpersonal, and Public Speaking. Each category has 3 Positive Association prompts and 3 Negative Association prompts.

After securing IRB approval, participants in the study were recruited through the MNCAPS program, with consent forms being signed by willing parents. The overall enrollment in the program is around 200 high school students, all of whom receive communication training throughout the course of their school year. To ensure previous MNCAPS curriculum did not influence the study, first year students in MNCAPS program were recruited by sharing a survey electronically during class periods early in the semester. No incentive was attached to participation in the survey and all results were anonymous. At the end of the semester after learning and practicing strategies in several professional situations, participants were asked to take the survey again. The aggregate scores were totaled and compared. All results were kept secured online in a password protected account.

### **Results**

A total of 15 students took the survey. Scores for PRCA-24 can range from 24-120. Scores below 51 represent people who have very low CA. Scores ranging 51-80 represent people with average CA. Scores above 80 represent people who have high levels of trait CA. The pre-test average score was 61.55 and the post-test average score was 50.37. Group Discussion CA scores went from 13.55 to 12.00; Interpersonal CA scores went from 13.97 to 12.00; Meetings CA scores went from 15.55 to 11.81; and Public Speaking CA scores went from 18.48 to 14.56.

Overall, the group improved in 23 of the 24 prompts, which calculates to a 96% success rate for improving CA.

Group Discussion was the area with the least amount of improvement. The one prompt where CA scores rose for the entire study was “I like to get involved in group discussions”. Further, the aggregate score changes in Group Discussion was 0.31, which was such a minimal change that 15 of the 24 individual prompts has larger score changes on their own. The prompt “Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions” had the smallest score change with 0.04. The largest individual prompt score change was “I feel relaxed while giving a speech” which came in with a 0.99 score change. See Figure 1.

### Figure 1

#### *Score Change in PRCA-24*

<b>Negative Association Prompts</b>	<b>Score Change</b>	<b>Positive Association Prompts</b>	<b>Score Change</b>
I dislike participating in group discussions.	-0.73	Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.	0.04
I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.	-0.26	I like to get involved in group discussions.	-0.06
Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.	-0.26	I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.	0.33
Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.	-0.75	Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.	0.20
I am afraid to express myself at meetings.	-0.88	I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.	0.80
Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.	-0.58	I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.	0.53
While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very	-0.06	I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.	0.41

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nervous.			
Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.	-0.29	Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.	0.50
I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.	-0.32	While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.	0.39
Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.	-0.65	I have no fear of giving a speech.	0.66
My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.	-0.40	I feel relaxed while giving a speech.	0.99
While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.	-0.27	While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.	0.95

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### Discussion

The results of the survey indicate that the MNCAPS program effectively reduces communication apprehension for its students. Improvement was shown in all four areas of the survey (Group Discussion, Meetings, Interpersonal, and Public Speaking). The only prompt that's outcome did not follow these trends was "I like to get involved in group discussions"; one contributing factor to this may have been the fact that daily class discussions were done through distance learning. This might also impact the overall low score change in the Group Discussion category. Overall, however, MNCAPS has demonstrated the ability to effectively reduce communication apprehension in its students.

With further research, it would be interesting to see how this same process would affect different age groups in different environments. Decreasing their communication apprehension in order to better themselves in professional speaking engagements such as a simple interview in hopes of reaching whatever goal life has in store for them next. Assessment that is focused on a



specific task or using a specific course or CA reduction training technique would yield more generalized results.

While CA was slightly reduced in this instance, the mental make-up of the students may need to be factored in. If these students select into this specific program, it is possible they already possess higher levels of what Nordin and Broeckelman-Post (2019) call communication mindset, which is a student's belief regarding whether or not their communication skills can be improved. If students in MNCAPS believe they can improve, their CA improvement might be better than the average high school student. Understanding more about the participants would help MNCAPS use the information from this study more effectively. MNCAPS may want to see how students fair after being in the Professional Practices curriculum for longer periods of time. Further research would help assess if a consistent curriculum of Professional Practices would positively affect adults in the work force post-graduation.

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# The Evolution of Antiracist Pedagogical Work: Pushing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to Undermine Oppressive Structures in Our Communication Classrooms

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## Abstract

*In this paper, I explore the evolution of antiracist pedagogy. This paper helps to answer for communication educators: How did antiracist pedagogy emerge? Why did antiracist pedagogy emerge? Who does antiracist pedagogy serve? Exploring the historical context of multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, antiracist pedagogy, and Whiteness studies provides a broad range of theoretical perspectives on multiculturalism as well as the how and why antiracist pedagogy emerged as a site for study. After reading this essay, educators should understand the need to push DEI to include antiracist work in our research, classrooms, and educational initiatives with our future educators, graduate teaching assistants.*

*Portions of this paper can be found in the author's dissertation.*

Fighting racism in the realm of ideas alone without undermining the structures that give birth to those ideas is a hopeless mission (Ayers, 1997, p. 133).

DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) is a buzzword in both the academic realm (elementary, secondary, and higher education) and the workplace. A quick search of DEI jobs on search engines like Indeed.com pulls up hundreds of positions across the country from human resources to instructional development. DEI is important work and current events in the United

States have pushed these issues to the forefront<sup>1</sup> of academic and organizational conversations with the creation of new positions, new missions, and a recognition that there is a significant need to hire non-white, racially diverse faculty, staff, and employees. These conversations, however, often lack an understanding of the systematic nature of oppression. Consequently, adding new positions, adding new mission statements, and adding new initiatives does little to overhaul and create meaningful change in these institutions. As Ayers (1997) argues above, we must push for less additive approaches and move to action. As someone who has studied antiracist pedagogy for nearly 25 years, I understand the systematic nature of racism and I argue racism is more than individuals being cruel or unjust to other individuals. I also contend that I cannot just “fix” one person; this will not cure all the ills of racism. Reinforcing this need was a conversation I had recently with a co-worker at my university about the systemic nature of racism; I was reminded that while I have been immersed in the study of and active in social justice work of antiracist pedagogy for over two decades, it is a new concept for many people I encounter daily. After this conversation with my co-worker, I had to pause and consider the ways in which I am not representative of what people know about the history of multicultural education in higher education nor was there an understanding of how and why antiracist pedagogy emerged as a way to push multicultural education in new directions – to undermine the structures that gave birth to racism.

Nearly 20 years ago, I examined how graduate teaching assistants in a communication studies doctoral program worked to integrate antiracist pedagogy in the basic communication

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “forefront” because these issues did not suddenly appear due to George Floyd’s murder or the current pushback against what is believed to be Critical Race Theory in the public school curriculum – these issues have always been embedded in our cultural fabric of the United States– it took a horrific, senseless murder to wake some people up to the systematic nature of racism in our society.

course. In doing so, I traced the history of diversity in education from multicultural education to whiteness and pedagogy. How did antiracist pedagogy with work in Whiteness in the field of communication push the work of multiculturalists to uproot the hidden curriculum and other structural forms of racism in the classroom (from teacher verbal and nonverbal behaviors to the choice of textbooks educators use in the classroom to teaching strategies employed by educators in the college classroom)? The paper revisits how antiracist pedagogy emerged by exploring the historical context of multiculturalism, critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, antiracist pedagogy, and Whiteness studies. This essay provides a broad range of theoretical perspectives on multiculturalism as well as the how and why antiracist pedagogy emerged as a site for study. After reading this essay, educators should understand the need to push DEI to include antiracist work in our research, classrooms, and educational initiatives, particularly with our future educators, graduate teaching assistants.

In what follows, I present several different theoretical perspectives on multicultural education from the education and communication disciplines. I begin by presenting the historical background of multicultural education. Once the historical background of multicultural education is in place, I explain how critical pedagogy plays a key role in the changing tide of traditional multicultural strategies in the classroom. Next, I discuss the emergence of critical multiculturalism. Third, I present antiracist pedagogy with work in Whiteness studies to offer opportunities to those who are new to the ideas to learn where “we” started in academia and where we are today. Finally, this essay ends with suggestions for educators to push diversity, inclusion and equity curriculum toward antiracist work in their classrooms.

## **The Multicultural Education Movement: Responding to the Need for Curricular Change**

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, a discourse of social change was at the forefront for social activists (Sleeter, 1998, xiii). One element of this discourse for social change was multicultural education, also known at the time as ethnic studies. Racism and inequality were the main concerns of activists during the multicultural education movement. Sleeter (1996) explained that multicultural education was seen as an opportunity to bring minority voices into the classroom, and to redistribute power and economic resources (p. 137).

Banks (1991a) explained that a major goal of the multicultural education movement was “a reformulation of the canon that is used to select and evaluate knowledge for inclusion into the school and university curriculum” (p. 127). Educators of color were concerned that White teachers, in particular, did not understand the backgrounds and life experiences of their students of color (McIntyre, 1997). Consequently, the teaching practices of White teachers worked to reinforce the myth that “difference meant deficiency” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 9). McIntyre (1997) illustrated the significance of multicultural education:

Multiethnic education was seen as a beacon for those who wanted to cross the educational borders and challenge existing forms of institutional and cultural racism. African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups demanded the educational institution reform their curricula, hire minority teachers, create ethnic studies programs, and give more control to communities over how their schools were structured. They saw their work as being antiracist in nature and as being situated in a sociopolitical context. (p. 10)



Originally, this movement was met with optimism and “a readiness to address the inequities within the educational system” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 10). New laws were passed supporting bilingual education, funding was provided for multiethnic curriculum development, students with disabilities were required to be mainstreamed, and the vision of inequality seemed to be captured in the educational community. During the early 1980s, however, the multicultural movement in education was met with contempt and a “ubiquitous language that has suffered considerably at the hands of educators and policy makers alike” (McIntyre, 1997, p. 10). To many educators, multicultural education became understood to add recognition of minority groups to the curriculum. However, in practice this meant that multicultural education became the way to insert or add minority perspectives, leaving the dominant perspectives at the core of the curriculum (Newman-Phillips, 1995, p. 371).

By the mid-1980s, demographic reports indicated that people of color would become the majority in the US by the twenty-first century. Multicultural education became a central focus of education once again. The renewed attention to multicultural education manifested itself in workshops at the K-12 level. According to Sleeter and McLaren (1995) multicultural education became “in’ again, with many teachers interpreting it to mean teaching supplementary lessons about other cultures” (p. 13). Issues of institutional, systematic, and personal levels of racism were not addressed under this new attempt at bringing multiculturalism into the classroom.

The additive approach to multicultural education had an insignificant impact on the educational experiences of minority students. Multicultural education did not change the chances of social mobility for students of color, the racist attitudes of students within the majority status, nor has multicultural education worked to restructure the curriculum and power relations imbedded in most schools (May, 1999, p.1). McCarthy (1994) argued the impact of

multiculturalism was minimal and education in the 90s was “entrenched in highly selective debates over content, texts, attitudes, and values” (McCarthy, 1994, p. 82). Simultaneously, educators are being confronted with a greater need for incorporating multicultural education into teacher preparation programs because the student body is becoming more racially diverse. Furthermore, the increase in racially and ethnically diverse students in our schools has educators, policy makers, and academics racing to find a multicultural cure (McIntyre, 1997). Critics of multicultural education proposed critical multiculturalism and antiracist pedagogy as the answer to the “additive” approach to culture in the classroom, as these approaches offered a critical examination of systematic racism in the classroom.

### **Critical Pedagogy: Combating Oppressive Conditions in the Classroom**

Critical pedagogy is inspired by liberatory struggles and work in Latin America and elsewhere. While there were many leaders of these efforts, critical pedagogy is most often associated with the work of Paulo Freire. (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). In what follows, I explain how critical pedagogy worked to challenge the existing oppressive conditions in our schools, the role of the teacher and the students in a classroom that embraces critical pedagogy, and how critical pedagogy informed a multicultural approach to education.

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is believed by many to have inspired the work of critical educators in America. In Brazil, Freire worked to educate in order to liberate oppressed adults through literacy. Freire (1998) argued that critical pedagogues know “that without a correct way of thinking there can be no critical practice. In other words, the practice of critical teaching, implicit in a correct way of thinking, involves a dynamic and dialectical movement between ‘doing’ and ‘reflecting on doing’” (p. 43). Critical pedagogy allowed students to become active agents as well as empowered students in the classroom. A critical pedagogy in the classroom

requires the teacher to give up traditional teaching methods for new methods that engage and empower students. As early as 1938, Dewey (1938/1997) argued that student involvement was essential to democracy in the classroom.

