ABSTRACT

In this portfolio, I address a particular teaching intervention to address student questioning of the practicality of the C205 course and its concepts. The rationale, the implementation, and the analysis of the collected data of the intervention are included in this portfolio. The fundamental purpose of this project was to emphasize the practicality of the course (including communication theories, concepts) through lecture, discussion, and student assignments by using concrete socio-political examples to connect theory with practice.
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Course Background

C205: Introduction to Communication and Culture is a required course for all CMCL majors. The purpose of the course is to introduce students to the three topoi (areas of interests) in the interdisciplinary CMCL Department. Our department brings together scholars with interests in Rhetoric and Public Culture, Performance and Ethnographic Studies, and Film and Media, and this