Democratic power-sharing is a dialogic process that is initiated and directed by a critical teacher but is democratically open to student intervention. The critical pedagogue does not become passive in the classroom. Teachers are still the authority or academic expert, but they "deploy their power and knowledge as democratic authorities who question the status quo and negotiate the curriculum rather than as authoritarian educators who unilaterally make the rules and lecture on preset subject matter" (Shor, 1996, p. 56). Empowering students becomes a collaborative effort between teachers and students engaged in transforming the educational experience. Expanding on the work of Freire and Dewey, Shor (1996) developed a method of democratic power sharing in the classroom. Shor's (1996) notion of democratic power-sharing involved creating new speech communities in which teachers and students work together to promote educational equity (1996, p. 29). Democratic power-sharing enables the student to choose themes to address in the course content based on their backgrounds, interests, and experiences. Engaging materials that are important to students helps them become active, engaged participants in their education.

Critical pedagogy and multicultural education can be used in conjunction to produce more empowering pedagogy for students of color. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) illustrated the power of such a union:

While there is no single narrative of liberation, a brief glance at the historic roots of multicultural education and critical pedagogy illustrates that both developed from

complementary struggles, and further, that narratives of liberation can be pulled away from liberating projects and employed in the service of extant power relations. (p. 11)

When coupled with multiculturalism, critical pedagogy becomes a way for students and teachers to address institutional racism in the school by critiquing the existing monocultural curriculum and the underlying power structures that work to reinforce inequalities in the educational landscape. Critical pedagogy adds an integral component to traditional methods of multicultural education by assisting in identifying and undermining the unequal distributions of power that enable the systemic nature of racism to exist inside and outside the realm of education

### **Critical Multiculturalism: An Oppositional Educational Discourse**

Critical multiculturalism in education emerged as a dramatic shift away from the additive approach to multicultural education. According to Duarte and Smith (2000), critical multiculturalism emerged "as an oppositional educational discourse and is an example of what Peter McLaren (1997) called 'Revolutionary Pedagogy'" (p. 18). Critical multiculturalism also has its roots in the liberatory educational praxis espoused by Paulo Freire (Duarte & Smith, 2000, p. 18). A fundamental assumption of critical multiculturalism is the necessity of restructuring the ideologies and discursive practices that have produced oppressive conditions in our schools for students in the minority position (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995). Critical multiculturalism, while a distinct perspective, combines several theoretical traditions (Duarte & Smith, 2000) such as antiracism and multiculturalism. Critical multiculturalism is different from multicultural education in that it calls for an undermining of the current educational practices that oppress particular groups of students. In what follows, I discuss the emergence of critical multiculturalism as a tool for combating the existing racism in the curriculum. I explore the existing research engaging critical multiculturalism. This exploration includes examining the

connections between critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy, exploring how critical multiculturalism is a vehicle for transformative social change, and investigating how critical multiculturalism is utilized in practice.

Critical multiculturalism has its foundation in critical pedagogy. Fundamental to critical multiculturalism is confronting oppressive conditions in the classroom. Critical multiculturalism, like critical pedagogy, applied in the classroom requires the teacher to give up traditional teaching methods for new methods that engage and empower students. According to Duarte and Smith (2000),

Critical multiculturalists attempt to emulate Freire's provisional utopianism, which he and Ira Shor expressed as “the possibility to go beyond tomorrow without being naively idealistic. This utopianism as dialectical relationship between denouncing the present and announcing the future. To anticipate tomorrow by dreaming today” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 186). This foundational perspective is also following in the tradition of John Dewey, and thereby represents an effort to confront anti-democratic practices and ideology by politicizing the educational sphere (p. 18).

The combination of critical pedagogy and multicultural education allows for educators to "create a collective praxis of liberation and social justice in a manner that will aid in the particular concrete struggles of the oppressed" (Sleeter & McLaren, 1995, p. 28).

Several scholars explored how critical multiculturalism can benefit our schools, teachers, students, and wider society. For instance, Sleeter and McLaren (1995) edited a book that is devoted to multicultural education and critical pedagogy. They argued that their book is an attempt to build a coalition that enables educators to create a dialog about multicultural issues as well as providing support and an arena for expressing common concerns about critical

approaches to multiculturalism in the classroom (p. 8). Scholars have studied critical multiculturalism in many ways, including an articulation of the connections and tensions between multicultural education and critical pedagogy, an exploration of critical multiculturalism as transformative social change, and a presentation of critical multicultural practices that can be utilized in the classroom.

A key area of research is the connection between multicultural education and critical pedagogy. For instance, Gay (1995) responded to the challenge to improve the quality of educational opportunities and experiences for all children through the exploration of the similarities between two theoretical orientations – critical pedagogy and multiculturalism (p. 155). Gay (1995) asserted that her discussion:

recognizes that these two movements are not identical, many of their concerns, perspectives, and proposals are analogous with respect to issues of educational access, equity, and excellence in a culturally pluralistic society and world. It builds upon the efforts to explicate connections between multicultural education and critical pedagogy that are offered by such educators as Christine Sleeter and Carl Grant, Warren Crichlow, Cameron McCarthy, Antonia Darder, Jesse Goodman, Etta Hollins, and Kathleen Spencer, Michelle Fine, and Terence O'Connor. (p. 156)

Gay (1995) argued that affirmation, knowledge, and actions are fundamental elements of empowerment and social transformation. Personal power begins when the curriculum and instructional strategies are modified to include cultural validation. A necessary condition for social transformation is knowledge acquisition because knowledge is a form of "cultural capital and possession of it empowers" (Gay, 1995, p. 177).

Grant and Sachs (2000) offered additional insight into the dialogue on critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy. They demonstrated that postmodern theory can be a useful tool for understanding the role education plays in the complicated task involved with educating a multicultural society (p. 178). According to Grant and Sach (2000), “postmodernism is concerned with rethinking culture and the power relations embodied not only in cultural representations but also material practices” (p. 179). Grant and Sach argued that the postmodern perspective is important for multicultural education for the following two reasons:

First, because it offers another lens through which to analyze and interrogate the literature on school practice and the distribution of culture and power in society. Second, the treatment of difference and Otherness is central to any investigation or understanding of the dynamics of social change, and postmodernism can contribute to how multicultural educators engage in this discussion. (p. 179-180)

They find that the multicultural practices that dominate schools are represented "through the three f's approach: foods, fairs, and festivals" (Grant & Sachs, 2000, p. 189). While food, fairs, and festivals may expose students to new cultures, the three f's do not aid transformative experiences for students of color (Grant & Sachs, 2000, p. 189). Multicultural education and postmodern theory presented students and teachers the opportunity to discover the social, political, and economic ramifications of culture in the classroom.

Nieto (1995) expanded the conversation on critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy through a consideration of the critiques of multicultural education from several ideological perspectives. She explored the connections between multicultural education and critical pedagogy and addresses the pitfalls endemic to multicultural education. First, she considered three implications of using a critical multicultural education in the classroom. She

argued there is no room for sacred cows in critical multicultural education. She explained that "all educational innovations, strategies, and ideologies must be assessed in terms of their ability to advance student learning and prepare students for their roles as citizens of a democracy" (Nieto, 1995, pp. 208-209). Second, a critical multicultural education includes the voices of students "in order to make substantive meaningful changes to education" (p. 212). Finally, "teachers themselves must be involved in their own reeducation and transformation, including challenging their attitudes, knowledge, and practices" (p. 213). In conclusion, Nieto argued that a critical multicultural education can only be realized when "educators accept the challenge that all our students deserve the right to dream" (p. 214). In other words, Nieto believed that educators must continue to challenge what they know and believe to continue to engage in pedagogical practices that will help their students have a greater access to an education that will help prepare them for life after school.

Scholars also explored the use of critical multiculturalism as a vehicle for transformative social change. Pease-Windy Boy (1995) and Darder (1995) explained the contribution minority educators have made to the empowerment of minority students. Pease-Windy Boy (1995) explores cultural diversity in higher education from an American Indian perspective. She explains that in tribal colleges, "American Indian people have built institutions reflective of the people they serve" (p. 399). For example, while many institutions of higher education are reflective of a White, male Eurocentric ideology, the tribal colleges that Pease-Windy Boy spoke of, represent the beliefs, attitudes, values, and life experiences of the American Indians they serve. She concluded by arguing that educators must critically analyze the educational system or else the results will merely be superficial change (p. 411). Darder (1995) illustrated the contributions of critical Latino educators to the empowerment and development of Latino



students in academics. Darder explored the experiences of Latino students in U. S. schools and provides a general introduction to critical pedagogy. She also considered the contributions of Latino critical educators to shed light on the ways in which culture shapes their interactions with Latino students. Darder (1995) argued that:

Although I believe that to a greater or lesser extent all critical educators and all Latino educators can contribute positively to the education of Latino students, it is the powerful combination of an emancipatory educational approach with the ability to enact and participate actively in the familiar cultural milieu of the student that can fundamentally potentiate the academic development and empowerment of Latino students in the United States. (p. 345)

Darder concluded that teacher education programs must be recreated and transformed to better prepare future teachers for their Latino students.

Murtadha (1995) put African-centered pedagogy in dialogue with liberatory multiculturalism. Murtadha began with a discussion of African-centered ideology and its use in school curriculum "infusion strategies". Murtadha (1995) also explored the need for dialogue with the "Others" as African-centered communities "examine the broad cultural political context of the oppression of women nationally and globally, the suffering of ethnic groups both nationally and globally as well as concerns of people with differing abilities" (p. 349). Murtadha asserted that liberatory multiculturalism is the tie that binds African-centered pedagogy and social reconstruction. The work of liberatory multiculturalists, she argues, can be seen in the teachers who work to develop curricula and classrooms that eliminate oppressive social practices through the restructuring of power relations, and engaging in a fight for freedom (p. 366).

Several scholars have addressed the concerns and suggestions of Murtahda by utilizing critical multicultural theory in the classroom. For example, a curriculum that helps students become actively involved in civic action and social change may transform their educational experience. Banks (1991a) argued that a transformative curriculum cannot be constructed by simply "adding" content about ethnic groups and women to the existing Eurocentric curriculum because the experiences of people of color and women are viewed from the dominant perspective. In Bank's vision, a transformative curriculum designed to empower students (especially victimized and marginalized students) must help teach "students critical thinking skills, the ways in which knowledge is constructed, the basic assumptions and values that undergird knowledge systems, and how to construct knowledge themselves" (p. 131). Banks' development of a new curriculum was designed to help liberate students through an analysis of social issues and to help them learn to take action.

Sleeter's (1996) book, *Multiculturalism as Social Activism*, is devoted to an exploration of the use of critical multiculturalism with students who want to become educators as well as a way for her to reflect upon her own positionality as a White woman from a professional class background. She also situated multicultural education debates politically and identifies themes in minority position discourse that drive multicultural curriculum. Sleeter (1996) explained that her book "attempts to connect political and pedagogical issues with personal experiences and reflections" (p. 15). Her book could be viewed as an example of how an educator might begin to integrate critical multicultural strategies into a college classroom.

Critical multiculturalism emerged as a means to examine the existing structure in schools that allowed particular groups of students to remain underrepresented or tokenized in the curriculum. McLaren (2000) argued that:

as multicultural educators informed by critical and feminist pedagogies, we need to keep students connected to the power of the unacceptable and comfortable with the unthinkable by producing critical forms of policy analysis and pedagogy. (p. 236)

Critical multiculturalism is linked to the liberatory practice of critical pedagogues such as Paulo Freire. While these two theoretical orientations are not the same, they both share the goal of transformative social change. Critical multiculturalist research takes the form of exploring connections and tensions between critical multiculturalism and critical pedagogy, as a form of transformative social change, and as a means for pedagogy in the classroom.

### **Antiracist Pedagogy: Addressing Systematic and Structural Racism**

Antiracist pedagogy is fundamentally an interdisciplinary approach that challenges the existing norms in our classroom that uphold the systematic nature of racism. Antiracist pedagogy examined how and why particular groups are marginalized in our schools and larger society and confronted racism as an institutional problem. Antiracist pedagogy, while similar to critical multiculturalism in that both concentrate on challenging the existing oppressive conditions found in our schools, is centered in Whiteness studies. According to Treinen (2004) “Whiteness needs blackness to maintain its purity and normality. The historical inequalities that non-Whites have faced in our country are the direct result of placing Whiteness in binary opposition with blackness” (p. 141). Antiracist educators argue that through a naming and marking of the White center of power, space can be made for the voices of those oppressed by systematic racism.

Education scholars have been at the forefront of producing research on antiracist pedagogy. The discipline of education has examined antiracist pedagogy in and out of the classroom, with White teachers and preservice education students, and in the media and popular culture. One such study by McIntyre (1997) explored how White student teachers made meaning

of Whiteness. Through a series of focus groups and interviews, McIntyre discovered that "for these young White females, being White is normal, typical, and functions as a standard for what is right, what is good, and what is true" (p. 135). Diaz-Rico (1998) argued for an antiracist education for preservice English-as-a-Second-Language teachers. Through a course titled "Teaching in a Multicultural Society," preservice teachers are given the opportunity to increase their effectiveness in providing non-mainstream students greater access to the core curriculum. Diaz-Rico (1998) asked teachers to explore their past beliefs about several subjects including genetic inferiority/superiority, institutional racism, and the employment of a curriculum free from bias (p. 71).

Educators have framed their antiracist work through research in the classroom. For instance, Maher and Tetreault (1997) revisited data they presented in their book, *The Feminist Classroom* (1994), to interrogate the effects of Whiteness on their original work. Originally, Maher and Tetreault (1997) considered themselves as "sharing a common perspective with the women of color that [they] studied, all of [them] being feminists resisting a male-centered academy" (p. 322). However, what the researchers discovered was that they did not fully interrogate their positionality of privilege. Maher and Tetreault (1997) used theories of Whiteness to understand how Whiteness was formed and the ways in which Whiteness shaped classroom discourse (p. 326). Titone (1998) reflected upon her time as a teacher education student and her current work as an antiracist pedagogue to argue why it is imperative for students to unlearn racism and teachers to develop their antiracist identities. Titone (1998) maintained that it is critical for "the [W]hite, anti-racist professor to hold a clearly defined antiracist educational philosophy reflecting his or her political commitment" (p. 169). Adding to this research, Rosenberg (1997) spoke from the position of a White teacher educator in a classroom with

predominantly White preservice teachers. She found that students "begin to feel lost in conversations of race and racism, especially when they begin to explore what it means to be [W]hite" (p. 80). Rosenberg (1997) maintained "we clearly need a new way of thinking about the *place* within which this type of work [conversations about Whiteness, race, and racism] can happen, and the *process* we engage in with our students and ourselves" (p. 87).

Adding to the research being conducted with preservice teachers is antiracist pedagogical research on classroom practice and the curriculum. Fine (1997) worked to chart "a theoretical argument about the institutional processes by which 'whiteness' is today produced as advantage through schools and the economy" (p. 58). Fine (1997) made a plea "to re-search institutions: to notice, to remove the [W]hite glaucoma that has ruined scholarly vision, as we lift up the school and work-related dynamics that make [W]hites and other racial groups seems so separable, and so relentlessly rank ordered" (p. 58). Additionally, Ellsworth (1997) used Carr's (1994) essay, "An American Tale: A Lynching and Legacies Left Behind," in graduate classes in education to confront how some antiracist research positions the White reader in various double binds (p. 263). For example, a White person may be working to fight against racism while simultaneously perpetrating racism in his/her classroom through the curriculum and/or the teaching practices. Ellsworth (1997) concludes by maintaining that "part of the racist potential of [W]hiteness as a dynamic of social production and interrelation, lies precisely in the ways that its academic performances can be made into double binds" (p. 268). Ellsworth (1997) was not proposing that the double bind should let White educators "off the hook"; instead, Ellsworth argued we must continue to locate and confront the double binds in the classroom and in our academic research.

Giroux (1997) expanded the work of antiracist pedagogues by examining how two films, *Dangerous Minds* and *Sutures*, can be used as pedagogical tools in the classroom to explore the

implications of Whiteness in the media. Giroux (1997) argued that by positioning [W]hiteness in a notion of cultural citizenship that affirms difference politically, culturally, and socially, students can see how their [W]hiteness functions as a racial identity while still being critical of how those forms of [W]hiteness are structured in dominance and aligned with exploitative interests and oppressive social relations. (p. 312) Giroux (1997) challenged teachers, students, and others to come to terms with Whiteness and take up the challenge in the classroom of confronting the systematic nature of racism.

Antiracist pedagogy is based on a theoretical perspective that exposes the ways in which racism is manifested in our classrooms and wider society. Essential to and at the center of antiracist pedagogy is the study of Whiteness. Antiracist pedagogues have researched the role of Whiteness in antiracist pedagogy, how antiracist pedagogy manifests itself in classroom practice, and how the media can be utilized as an antiracist teaching tool. Antiracist pedagogy articulates a way to disrupt the inequities that exist in our schools, institutions, and wider society.

### **Whiteness Studies: Examining the Power of the Invisible Norm**

It is important for us to remember that the struggle to end [W]hite supremacy is a struggle to change a system, a structure . . . For our effort to end [W]hite supremacy to be truly effective, individual struggle to change consciousness must be fundamentally linked to collective effort to transform those structures that reinforce and perpetuate [W]hite supremacy. (hooks, 2000, p. 117)

Fundamental to the antiracist pedagogue's struggle to end White supremacy is an interrogation of the role that Whiteness plays in the oppression of others. In the past three decades, Communication scholars have offered several complex and valuable theories of Whiteness that can enhance the teaching practice of educators. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) wrote a groundbreaking essay on the rhetoric of Whiteness. They studied the discursive space of Whiteness and argued that "'White' is a relatively uncharted territory that has remained invisible

as it continues to influence the identity of those both within and without its domain” (p. 291). In what follows, I present literature that examines the normative space known as “Whiteness” as it influences systemic and institutional racism in our schools and society. I begin by presenting research that explores the rhetorical location of Whiteness and continue by presenting research that explores the role Whiteness plays in identity formation. Finally, I present the extant communication research that examines Whiteness in the classroom setting.

In their article, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” Nakayama and Krizek (1995) mapped the marking of the territories of Whiteness. Through the mapping, they made the critical “move of not allowing White subjectivity to assume the position of the universal subject – with its unmarked territory” (p. 298). Nakayama and Krizek (1995) concluded by urging educators/scholars to consider “[W]hiteness in the context of social relations, such as gender, sexual orientation, class, [and] religion” (p. 305). Since this work first appeared, several communication scholars have followed with studies that work to deconstruct Whiteness as the rhetorical center of power and privilege (e.g., Shome, 1996, Crenshaw, 1997, Jackson, 1999, Mcduffie, 2018, Calvente et al., 2020).

Several scholars examined the rhetorical location of Whiteness within an antiracist framework. Furthering the work of Nakayama and Krizek (1995), Shome (1996), Crenshaw (1997), and Jackson (1999) examined Whiteness with an understanding of how and why non-White groups are culturally marginalized. Shome’s (1996) essay focused on the movie, *City of Joy* to examine one instance of the discursive construction of Whiteness in media representations. Crenshaw (1997) explicitly accepted Nakayama and Krizek’s invitation to move beyond their study by investigating how the rhetoric of Whiteness functions in other contexts such as gender. Crenshaw (1997) explored the rhetorical dimensions of Whiteness in a debate

between Carolyn Moseley Braun and Jesse Helms over the Senate's decision on whether to grant a fourteen-year extension of a design patent to the United Daughters of the Confederacy's insignia, which many claim is a symbol of slavery and racism. These two articles offer a critique of two historically White dominated spaces – politics and the media – to make White visible, and to overturn its rhetorical silence (Crenshaw, 1997).

Jackson (1999) uses Nakayama and Krizek's (1995) mapping technique to understand the ontological territory known as Whiteness. Jackson's study is unique in that White participants analyze what White culture means. In his study, Jackson (1999) found that Whiteness is:

- (1) incompleteness, (2) interrogatable space, (3) metaphor for the universal insider, (4) guilty and fair space, and (5) situationally immutable. Metaphorically, each strategy occupies its own territory, a space that can be further constructed and explored. (p. 46)

Answering the call of bell hooks (1990) for a discourse on race that interrogates Whiteness, Moon (1999), similarly, offered a critical reading of White women's narratives about Whiteness. In this essay, Moon (1999) attempted to “displace [W]hiteness as the universal stance” and “attempts to map a number of discursive practices that work to produce and reproduce ‘Whiteness’” (p. 178). She discovered several communication practices that constitute “Whitespeak,” support the reproduction of good (White) girls, and produce safe spaces where Whiteness can be maintained. Moon (1999) asserted that White women must take an active role in rearticulating a vision of White people and abolish White supremacy at the forefront of their political and personal agendas (p. 196). These scholars provided communication scholars compelling explanations as to how and why Whiteness gets rhetorically positioned as the invisible center of power.



Scholars have also concentrated their attention on the role Whiteness plays in identity formation. For instance, Martin et al. (1999) examined the preferences and meanings of labels for White Americans at a time when some Whites are perceiving that they occupy a minority status for the first time (p. 28). Martin et al. (1999) argued that their exploration of labels for Whiteness is “an attempt to better understand this phantom center that has not only masked its own positionality but fueled countless debates over labeling marginalized groups far from this center” (p.47). Furthering the work of Martin et al. (1999), Stage (1999) explored the cultural identity of one small all White Midwestern town. Stage (1999) employs an indigenous perspective (researcher-as-insider) to aid in a much-needed step toward the examination of White culture and to understand how White rural Midwesterners understand their position in society (p. 79). Most recently, McCann et al (2020) examined the racial politics of legitimizing communication through Whiteness. The authors’ argued as the field of communication has chased legitimacy, “the field repetitiously jettisons Blackness” (p. 2). Studies such as these disrupt the naturalness of Whiteness and force Whites to think about their complicity in institutional and personal racism.

Whiteness has also been studied in the communication classroom. For instance, Martin and Davis (2001) address the current interest in Whiteness studies by incorporating it into an intercultural communication classroom. They presented four current topics in Whiteness studies: (1) the foundations of Whiteness studies, (2) the Whitening of U.S. immigrants, (3) White privilege, and (4) White discourse and cultural practices. These authors also suggest strategies to incorporate these four topics into an intercultural communication classroom. Cooks (2003) and Miller and Harris (2005) explore teaching Whiteness in interactions in the classroom. Warren (2001) examines Whiteness through performativity. In his essay, Warren explores how

Whiteness is “performatively accomplished” by students in an entry-level performance communication course (p. 92). Warren (2001) argued that “the generative power of performativity – the potential of locating race in its own process of reiteration – offers us the possibility of interrupting the discursive process of racial formation, as well as the naturalization and sedimentation of those racial categories.

Treinen and Warren (2001) offered (for the time) a novel approach to teaching cultural communication in the basic speech course through an examination of the role of Whiteness in institutional and systemic racism in the communication classroom. According to Treinen and Warren (2001), antiracist pedagogy is often missing from the basic speech communication course curriculum. In response, they encourage communication educators to “problematize the unexamined cultural center to better understand how Whiteness affects our teaching, curriculum, and students (p. 49). They offered modifications to teaching the basic course that address culture in a systematic way rather than the additive approach that is commonly used in studying cultural communication. Matias and Mackey (2016) proposed a Critical Whiteness pedagogy and Ohito (2020) explored the enactment of whiteness in antiracist pedagogy. Treinen (2014/2015) argued for antiracist pedagogy with work in whiteness studies in the training and development of graduate teaching assistants.

Although interrogating the taken-for-grantedness of Whiteness is not always central to the work of antiracist pedagogues, many scholars would argue that in order to engage in antiracist pedagogy one must deconstruct the power and privilege inherent in Whiteness. This examination then should lead to a new way of understanding and constructing Whiteness in our schools, institutions, and wider society. There are several ways to explore Whiteness. For instance, researchers examine the role of Whiteness in identity formation. Whiteness has been

studied as a rhetorical location. Whiteness has also been studied in the classroom setting. Engaging in Whiteness studies offers antiracist pedagogues a lens for examining and disrupting the ways in which racism is perpetuated through the invisibility of Whiteness.

### **Hey, I'm a White Educator. What can I do to help?**

With the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, MN to the recent murder of North High (Minneapolis, MN) football and basketball star Deshaun Hill to social media posts of the racist rants of high school students in Prior Lake, MN, New Prague, MN and Minnetonka, MN disrupting racism is not something we, as White educators, cannot hide from. It is a part of the fabric of our lives – impacting our students and their communities. So, I write this section for White educators. What can we do?

From this literature review, the charge is clear – more research and exploratory essays need to be done to document to help us, as a discipline, understand how we are impacting the work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and racism in the classroom for new instructors of higher education and the students in our communication classrooms. For White educators compelled to embrace the call to move away from teaching multiculturalism in the classroom and address systematic racism in our schools and our communities, there are ways to begin the work. I say work because that is what one must do. This is not the easy approach where we just celebrate cultures and engage in a “foods, fun, and festivals” approach to multiculturalism. If you, as a White educator desire change, you must be that change. The change begins at home, in your own self-examination about your beliefs, attitudes and values. To what degree are you privileged? How does that privilege impact the way you teach, what you teach, and how you teach? How do your values, attitudes, and beliefs impact your communication (behaviors) in the classroom with your students? White educators need to be ready to spend time educating themselves.

White educators can begin the work by examining who they are – what do they bring to the table in terms of value, attitudes and beliefs – as educators and members of their communities. I ask my students this question at the beginning of all my courses from lower-level general education courses such as public speaking and interpersonal communication to my undergraduate/graduate course in Whiteness and Communication. Why do I ask this question? Everyone in the classroom community, including myself, bring attitudes, values, and beliefs that have shaped our identities and the way we communicate/ behave with others. While all students have a general sense that our communication impacts others, far fewer of them have spent time exploring themselves – Who are they? What do they bring to the class in the form of values and attitudes? How does their background and upbringing come to play in the way they communicate with others? How do these attitudes and values impact their behaviors? If I ask my students to be introspective and engage in self-analysis, I expect them to want the same from me. As a White educator, I cannot imagine walking into a classroom, teaching about racism having not done the work to understand my role in institutional racism and the privilege my White body carries with it when I walk into the classroom.

Once a White educator has begun the process of self-examination, I suggest a reading by Rowe and Malhotra called *(Un)Hinging Whiteness* (2006). In this essay, the authors help the reader examine the idea of whiteness and how Whiteness can be taught in the classroom without re-centering White educators and White students. They explain:

To do so, we untangle the distinctions between whiteness as a universalizing, privileging process and white identity and/or the white body. This distinction is important for two reasons: to provide a space to theorize and teach whiteness as a multiracial phenomenon,

as opposed to an identity that holds meaning only for white people; and to empower students and educators to act against white supremacy. (p. 166)

The reference section of this paper offers a wealth of readings to offer historical context to antiracist education and whiteness studies. For those who prefer other formats, there are some wonderful books published that examine a variety of ideas surrounding racism, such as *Just Us: An American Conversation* (Rankine, 2020) *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (McGhee, 2021), *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of how our Government Segregated America* (Rothstein, 2017), *Nice Racism: How Progressive Whiten People Perpetuate Racial Harm* ( DiAngelo, 2021) and/or *Seeing White: An Introduction to White Privilege and Race* ( Halley, et al., 2011). These books offer a starting point to examine our part in the system of racism in our communities and in our schools.

Documentaries and podcasts also provide a rich view of our racial history. *Race the Power of an Illusion* is a staple in my classrooms. This documentary explores how race was created in order to dehumanize black and brown folks and ensure that “all men are created equal” only meant White men. If you are interested in how policies impacted institutional racism *Jim Crow of the North* (2019) and *13<sup>th</sup>* (2020) are places to start. If you like podcasts, *Seeing White* (2017) hosted by John Biewen (a MN native), *Asian Enough* (2020) with hosts Jen Yamato, Johana Bhuiyan, Tracy Brown and Suhauna Hussain, or *Coming Through*. (2020) with Rebecca Carrol.

Finally, professional development opportunities are a way to both improve our teaching and stay current on anything from research to new teaching strategies. Attend conference paper presentations and panel discussions on issues about antiracism and social justice in education. Enroll in webinars, symposiums, special presentations, and discussions offered by community

groups, your workplace, or local university/college. Staying current on issues facing your community is imperative to understanding the world in which our students are living. The exploration process as well as ongoing professional development opportunities will help White educators build a curriculum that reflects the voices of all their students. Everything you watch, read, listen to, and learn become your resources for teaching.

As I was writing this section, I was thinking about this quotation: “Be the change you want to see in the world,” a quote often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi. After further investigation, I found the actual quotation from Gandhi. One with deeper meaning; pushing “us” to be the change we want to see in the world; what we must do, if we embrace the charge to become antiracist educators:

We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man[woman] changes his[her] own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do. (Morton, 2011, par. 5)

Gandhi urges us not to wait for others to be the change. The worst thing White folks can do is wait for BIPOC scholars, experts, and activists to “teach” what to do – it is not their responsibility. White educators need to do the work. Educate yourself. Reflect upon who you are. Examine what you bring to the table. Support your BIPOC colleagues and BIPOC students through antiracist education.

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# Request Strategies Used by English Language Learners: Student-Professor Email Communication

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## **Abstract**

*Recently, email communication between students and professors in the U.S. higher educational institutions where English is the medium of instruction has become increasingly popular. However, ESL students in these educational institutions encounter numerous challenges to write email to their professors because of their unfamiliarity with email etiquette in English, inadequate English language proficiency, and lack of understanding of socio-cultural norms and values. Also, writing emails to professors requires higher pragmatic competence and critical language awareness of how email correspondence takes place in academic setting. Email requests written by ESL students are often seen as inappropriate or informal by their professors, resulting in pragmatic failure and being rejected. To this end, the main purpose of this literature review paper is to explore the request strategies used by ESL students to write email to their professors. Finally, the author concludes the paper by pointing some pedagogical implications to the educators who work with ESL learners at the universities and colleges where English is the medium of instruction.*

## **Introduction**

Language is a primary means of communication among human beings. In support of this argument, LoCastro (2012) argued, “human beings are inherently social beings, and language is arguably the primary means through which they act in the world of communication with others and are acted upon by others” (p. 37). To communicate with others appropriately, the knowledge of cultures, norms, and values, especially English as second language (ESL) learners, is essential because each language functions differently in relation to society. Additionally, the pragmatic

knowledge is equally important because it informs the language users about language use from the point of view of the users, “especially choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (Crystal, 2007, p. 301). Crystal (2008) added, “pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choices of language in social interaction and the effects of those choices on others” (p. 379). For ESL learners, learning a new language is by no means simply the learning of a list of words or grammar rules. Rather, it means more, for instance, learning of speech acts or communicative functions such as making a request, asking for permission, asking for clarification, apologizing, and their exponents, their usage based on politeness, the knowledge of the context where communication takes place, and the social relationship the speaker has with their interlocutors. So, in order to be communicatively competent, the L2 learners should have the knowledge of sociocultural norms of the language being learned.

Past research studies conducted on intercultural and interlanguage pragmatics have consistently shown learning to comprehend and produce speech acts can be a challenge for language learners, even for those with comparatively advanced linguistic competence (Nguyen, 2008, 2013). Due to cross-cultural differences in L2 learners’ first language (L1) and second language (L2) constantly caused miscommunication and social and cultural issues (Akikawa & Ishihara, 2010; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, 2007; Chen, 2001, 2006, 2016; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hendriks, 2010). For L2 learners, these challenges may even be a bigger problem compared with L1 learners because of their limited English language skills, lack of sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge, and limited understanding of how discourse shapes and reflects power relations in the target culture (Chen, 2006, 2016).



In recent years, electronic communication, particularly email correspondence between students and professors in educational contexts, has become increasingly popular. Nguyen et al. (2015) argued “[a]s email requests from students and professors have become increasingly common in academic settings, research has shown that second language (L2) students' unfamiliarity with email etiquette in their L2 has adversely affected their communication with their professors” (p. 169). Since email correspondence uses speech acts in a written medium, it is perceived as a hybrid between spoken and written forms of language that may require many stylistic differences (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006; Harvey, 2013, Nguyen et al., 2015). Email requests written by L2 students are often seen by their instructors as inappropriate or casual resulting in pragmatic failure and being rejected (Akikawa & Ishihara, 2010; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, 2007; Chen, 2001, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hendriks, 2010, Nguyen et al., 2015). Therefore, the main purpose of this literature review paper is to explore the strategies used by ESL learners to write email to their professors. Finally, the author concludes the paper by pointing some pedagogical implications to the educators who work with ESL learners at the universities and colleges where English is the medium of instruction.

### **Literature Review**

In recent years, email communication has become important between students and professors in educational contexts where English is the medium of communication. Although this form of electronic communication is common between these two groups, it has resulted difficulty for many L2 learners, particularly when they write email requests to their professors because “writing emails to authority figures [professors] requires higher pragmatic competence and critical language awareness of how discourse shapes and reflects power asymmetry in an institutional context” (Chen, 2006, p. 35). With inadequate language proficiency and

understanding of the socio-cultural norms and values of the target language, L2 learners face many challenges in writing emails to their professors.

### **L1 and L2 Learners' Request Forms/Devices**

Past studies have revealed L1 and L2 learners employ different kinds of devices and markers in making requests in different contexts. Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1996) investigated emails written by native and non-native speakers of English and asked how they were evaluated by faculty members. The study, while dated, showed non-native speakers' emails did not employ mitigation strategies/devices, emphasized students' own needs, and lacked status-congruent language. Al Masaeed (2017) researched the style in which U.S. university students learning Arabic as a foreign language (FL) in the U.S. demonstrated the capability to make and modify requests using internally "mitigating or aggravating modality markers" such as will, could, can, might, and externally, by "supportive moves" such as giving reasons and emphasizing urgency before or after the main request in formal and informal situations. Data were gathered from discourse completion tasks (DCTs) administered to 56 students divided into four separate proficiency levels. Unlike previous studies' findings, the study found lower-proficiency students most frequently used grounders (i.e., the reasons, explanations, and justifications before and after request forms). Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1986), Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993), and Ellis (1992) concluded requests were one of the first productive illocutionary acts accomplished by learners. These request skills are acquired because of their communicative necessity. Furthermore, they noticed L2 learners were found to be wordy, while native speakers were found to be concise in their communication. Chen (2006) carried out a 30-month longitudinal case study to investigate how a Taiwanese graduate student learning English as a second language developed her email writing skills at a U.S. university. Employing a critical

discourse approach, the study indicated she regularly faced difficulties using appropriate language and maintaining politeness in her email communication to professors and fulfilling her communicative needs. Furthermore, her improvement in email literacy can be observed, particularly in terms of comprehending email correspondence, increasing knowledge of student-instructor communication, and understanding of socio-cultural values, norms, and respectfulness.

### **Factors Affecting L2 Learners' Pragmatic Features**

Research studies found various factors affect the learning of L2 learners' pragmatic features, including gender, L1 background, social and cultural setting, individual differences, linguistic competence, age, and length of time in the formal study of English. For instance, Thomas-Tate et al. (2017) argued gender bias in cyber communication in educational institutions had been considerably increased, as shown in print media. In an experimental study constructed to investigate language use in different situations, the subjects were requested to write an email to a faculty member whose gender had been experimentally operated. The study found female students demonstrated lower politeness, higher directness, and lower formality when writing an email to female faculty members than to male faculty members to moderate or intensify their email requests. Similarly, Economidou-Kogetsidis (2011) investigated email requests sent by students who are non-native speakers of English (NNSs) over different semesters of study at Greek Cypriot University, Cyprus. The study looked at salutations, the level of straightforwardness used, and the level and types of supportive moves and lexical/phrasal modifiers employed by the students. The study found non-native speakers' emails are represented "by significant directness, an omission of lexical/phrasal down graders, the omission of greetings, and inappropriate and unacceptable forms of address" (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011, p. 3193) from the perspective of native speakers of English. Likewise, Aydin and Koch

(2012) conducted a cross-sectional mix-method study to investigate requests and apologies of Romanian English language learners with the purpose of informing ESL and EFL teachers about their enduring instructional pedagogy. Using Modified Cartoon Oral Production Tools (MCOPT), which comprised 16 cartoon drawings portraying settings in which two characters take part in communication, the data were collected from 80 students, including males and females. The participants were chosen from first to seventh grade from the International School of Cluj-Napoca, Romania (ISC), Romania. The study revealed the sophistication of speech acts increases with age more than with the length of study. In other words, the study did not find a positive correlation with the duration of formal English teaching.

### **Efficacy of Explicit Classroom on ESL and EFL Students' Pragmatic Knowledge**

#### **Development**

Previous studies conducted in the field of pragmatics have shown explicit classroom instruction helps ESL and EFL learners to better develop their pragmatic knowledge. To illustrate, Saadatmandi et al. (2018) investigated the influences of teaching English pragmatic features on 50 Iranian high school girls' use of request speech acts. These students with the same English language proficiency level were allocated to treatment and control groups. The data for the study were gathered by administering pre-test and post-test that comprised the multiple-choice discourse completion tests (MDCTs). The control group received conventional instruction, while the treatment group received distinct instruction focusing on request speech acts as an intervention. The statistical analysis of the findings of the inquiry discovered explicit instruction of pragmatic features had a positive impact on the students' performance on request speech acts. The study also revealed that "indirect request speech acts were more widely used than direct request speech acts as the sign of social and cultural politeness" (Saadatmandi et al.,

2018, p. 829). Likewise, Rose (2005) conducted a literature review study on the effects of instruction in second language pragmatics, L2 students' features, and learning situations characterized in the studies. The study found three essential concerns captured in the literature: "the teachability of pragmatics, the relative benefits of instruction versus exposure, and whether different approaches to instruction yield different results" (p. 385). Alcón-Soler (2017) conducted a replication study on the teenage study-abroad students and examined the impact of pragmatic instruction and the pragmatic development trajectories of the students when they move from teaching context to in real email communication. Email requests written by 60 Spanish teenagers were analyzed to examine the impacts of instruction regarding the uses of indirect request strategies and internal modifiers. In addition, pragmatic developmental paths of two students, one with a high producer and the other the low producer of request modifiers, were analyzed qualitatively at four distinct times during the study-abroad experience. The results showed that there were positive effects of teaching on students' use of indirect request strategies and request modifiers. The study concluded two different pragmatic developmental paths were found in two students' email requests.

### **Effectiveness of Explicit Classroom on ESL and EFL Students' Email Communication Skills Development**

Recent studies have shown ESL learners' email communication skills with their professors improved through explicit instruction in ESL and EFL classrooms. Chen (2015b) carried out an experimental study to investigate the efficacy of instructing email requests to professors in a class of 28 intermediate-level Chinese students learning English as a foreign language. Following the genre-based instruction by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the six-hour tutoring was designed in the sequence of setting the context, modeling, collaborative

production, and self-directed production. Two hundred twenty-four emails written by the participants during pre-test and post-test instruction were statistically analyzed by running paired t-test and qualitatively by move analysis. The quantitative analysis revealed students made overall improvement after the explicit teaching. Conversely, the qualitative analysis showed the students made greater progress in “framing moves (i.e., subject, greeting, and closing) than in content moves (i.e., request strategies and request support)” (Chen, 2015b, p. 131).

In a mixed-methods study, Biesenbach-Lucas (2007) examined email requests written by native and non-native English-speaking graduate students to a professor for several semesters at the main U.S. university. The data were statistically analyzed employing Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) framework to differentiate levels of directness (i.e., pragmatic clarity); and qualitatively to compare syntactic and lexical politeness devices, the request perspectives, and the specific linguistic request realization patterns chosen by native and non-native speakers. The results indicated most of the email requests were written using direct strategies and hints rather than traditional indirect strategies (e.g., “I was wondering if you could give me some money”). The study revealed politeness convention in email correspondence seems to improve, and native speakers of English composed more polite emails to their professors than non-native speakers of English.

Chen (2015a) investigated the cognitive processes of L2 learners involved in an email writing task comprising two requests to the professor. Concomitant and reflective verbal reports were gathered from 15 pairs of intermediate level Chinese EFL students and were analyzed based on intention, cognition, planning, and evaluation. The analysis revealed the students employed different politeness strategies to express their request intentions and emphasized their consideration of a lexical, grammatical, and situational feature of the task. The students

planned their emails analytically in the order of salutation, content, and conclusion and also assessed their presentations based on the degree of politeness and expressiveness of their reasoning.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Email communication between ESL students and professors in higher educational settings has become increasingly popular. Email has become the primary means of communication in the academic setting, especially during COVID-19 global pandemic due to which the students and teachers cannot meet in person. Nguyen et al. (2015) concluded that email communication, particularly between ESL students and professors, has been common in academic institutions where English is the medium of instruction. However, ESL students encounter many challenges to write etiquette email to their professors. As a result, their communication breaks down. Furthermore, professors also consider ESL students' email improper and impolite because ESL students do not have adequate knowledge of pragmatic markers, socio-cultural values, and norms related to English language (Akikawa & Ishihara, 2010; Biesenbach-Lucas, 2006, 2007; Chen, 2001, 2006; Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2011; Hendriks, 2010, Nguyen et al., 2015). Therefore, the main pedagogical implication of this study is to plan explicit email instruction in the ESL classroom in U.S. university contexts. It is very crucial to do so because research has demonstrated explicit pragmatic instruction improves the pragmatic development of L2 learners (Alcon-Solar, 2015, 2017). In doing so, the students in basic composition courses at a U.S. university context learn the very important skill of writing etiquette email requests to their professors that ultimately improves the student-professor communication and the ESL students' overall learning achievement.

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## OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCE TEXTBOOK REVIEWS

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### Review of *Arguing using critical thinking*

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Martenev, J. (2020). *Arguing using critical thinking*. Academic Senate for California Community Colleges.

After debating about a subject that was essential to all parties involved, people retreat to their own spaces and begin to reflect on how the conflict could have ended better. Some of them begin to say to themselves that they should have said a word or two differently, while others find themselves thinking that they should have avoided the commotion by remaining silent. Returning to places where they will communicate with others, these people begin to wonder what they need to do the next time they encounter a conflict. For individuals who are wanting to learn skills that will be effective in conflict resolution, this textbook serves as one of the projects that teach readers strategies that will help them in resolving differences with others. Through twelve chapters, Martenev (2020) discusses how readers may present their viewpoints with confidence during conflict resolution by referring to critical thinking foundations. Readers will progress through lessons where they learn why people argue, concepts that are seen during debates, and the history of critical thinking.

In Chapter 1, Martenev defines conflict as a state of opposition that naturally occurs in everyone's lives because each person has different goals and expectations (p. 1.2.1). Building on

the definition, Marteney shows different types of conflicts and various ways that people engage with conflict. Humans argue with each other due to the topic of a subject, miscommunication, and personality differences (p. 1.3.1). Therefore, learning different styles of communication is essential because each person has their way of thinking and handling a problem. Communication style differences further show why people win and lose debates because they create different results in each situation. To identify why various methods of communication exist, Marteney moves on to discuss the definition of communication in Chapter 2. He presents an overview of why communication is continuous and imperfect by going over the communication model, distinguishing verbal and nonverbal communication, and how language shapes human perception (p. 2.2.1-2.13.4). A key takeaway for readers here is messages are often exchanged nonverbally, and languages change in every generation as new words are invented. Therefore, answers will vary on how everyone interprets what is said in each situation, which further leads to show why conflicts occur naturally. After talking about the foundations of conflict, communication, and critical thinking, Marteney introduces his readers to strategies that are used in argumentation. He discusses how people respond to arguments, stay focused during debates, analyze points made by others while arguing, how to present evidence well, and how to evaluate conclusions.

Starting in Chapter 3, Marteney talks about how people disagree with others by going over concepts and examples. Readers will see in this chapter how people hone their skills in providing a thoughtful response if they must disagree with others. Initially, everyone argues with others in their childhood by engaging in name-calling when a conflict starts, then they start developing ways to use counter-arguments when others present points they don't agree with (p. 3.4.1). But understanding how to formulate counter arguments can be a steep learning curve because it needs to be backed up by clear evidence. Thereby, to address what one may do in

crafting arguments that show alternative viewpoints, Marteney introduces his readers to the Toulmin model. He explains that using the Toulmin model approach will require one to effectively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of another person's argument by analyzing the claim, grounds, warrant, backing, rebuttals, and qualifiers (p. 3.6.1). With several concepts holding the Toulmin model together, individuals need to learn each concept embedded in this approach step by step if they want to successfully use it during a debate.

For the next few chapters, Marteney breaks down the components inside the Toulmin model. In Chapter 4, he explains that speakers who want to partake in a constructive conflict resolution must clearly define a claim when they start a debate, then present the burden of proof, burden of presumption, and burden of rebuttal (p. 4.2.1, 4.5.1). It is important here that all parties involved understand that defining a claim is the most essential step before presenting their arguments. This is because a claim is a defined statement that challenges the status-quo, arguable for both pro and con sides, and is accepted or rejected by all debaters at the conclusion of debate (p. 4.2.1-4.3.2). In the following three chapters, Marteney unpacks more details of practices and strategies in argumentation. Moving into Chapter 5, readers learn that critical thinkers need to make cases that support their position on a claim by identifying inferences, assumptions, and issues that are relevant to the subject of their claim (p. 5.2.1-5.8.1). Progressing to Chapter 6, readers will see how much evidence is needed to construct an argument, what speakers may do to evaluate sources used for evidence, and how they may use evidence to support their claim (p. 6.2.1-6.5.3). In Chapter 7, Marteney presents a lesson on what makes an argument illogical as he discusses types of reasoning and fallacies (p. 7.3.1-7.4.3). By uncovering the terms in the Toulmin model, Marteney informs his readers that successful debaters will clearly define, organize, and support their arguments when they resolve conflicts.

Now presenting the final details of what debaters may do to increase their knowledge of argumentation, Marteney goes over the foundations of critical thinking. Chapter 8 covers the practices of argumentation during Ancient Greece, elements of rhetoric, and why conflict resolution is contingent on a critical thinker's ability to show a valid position in their argument instead of the truth (p. 8.2.1, 8.3.1, 8.8.1). Chapter 9 shows that speakers need to identify the attitudes, biases, interests, and needs of their audience if they want to successfully create an argument to persuade others (p. 9.9.1). Chapter 10 addresses the issue of how humans must make a decision on which argument to side with, and they will decide based on the facts that are presented or using their feelings (p. 10.1.1, 10.10.2). Marteney then closes his textbook as he elaborates what people could do to improve their critical-decision making skills. Chapter 11 teaches the readers that people are influenced by their beliefs when they take sides during an argument, so they need to become more open-minded if they want to successfully resolve conflicts (p. 11.1.1-11.7.2). Chapter 12 explains how debaters may teach themselves to be great critical thinkers by understanding knowledge, literacy, and thinking (p. 12.1.1-12.9.1). In conclusion, this textbook shows that everyone has the potential to become great debaters who use excellent critical thinking skills to construct persuasive arguments.

In addressing limitations in Marteney's textbook, it can provide more examples of how critical thinking concepts apply to what people experience in their daily lives, and provide questions that assess a reader's knowledge. There could be more detailed explanations of how people handled conflicts that arose due to money spending, politics, personal interests, etc. For example, how might a person persuade his or her friends to cut their time or spending on food, gasoline, clothes, and leisure activities? What do critical thinkers do when they persuade their family and friends to change their opinion regarding topics such as voting, military actions, social activism,

prison reforms, and environmental protection? Each chapter of Marteney's textbook could add short quizzes, where readers define concepts from the readings, and apply them to real life scenarios. Also, testimony of how leaders in professional occupations used critical decision making skills to help their teams could be added. Despite its limitations, the overall work of Marteney's textbook provides foundational knowledge to students who want to learn how to be a great speaker who can persuade others effectively.

Marteney's textbook possesses its strengths by serving as a textbook that is designed for readers who are wanting to learn why people debate, how successful debaters construct their arguments, and see that critical thinking skills required for successful debaters can be learned. Most importantly, this work presents an alternative viewpoint to a traditionally established idea of argumentation and debate. As Marteney emphasizes, the subject of argumentation is not about winning an argument, but about learning how people may successfully resolve different opinions during a decision-making process. Therefore, this textbook contributes to the Communication Studies scholarship by presenting the knowledge and skills to readers who want to understand a larger picture of why argumentation and debate classes are important. Applying Marteney's points into their previous debates, students and teachers will discover new methods they can use when they need to confidently negotiate ideas with others, instead of creating a commotion that is unresolvable. Perhaps, reading this textbook will help readers feel more content, confident, and comfortable with the decision that comes at the conclusion of their next debate.



## Review of *Communication in the real world*

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University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing (2016). *Communication in the real world*.

An ideal text for an Introduction to Communication course delivers on several fronts; it provides a no-cost and adaptable overview of core communication theory, it is engaging and readable for an beginning college student, and it provides timely, interesting, applications of the communication discipline – all for free. *Communication In the Real World* provides on several, but not all, these fronts. This free, OER text gets the job done, mostly in its readable, succinct format that allows for focused assigning of topics and subtopics relevant to any flavor of introductory communication courses. Students won't be clamoring to read this text (as what it accomplishes in brevity and adaptability, it lacks in general energy and entertainment value), but they will find it informative and applicable to their course and lives, particularly because the instructor can select and assign relevant chapters and subsections with ease.

This text is organized into sixteen chapters with each chapter containing a brief introductory paragraph followed by three to six subtopics. Each subtopic is organized as a standalone section, opening with a list of objectives, including one to two application sidebars, and concluding with a summary of main ideas and exercises for further thought. The first five chapters of the text cover communication foundations; Introduction to Communication Studies, Communication and Perception, Verbal Communication, and Listening. These provide an adequate and approachable footing for the further exploration of the forthcoming chapters on Interpersonal Communication, Public Communication, Small Group Communication and Mass

Communication. The three Interpersonal Communication chapters are Interpersonal Communication Process, Communication in Relationships, and Culture & Communication, the final of which does serve as an adequate primer on the basics of intercultural communication concepts. The following four chapters on public communication cover Preparing a Speech, Delivering a Speech, Informative & Persuasive Speaking, as well as Public Speaking in Various Contexts. Of great value in these chapters are example speaking outlines and video clips for speeches of different rhetorical purpose. While the video clips, like the text in general, are dated, they do accomplish the aim of providing a student with a workable example from which they can extrapolate. The Small Group Communication chapters include Small Group Communication fundamentals of Development and Dynamics, and a chapter on Leadership, Roles and Problem Solving. The final two chapters on Media, Technology, and New Media are where the text's 2013 publishing date are especially painful, given the acceleration of mediated communication products, services, and documented effects in recent years.

The reading level of this text is appropriate for a first-year college student, and even a college student with a low reading prowess. Many students enter college unprepared for academic reading or with English as a second language, and this text uses vocabulary and language structures that are easy to understand and decipher with little jargon that goes undefined. Additionally, as an OER text from the University of Minnesota Library, the text is available in an exceptional number of formats, ensuring screen readers, translators, and other accessibility tools will be able to engage and process the material successfully.

The faults of this text are really a result of its publication date. The images in the text show mostly able bodied, cis-gendered, white people engaging in communication activities, with few non dominant identities represented visually except in the expected or necessary cases of

discussing culture or race. Surely an OER text developed in 2021 would be more mindful of its stock photo selections and the implications they have on students consuming them. Similarly, there are no references dating past 2012 in this text meaning that many of the application topics feel woefully incomplete as our discussions and experiences as a society on subjects such as “Perception, Schemata, and, Police,” “Political Spin,” “Textese,” among others, are deeply changed by the Black Lives Matter movement, Trump presidency, and Covid 19 Pandemic. While the text does work to include critical topics like the meaning of the Confederate Flag and Toxic Masculinity, among others, these are literally asides, which read hollow in a time when these topics and realities are justifiably front and center in our personal, social, and cultural consciousness. Finally, while there are several video clips embedded in the text, they are too few, twelve in total only, given the opensource video content widely available on these subjects. This again is an indication of the text’s age, as in many ways twelve video clips for an OER text in 2013 is prescient, as is covering topics of perception, race, and police – but the dynamism of communication demands that our materials meet the current moment, and this text on its own, does not.

Thankfully, a text does not exist on its own – it is typically accompanied by a skilled and thoughtful instructor who can put it to use within the context of their course. Despite the limitations and problems of this text, it is the one I choose to use for my Introduction to Communication course. Few OER textbooks exist with as broad a range of topics and subtopics. The span of content demanded by introductory and survey courses frequently come at a steep cost for students or institutions in acquiring a text designed to cover the range of designated outcomes. Curated and thoughtful assigning out of Communication the Real World, combined with current research, video, and reporting will result in a dynamic, thorough overview of

Communication Studies and its disciplines. For the low price of zero dollars and the ease of adaptability, *Communication in the Real World*, does a more than adequate job when an instructor frames and augments the limitations of this text to meet the needs of their particular students and course.

## Review of *Exploring public speaking*

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Tucker, B., Barton, K., Burger, A., Drye, J., Hunsicker, C., Mendes, A., & LeHew, M. (2019).

*Exploring public speaking* (4th edition). Communication Open Textbooks.

<https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/communication-textbooks/1>

With the cost of higher education steadily rising, it is important for us to consider open-source textbooks for their cost-saving potential. *Exploring Public Speaking 4<sup>th</sup> edition*, is available online as a worthwhile consideration for a variety of courses. This textbook, co-authored by Barbara Tucker, Kristin Barton, Amy Burger, Jerry Drye, Cathy Hunsicker, Amy Mendes, and Matthew LeHew provides engaging, outside-the-box ways to craft speeches and explore public speaking. What began as a resource for students at Dalton State College (1<sup>st</sup> edition), *Exploring Public Speaking* is now in its fourth edition and has been revised for public speaking students at any high-school, college, or university. Additionally, several of the chapters, which can be downloaded separately, would be beneficial for forensics courses, theater courses, English courses, and courses designed to teach college-level research skills. *Exploring Public Speaking* covers the necessary elements of introductory public speaking courses and then goes beyond the standard components in an easy-to-follow, conversational style.

The structure of this textbook follows a pretty standard format. Students begin with an overview of public speaking and then through each of the next fourteen chapters go in-depth into each step of the process (i.e., audience analysis, ethics in public speaking, developing topics, conducting research, organizing the presentation, supporting main ideas, introductions and

conclusions, presentation aids, language use in presentations, and delivering the presentation).

The lessons are scaffolded in such an order so as to flow logically through the process of giving a presentation, without being too dense for new students or too simple for more experienced speechcrafters.

The chapters themselves follow a clear pattern and were easy to navigate. Each chapter begins with a list of neatly stated learning objectives and a chapter preview to help situate students to the information that follows. For example, chapter four: developing topics for your speech's learning objectives are shown below in Figure 1. As a result of this chapter, students will be able to "write a specific purpose statement" and "write a thesis or central idea statement" among other objectives. Students know they will be "getting started with [their] topics" and learning some of the "problems to avoid with specific purpose and central idea statements" (p. 62). Following the preview is the text of the chapter, complete with useful visual aids (e.g., charts and photographs) and keyword definitions in the margins.

## Chapter 4: Developing Topics for Your Speech



### Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, the student will be able to:

- Distinguish between the specific purpose, central idea, and main points of a speech;
- Differentiate between a speech to inform, persuade, and inspire or entertain;
- Write a specific purpose statement;
- Write a thesis or central idea statement;
- Distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable specific purpose and central idea statements;
- Compose appropriate specific purpose and central idea statements for informative, persuasive, and inspirational/entertaining speeches.

### Chapter Preview

- 4.1 – Getting Started with Your Topic
- 4.2 – Formulating a Specific Purpose Statement
- 4.3 – Formulating a Central Idea Statement
- 4.4 – Problems to Avoid with Specific Purpose and Central Idea Statements

Figure 1. Chapter Four’s Learning Objectives and Chapter Preview

This textbook invites students to higher levels of learning by ending each chapter with “Something to Think About.” This final section calls for students to engage with public speaking concepts, by critiquing, creating, or applying the information to various topics or scenarios. For example, chapter four’s scenario reinforces understandings of specific purpose statements by asking students to consider the impact of these statements on a hypothetical presentation that has passed the allotted time for their speech. Students may decide to narrow the hypothetical specific purpose statement in order to create a shorter, more focused presentation. In addition to “Something to Think About,” several chapters include case studies for further content exploration. Possible answers to these case studies are available for teachers and students in

appendix J. Through case studies, hypotheticals, text, charts, and photographs, *Exploring Public Speaking* provides opportunities for a variety of learning styles, beyond simply reading a textbook. There are also supplemental materials, added for the second edition and expanded for the third and fourth, thanks to two grants received by the authors, including lecture slides and flashcards, available to suit the needs of diverse learners. Not every student learns through reading and comprehending. Readers of this textbook will find multiple ways to absorb and understand this material.

When comparing *Exploring Public Speaking* to the public speaking textbooks I've used or considered, I appreciated the several instances throughout that challenge students to think outside of the box for their presentations. Chapter nine, presentation aids, provides an example of this. Presentation aids rather than visual aids is not a unique contribution from this textbook. Although, in the age of technology when PowerPoint has become the de facto standard, a step away from instinctively favoring visual aids and towards "presentation aids" is a useful reminder that presentations can be aided by all five senses, including olfactory, the sense of smell and gustatory, the sense of taste (p. 157). The rest of this chapter does focus mainly on audiovisual, aligning it more with other books, but I found the reminder for us to be less limited, nonetheless, beneficial.

One of the major strengths of this textbook is the writing style. Tucker and her co-authors should be commended for the writing style that informs without patronizing students at any level of public speaking ability. I've taught many sections of this course and still found myself engaged. Students may appreciate the conversational style found throughout this book, as they explore the why in addition to the what and how. Why is it important to practice delivery (p. 211) or to employ ethical public speaking (p. 46)? Why can persuasion be difficult to accomplish



(p. 261)? The questions “why should I” and “why would I ever need to know this” are answered, priming students for a more engaged reading of the text.

*Exploring Public Speaking* was written for public speaking students of today. The advancements of today’s public speaking, whether an evolving audience or changing technology, are intentionally included, rather than added as an afterthought in a new, more expensive edition. There are clear sections for conducting research from a wide variety of sources. This does include library databases, but it also includes tips for checking the credibility of sources found elsewhere online. As the sources of news and information continue to evolve, it is important to have a textbook that was written with this evolution in mind.

Appendix C: public speaking online demonstrates the authors’ focus on public speaking students of today. With the pandemic came a proliferation of online public speaking and a flurry of instructors working to adapt their courses. The textbook I was using during the transition to online teaching was not written with online courses in mind. It was adequate for other reasons but without being written intentionally for today’s speakers, it felt outdated as I tried to adapt it to an online format. Appendix C of *Exploring Public Speaking* addresses the needs of online public speaking students, deliberately. There are online-speaking-specific tips for visual aids, preparation, and delivery (e.g., keep your visuals simple; prepare the background; practice working with the technology, etc.). It can be used in conjunction with the text, or it can be downloaded as its own standalone chapter for a multitude of speaking purposes.

There are two noticeable opportunities for improvement. The first is an obvious lack of diversity in the chosen photographs. The images work well and directly relate to the text; they are not superfluous by any means. However, as the textbook continues to expand worldwide, the images need depict more diverse students. While there are dozens of white students and

presenters, the number of people of color can be counted on one hand. The all-white writers of *Exploring Public Speaking* may see themselves and the majority of students at Dalton State College, where this textbook originated, represented, but this book has evolved from its first edition as a department-use text to an open-source book downloaded over two-hundred thousand times worldwide. Significantly more diversity is needed. Students need to see themselves in academia. This is lacking in this textbook.

The second opportunity for improvement is in chapter ten: language. This section includes a useful guide for gender-diverse language (e.g., avoiding the universal he), but could benefit from a more expansive discussion of the why, how, and what for gender-diverse language that moves beyond the gender-binary into the significantly more varied realm of gender identities and expressions. Again, the authors may see themselves in this language, but this won't be the case for every student. This book really does appear to be student-centered, so I am hoping these areas for improvement will be addressed.

There are many similarities between this textbook and others I've encountered. It does cover the standard content for public speaking. However, the writing style, modern-day lessons, and adaptability are great strengths that set *Exploring Public Speaking* apart in a fairly saturated market. Another strength is the price. This textbook covers the same ground as significantly more costly books, for free. *Exploring Public Speaking 4<sup>th</sup> edition* is worth considering for your public speaking courses.

## Review of *Humans r social media*

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iVoices Media Lab, & Daly, D. (2021). *Humans r social media*. University of Arizona.

<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsm/>

*Humans R Social Media* is an essential textbook for any instructor interested in the diverse and expansive realm of contemporary digital communication. Incorporating undergraduate student voices through the University of Arizona’s iVoices Media Lab with Daly’s insightful and accessible writing style, this textbook interweaves prominent theoretical conversations of the field with critical self-reflection. Bringing a human-focused view to social media in the digital age, Daly argues “the development of social media culture, including norms and technological affordances, is wrapped up in you, and me, and other humans. And we are also wrapped up in that culture; as we shape it, it shapes us” (Ch. 10, para. 7). Human action, agency, and behavior are central to the book. Regularly featuring undergraduate student voices, this text elicits a collaborative and interactive tone. While the digital environment of the text is marked by an ever-changing impermanence, the use of both theory and practice, as well as the integration of contemporary discourses in the field with critical self-reflection make this text a strong choice.

The interactivity of the text prompts engagement and illustrates student agency through a rich utilization of projects created by iVoices students. The University of Arizona’s iVoices Media Lab “channels knowledge shared through students’ stories into new media, curricula, and scholarship” (2022). As implemented throughout, *Humans R Social Media* places importance on individual and shared experiences of using social media as technology rapidly develops. Located

in orange boxes labeled “Student Content” are thematic narrative-driven pieces created by iVoices students discussing their experiences using social media. These projects include short essays, audio recordings, and videos, both individual and collaborative. Social media is “grounded in how people talk and behave, not in rules set by any authorities” (Introduction, para. 8). It is only fitting in discussing social media, many different voices and types of participation are included. Notions of agency and participation are prominent throughout the text. As the reader scrolls, each chapter located on the same webpage, they are prompted with hyperlinks, embedded videos, and relevant external conversations allowing for interactive engagement with the ideas of the text and beyond. “Almost any standards at work in social media can be changed by users if enough of us start pushing against those standards. We create social media” (Introduction, para. 8). In addition to student voices, readers can offer terms or ideas which may be missing from the textbook in a Google form at the end of Chapter 10 and other authors can participate through contributing a chapter in the second half of the book. The affordances of its digitality allow for a robust interactive and collaborative text which invokes feelings of familiarity.

The digital nature of the text allows for a multimodality only possible in this kind of space, showing the expansiveness of digital pedagogical tools. Each chapter incorporates audio, images, embedded videos, and hyper-links to illuminate the networked underpinnings of online spaces. The digital design allows for hands-on learning by incorporating multiple means of accessing definitions of bolded terms, interactive quizzes that test knowledge of each chapter’s main points, and a related content section with dozens of links to external sources to broaden the chapter conversations. Although its multimodal functions are engaging, some are subject to change because of their external nature. Thus, the textbook will have to be updated in order to

remain relevant and to have accessible accurate links. Daly highlights this complication in a note on impermanence in the beginning of the text, commenting on the complexity of networked interactions. “All informational content today, and particularly online content, is comprised of structures built on shifting foundations ... First we will lose the hyperlinks, as one, then a few, then many links lead to disappeared pages ... Second, the platform on which this book is published could be compromised” (Preface, para. 4). In this way, the book models the digital landscape of contemporary social media in its malleability.

Each chapter incorporates socio-political and ethical implications of digital communication. This includes notions of private and public, identity formation, attention, algorithms and bias, online activism, and post-truth discourses. In Chapter 6, titled “Activism,” Daly draws on examples from the Zapatistas, the Arab Spring, and #BlackLivesMatter to present both the strategies used and the tensions that arise from utilizing social media as a digital tool for issue awareness and activist organizing. Daly highlights five strategies used in social media activism, which are: speed, visuals, performances, inclusiveness, and “masked leadership” (Ch. 6, para. 21). She then troubles the use of social media in social movements with Evgeny Morozov’s term “slacktivism” wherein users experience an illusion of significant participation “at zero risk to themselves” (Ch. 6, para. 30). Additionally, at the end of every chapter, there are short descriptions, hyperlinks, and visual aids depicting a variety of different contemporary issues and how they might be analyzed through the framework of the chapter. For example, after Chapter 8 titled “Information,” Daly points to COVID-19 during spring 2020 as an emergent site for critical conversations surrounding information, trust, and accuracy. This critical engagement with current events is woven throughout the book.

Many of these events are current to the decade, however, there are some places where material already needs updating. For example, in chapter 8, titled “Information,” are “Dr. Daly’s Steps to ‘Reading’ Social Media News Stories in 2020.” After articulating the important differences between “disinformation,” “misinformation,” and “bullshit,” Daly crafts steps for critical reading, giving students tools to engage with and unpack the different kinds of information they encounter on a daily basis through social media. While these tools remain useful, urging students to investigate sources and consider reliable fact-checking sites, the landscape of news media has already changed widely, especially considering the ongoing pandemic. In the following COVID-19 example after the chapter, Daly states, “Yes the bad information machine is still chugging, but the virus has also bridged countless divides” (Chapter 8, para. 54). While this sentiment may have been widely regarded as true nearing the beginning of the pandemic, ongoing political strife has shown a nation widely divided which, as of February 2022, can be charted along party lines with vaccine decision-making and rates of infection (Leonhardt, 2022). Though Daly highlights the impermanence and complexity of the digital landscape, the lack of updating may already leave some chapters incomplete. Instructors using this text in their classes may consider implementing updated examples to reinvigorate the contemporary settings of the chapters.

As an open-sourced text, this book is both accessible and easy to use. By taking away some of the monetary burden for students attending college, instructors are able to use this text as much or as little as they need in their classrooms. Though the book in its entirety is valuable and illustrative of the diverse array of approaches to studying human interaction on social media, because of the ease of accessibility, instructors can implement any section of the text into their pedagogy. This unique ability of an open-sourced textbook may help mediate the problem of

impermanence. As a book designed in and for an online medium, it is best read online. Having downloaded the book to multiple different formats, including pdf, the easiest, most accessible, and most interactive way to engage with the textbook is by locating it online. Similar to the impermanence of its digital modality, some downloadable formats leave absent embedded videos and hyperlinks which impair the overall functionality of the text; however, this should not deter instructors from utilizing this open-sourced textbook in their courses.

*Humans R Social Media* is a valuable text for anyone teaching undergraduate courses pertaining to human interaction in digital spaces, ethical considerations of social media, foundational conversations in digital communication, and current socio-political issues circulating in social media spaces. Although this text appears geared toward an undergraduate audience, as a graduate student, I found it to be useful, engaging, easy to navigate, and helpful for grounding foundational terminology. As an open-sourced textbook, *Humans R Social Media* can and should be implemented as a multimodal, interactive, student-centered pedagogical tool for educators.

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## Review of *Public speaking: The virtual text*

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Schreiber, L. (Ed.). (2013). *Public speaking: The virtual text*. LibreTexts.

[https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Public\\_Speaking/Public\\_Speaking\\_\(The\\_Public\\_Speaking\\_Project\)](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Communication/Public_Speaking/Public_Speaking_(The_Public_Speaking_Project))

There is surely no shortage of public speaking texts on the market. Some are marketed to communication practitioners, some appeal to hobbyists, but most are intended for the classroom. Although the content of the latter covers largely the same content and, aside from some cultural examples, rarely changes in a meaningful way, the book prices that postsecondary students must pay is a challenge with disproportionate effects. As such, communication educators should consider our time to be a kairotic moment that invites us to explore open educational resources (OER) and open-source textbooks as an opportunity to improve student equity and increase learning outside of the classroom by removing cost as a barrier in a course that many colleges and universities require for students to graduate.

When it comes to open-source textbooks for public speaking, *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* has been a pioneer and a standard-bearer. First appearing in digital formats for the public in 2013, this work was originally part of the Public Speaking Project with its own dedicated website, but in 2021 it was relocated to the Social Sciences Library section of LibreTexts, a leading database housing free educational resources. The change of location also altered its format; PDFs have been replaced by a user-friendly browser interface (with the option to download sections or chapters as PDFs if preferred). Rather than being written by one or a few



authors, *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* is comprised of 18 thorough chapters composed by different authors, allowing each to focus on their own particular expertise. Although this makes it a bit more like an edited volume, the overall product is organized and edited to present a consistent final product to the reader. On the whole, the text provides holistic instruction in researching, writing, and delivering speeches and presentations in different settings and for diverse audiences.

The scope of the content and structure of the chapters are comparable to most standard textbooks intended for public speaking courses but also include some additional areas of interest that are often neglected. Following the introduction, the first chapter outlines the history of public speaking in western civilization, from its origins in ancient rhetorical theory to its role in contemporary politics. The next several chapters introduce readers to what an orator must consider before developing their speech, including communication ethics, effective listening, audience analysis, and critical thinking. The book then turns to elements of speech writing, which covers researching, outlining, organizing, and using rhetorical devices. Moving beyond composition, the following four chapters consider different aspects of delivery, from developing confidence to a surprisingly thorough overview of visual aids to adapting to global audiences. The final chapters focus on different types of speeches and settings: special occasions, informative speeches, persuasive speeches, and group presentations. Each chapter includes discussion and review questions as well as glossaries for key terms .

Although the authors have done a commendable job in offering a standard public speaking text as an OER, there are some issues and limitations that instructors should consider before adopting it for courses. The most significant is that while it covers more than the typical content expected for a public speaking course, the work is perhaps too broad. The separated

digital chapters, though convenient, seem to disguise the density of the overall product—a print edition would be a hefty tome nearing 400 pages. This can eventually wear out the patience of some students while burying the preferred content of instructors deep within lengthy chapters. Navigation may be especially daunting to instructors who have preferred some of the brief handbook-style texts like Beebe and Beebe's *A Concise Public Speaking Handbook* or Sprague, Stuart, and Bodary's *The Speaker's Handbook*.

Similarly, like many multi-author volumes, *The Virtual Text* suffers from a bit of disjointedness between its chapters, especially when it comes to the redundancy of content. For example, readers encounter an in-depth exploration of logical fallacies in Chapter 6, only to be introduced to them again ten chapters later as though it were a brand-new subject. That sort of chapter-to-chapter inconsistency doubtlessly adds to the organizational issues stemming from the book's length. On the other hand, opportunities to explore topics that have more recently become essential staples in the basic communication course, like speech anxiety, diversity and inclusion, and (ironically) virtual presentations, are lacking or absent entirely.

Despite its problems, *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* boasts plenty of advantages that should encourage instructors to adopt it for their courses. Firstly, the aforementioned depth and breadth of content ensures that a variety of approaches to public speaking pedagogy can be supported; indeed, the book is substantial and eclectic enough to allow a grounding in communication theory, rhetoric, performance studies, ethics, and more.

Furthermore, the text's extensive length does offer chapters that are less common yet still useful. Peter A. DeCaro's "Origins of Public Speaking" chapter, for example, is far more than a simple historical account, providing an introduction to relevant concepts from rhetorical theory and philosophy. Sheila Kasperek also provides an exceptional chapter on designing and using

visual aids that's far more utile, especially in today's online environments, than the short blurbs included in most texts. Educators may also appreciate how the book extends beyond the standard chapters on ceremonial, informative, and persuasive speaking with Jennifer Woods' section on group presentations, which thoughtfully guides students in creating and delivering a consistent, coordinated project with their peers.

Of course, not all educators may include such content in their course design, but therein is one of the many advantages of an open resource like this one: chapters (or sections) can be left unassigned without the guilt of students "wasting" money on a complete textbook only to read certain segments of it. Similarly, although instructors cannot edit or add sections directly, any insufficiencies in the content can be supplemented through instruction or other materials. One of the greatest strengths of *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* is its cost, offering a completely free open-source textbook that alleviates the growing educational expenses in a class that is required for most students at many universities.

While some practitioners and casual readers may find this work useful, the audience who will benefit most is students. The writing and scope may be challenging for secondary education, but *The Virtual Text* is perfectly at home in postsecondary public speaking courses or their equivalent. Additionally, the ability to separate the chapters offers opportunities in other courses: the critical thinking chapter is a solid introduction to argumentation, and the group presentation chapter is beneficial for any course with such a project, to name just two examples.

Every educator, of course, has their own preferences regarding length, style, and content, but it is hard to imagine that anyone looking to adopt a textbook for the basic communication course would find this one to be anything less than sufficient and, thus, worth any trade-off from a preferred traditional textbook in light of price tags in the double or even triple digits. Overall,

the old adage of getting what you pay for is not applicable here, as *Public Speaking: The Virtual Text* offers an impressive product that cuts no corners and instead offers far more than many of its pricey counterparts.

## Review of *Small group communication: Forming and sustaining teams*

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Linabary, J. R., & Castro, M. (2021). *Small group communication: Forming and sustaining teams*. Open Textbook Library. <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/small-group-communication-forming-sustaining-teams>

*Small Group Communication: Forming and Sustaining Teams* is designed as an undergraduate textbook committed to furnishing students with an assortment of theories, principles, and strategies for improving group communication experiences across a variety of social domains and contexts. According to Linabary and Castro, the text was crafted to cover content in an upper division small group communication course taught at Emporia State University (Emporia, KS). While the book is configured closely in both arrangement and substance to other traditionally available group communication textbooks, it remains comparatively advantageous for an open copyright license that allows users to access the publication at no cost through multiple formats including online, e-book, or as a PDF file. A major strength of *Small Group Communication* is its ability to highlight the fundamental concepts of group communication theory (broadly considered) in plain and uncomplicated detail while interspersing useful and relatable examples that complement and reinforce the book's core content. The text is written in a highly readable, nontechnical fashion and may be used as a principal or supplementary resource in either introductory or advanced group communication classes.

The book is comprised of 16 chapters that are thematically clustered around four major divisions. The first section, “Group and Team Communication Overview,” contains a solitary chapter that lays out important group-based terminology as well as considers the central features of group communication including types of groups, group structures, and the benefits and drawbacks of group work. Sections two and three constitute the bulk of the text and center on issues that bear directly and secondarily on the formation and maintenance of groups. Chapter Two, “Understanding Group Formation,” surveys the motives underlying group membership and compares two explanatory models of group development (i.e., Tuckman’s model and punctuated equilibrium). Chapter Three, “Identifying Group Roles,” draws on Benne and Sheats’ functional role theory to frame discussions of task, maintenance, and negative group roles. Chapter Four describes the features and functions of group norms and offers instructive advice for addressing destructive normative behaviors. Chapter Five, “Working in Diverse Teams,” delivers a pragmatic, albeit superficial, primer in cultural diversity while Chapter Six addresses the bases, sources, and tactics of power in group contexts.

The largest part of the textbook, section three, examines group processes and methods of decision-making/problem-solving. Chapter Seven highlights elements of group climate and features a concise, but apt, synopsis of Bormann’s symbolic convergence theory. Chapter Eight, “Navigating Group Conflict,” deals with forms of functional and dysfunctional conflict, with matters ranging from the productive dynamics of group conflict to consideration of individual conflict management styles. Most useful are the strategies presented for conflict prevention and reduction. Chapter Nine concentrates exclusively on the topic of social loafing. What is unique about this emphasis, particularly in the comparative context of other group communication textbooks, is the specialized and self-contained treatment the authors offer the subject with

regard to the causes and effects of social loafing, cultural and gender-based variations of loafing, and ways of addressing reduced individual effort. The chapter encourages readers to reflect on the consequences of diminished effort in a way that is both thought-provoking and applied. Chapter Ten includes relevant discussions about groupthink, consensus making, and decision-making methods, while Chapter Eleven draws upon John Dewey's reflective thinking framework to put forth a well-known group problem-solving model that incorporates problem definition, analysis, generating and selecting solutions, and implementation planning. Chapters Twelve and Thirteen familiarize readers with the principles of effective leadership and compare conventional models of group leadership: designated and emergent leadership, trait versus situational approaches, and situational (i.e., Hersey-Blanchard model, path-goal theory) and transformative leadership styles.

The final section, "Putting Group Communication Skills into Practice," focuses on practical guidelines and communicative applications for managing group meetings, facilitating creativity sessions, and planning and conducting public presentations. In Chapter Fourteen, the authors give concrete direction for meeting preparation (e.g., time, place, manner, forming an agenda) and offer time tested tactics for supporting group meetings and deliberations; sensible tips for employing technology and taking part in virtual meetings are also addressed. Chapter Fifteen, "Enhancing Creativity in Groups," surveys creativity in generous depth and synthesizes numerous methods for facilitating brainstorming sessions which teachers and students should find valuable as any or all of them could be modified for classroom demonstration and instruction. The concluding chapter, "Presenting as a Group," is a primer in the principles of public speaking; the authors succinctly review types of group presentations, approaches for organizing content, speech outlining, audience analysis, and verbal and nonverbal delivery.

Students inexperienced in public speaking will find the material instructive and convenient, especially if oral presentations and/or group discussions are required components of the course.

Two short appendices tackle the subjects of professional communication (e.g., writing emails, formatting memos, netiquette) and APA style. Having taught business communication and research methods over the years, I can appreciate the pedagogical importance of this supplemental material and find merit in its inclusion here.

All chapters begin with clear and concise learning objectives and close with three to five “review and reflection questions” which could be assigned independently or utilized for classroom conversation. Figures, images, and tables are sprinkled strategically throughout the text and help readers by inserting attractive visual features into the expository content. Important vocabulary words are highlighted with mouse-over text that allows readers to define new or unfamiliar terminology as they study without interrupting the flow of reading. There are references at the end of each chapter and a full glossary of vocabulary terms at the end of the textbook.

By all appearances and manifest intent by the authors, the textbook is geared toward use in lower-level group communication courses (either online or traditional), but could easily be incorporated as a supplementary resource across a wide range of classes and disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, human relations). Although Linabary and Castro do not provide much in the way of original or inventive content, they do a respectable job of streamlining traditional group communication scholarship and balancing it with functional and applied examples, best practices, etc. Given the open access nature of the text, the book could be used in myriad applications. Individual chapters could stand on their own and serve as a useful pedagogical resource for instructors interested in specific topics or cross-curricular subjects. Hyperlinks to the



material could also be shared in ways conducive with varying learning modalities and instructional delivery methods.

In closing, *Small Group Communication: Forming and Sustaining Teams* is an intelligent, flexible substitute to traditionally-published group communication textbooks that can be freely accessed by students, teachers, and, of course, the public at large. While the book's lack of ancillary aids may be a hurdle for new or adjunct instructors, it more than makes up for it in its concise writing and clear organizational structure. I would have no reservations about using or recommending the book as either a primary or secondary text for an undergraduate group communication course. Indeed, the authors are to be congratulated for their unique contribution to group communication curricula.

## Review of *Theatrical Worlds*

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Mitchell, C., Hayford, M., Browne, K., Mallet, M., Calloway, S., Djuren, K., Davis, J., Fiebig, J.,  
& Butler, M. (2014). *Theatrical worlds*. University Press of Florida.

Wealthy, white communities have dominated the legacy of arts patronage. Because of this, many economically disadvantaged people have not experienced the transformative alchemy of live theatre. Over the past few years, we as theatre artists have had difficult but needed discussions on how to support all communities with our artistry, not just those who can afford the full price ticket (and parking.) We are now having these same discussions within educational systems: how can we open the Academy to everyone seeking to learn? Therefore, I am thrilled to see educators creating open-source textbooks. This is an exciting contemporary tool for communities and individuals who see a physical textbook's retail price as a barrier to that learning. However, open-source should never default to lesser quality. Initially produced in 2014, Charlie Mitchell's *Theatrical Worlds* has great ambitions to provide clear information on theatre arts. Mitchell writes that the book "seeks to give insight into the people and processes that create theatre." He discusses how they aim to strip away the "magic" one feels when experiencing live performance and replace it with "wonder for the artistry that makes it work." (Page 4.) By this, Mitchell's book does precisely what he proposes in the introduction, a look at theatre's historical and current applications through these different topics. However, it lacks nuance for contemporary readers in both the language used and the presentation of information.

Various theatre professors provide a chapter in their area of specialization. The book begins with an introduction titled “Mapping Realities,” written by Mitchell and Michelle Hayford. The following section is Theatre Production which goes through a range of theatrical disciplines by chapter: Acting, Directing, Set Design, Costume Design, and Lighting Design. I was slightly disappointed there were no chapters on playwrighting, dramaturgy, or stage management; they detailed sound design through an interview with Richard Woodbury at the end of the Set Design chapter. However, I found all the chapters on design very engaging, especially the historical sections. Notably, Mark E. Mallett’s writing on set design. Mallett explained the evolution of scenography, basic visual components of design, and technical direction effectively without too strong of didactic undertones. All the design-oriented chapters provide a robust overview of what they do from beginning to end in production. The third and last section goes through Genre, Shakespeare, The American Musical, and World Theatre. Jim Davis’ chapter on Genre was an excellent addition as it contemplated the notorious “ism” within dramatic criticism and classification. The book's structure is strong; it provides a comprehensive overview of the major fields within the performing arts.

Despite this broad framework of the textbook, there are critical aspects within those fields that have been excluded. For example, the chapter on acting, which Mitchell also wrote, leaves out large sections of historical and contemporary acting practices. His chapter begins detailing the origins of Western performance, starting from Greek and Roman rhetorical traditions, and then moves to the less-than-subtle acting theories of Delsarte. The remaining chapter goes into lengthy detail on Konstantin Stanislavski’s acting method. Any contemporary performance theorists, which in this case are Meyerhold and Michael Chekov, are left to a concluding paragraph along with Laban, Linklater, and others. Given Mitchell’s earlier “Mapping Realities,”

which professed performance as an all-encompassing aspect of the human condition ranging from the religious rites of ancient Egyptians to video games, to then read a chapter on primarily one specific acting style was unexpected. There is no doubt that Stanislavski's psychological approach to acting has its chokehold on North American training programs. However, to overtly emphasize Stanislavski within their acting chapter feels dated. While Mitchell's desire to narrow in on the most prominent Western acting style is not inherently negative, he leaves out an almost century of progress, theory, and history since Stanislavski's revolution. The Group Theatre, for example, is not discussed besides a brief mention of Lee Strasberg. I found this a questionable omission given The Group Theatre's immense influence on the American acting tradition, both on stage and screen, and how intrinsically Stanislavski influenced their work. This is compounded by the fact they included a Stella Adler quote earlier in the book with the simple title of "actor" after her name.

I also felt that the overall written style of the book would create unwanted conversations during a lecture. There is no doubt that over the last few years, there has been much discourse in reexamining our use of language and its gendered implication. These conversations became more mainstream well after this book was digitally published. However, that does not absolve the many moments throughout *Theatrical Worlds*, which tend to use "he" as the default third person. I feel Kevin Browne's chapter on directing represents this male-centric approach to language the strongest. Browne consistently refers to directors as "he" with the cumbersome "he or she" now and again. Younger readerships are more aware of gendered language, and because of that, I feel that their awareness would discredit Browne's chapter. These conflicting sensibilities would require the lecturer to clarify or qualify the text, which in the end dilutes its authority.

As I read the various chapters, I noticed misspelling after misspelling. In addition, I noticed that many typos were in different fonts and sizes, along with characters not found in English. Given how pervasive these oddities are, I assume something happened during the digitalization of the text. These typos were made especially difficult to read, given the overall less-than-ideal visual aesthetic of the text. While it is a Beta Version, there is little to no design to the information presented, a feature that I feel many would expect from this type of educational material. The entire book appears as a sea of black and white text with pasted images now and again. While a few graphics are scattered throughout, the book presents more like an academic journal than a learning tool. It will not surprise me if students struggle with the readings, given the lack of visual aids. Many of the chapters would benefit from visual assistance to guide the reader from point to point.

Lastly, the book has a complete lack of citations or bibliography. *Theatrical Worlds* has no citation footnotes or even a reading list at the end. The only consistent citations are for the used images and photographs, but those citations vary significantly in style or information provided even then. Educational texts such as this are responsible for providing accurate and fact-based scholarship. Excluding any citations is a disservice to students and us as educators. Any reader wishing to learn more, who might feel inspired, could not pursue further study because they have no sources to investigate. I could not recommend this book for any serious academic setting because of this omission.

*Theatrical Worlds* is an attempt to provide accessibility to the arts. Theatre is an expression of the human condition and everyone, no matter their background, has the inherent right to explore their artistry. Mitchell's book looks to the de-mystify theatre to open it up for curious minds to better understand its historical, theoretical, and mechanical nature. However,

his book provides an all too narrowed focus that omits core aspects of those fields of study. I feel that *Theatrical Worlds*' sensibilities do not resonate with a more contemporary readership, along with limited visual aids and dated language. Given the lack of citations throughout, *Theatrical Worlds* would work well in an academic setting as a supplement rather than the primary source of study. I would personally recommend utilizing other free resources found online. CrashCourse is an educational channel on YouTube originally created by John and Hank Green. This channel has won awards and has partnered with traditional educational institutions. They have produced a series on Theatre History that provides clear and often entertaining education. For more production-based open sources, I recommend the YouTube channels of professional-producing theatres. The National Theatre in London and Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon have lengthy playlists of videos of their artists explaining what they do and how they do it. The American Theatre Wing also has the video series Working in the Wings, which examines specific national productions or fields of theatrical artistry. These free online resources provide an engaging and contemporary approach to theatre education. Open educational resources are an incredible feature of the all-encompassing digital age. I look forward to seeing how we as educators can use it to create accessibility to the arts.

## **Review of *Writing like a PR pro: Why writing is still crucial in a digital and visual world***

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Sterenberg, M. (2017). *Writing like a PR pro: Why writing is still crucial in a digital and visual world*. The Ohio State University.

*Write Like a PR Pro: Why writing is still crucial in a digital and visual world* by Mary Sterenberg is an open educational resource (OER) textbook on writing in the field of public relations. The text is separated into five sections and each of the 13 chapters uses real world examples. The engaging examples that allow students to understand how the material corresponds to the real world is a major strength of this textbook. I have taught writing courses for over 10 years and in the past few years have explored the use of OER materials. I therefore have used this text for two semesters in a junior-level intermediate writing for public relations course.

Part one of the text is *PR Writing and Planning Basics* which is made up of three chapters. The text establishes the importance of writing as the foundation of public relations. Basics of writing for public relations are also covered such as associated press (AP) style and identifying target audiences. PR professional advice helps students understand how writing will be a part of their future careers. Part two, a single chapter focused on *Writing for Owned Media* where blogging in public relations is explained using real-world examples. Part three of the text is *Writing for Social Media* and consists of five chapters. This is an area many students are interested in, and the text goes in depth in different aspects while providing engaging examples.

In the section, “How the PR Pros Do It: Retailer Jumps on Holiday Hashtags to Increase Engagement,” an example of how social media can be used by established brands to grow engagement was detailed nicely. Part four is *Writing for Video and Visuals* consists of two chapter, another area important for aspiring public relations professionals. The final section, *Writing for Earned Media*, two chapters, explores news values and how to successfully create releases that will lead to media coverage in two chapters. Brand journalism is covered giving students perspective on how brands are creating their own stories in the crowded media environment.

I have now used this text for two semesters. Student response has been extremely positive. Students found the shorter chapters to be easily accessible. The focus on real-world examples was also viewed as helpful and engaging. Engagement with the course and topics was increased compared to when I taught the course prior semesters. The ability to get the text at the beginning of the semester at no cost was extremely appealing to my students and they continued the engagement throughout the entire semester.

The biggest strength of the text is the real-world examples. The excerpt on Travel Nevada excellently lays out how a brand (in this case a state) must account for preconceived notions when deciding on a marketing plan. This example demonstrates how Nevada must work to get visitors to think of the state as more than just Las Vegas and casinos. This type of practical exemplar is useful to illustrate valuable aspects of public relations writing. The biggest weakness of the text is that it does not delve into the nuts and bolts of public relations writing. Therefore, this text should be supplemented with additional writing-focused materials if it is used in a skills-based public relations course.



This text is useful as either a primary or supplemental textbook. Any public relations course could benefit from using the sections on the public relations planning process to bolster other materials used in the course. The text also includes a YouTube page containing interviews with PR professionals which are highlighted in the chapters. Since the chapters vary in length and depth it is possible to use specific chapters as they fit topics in other courses. Given that writing is an essential skill across all aspects of the curriculum this text is a useful resource for many courses related to new media and the converged media landscape.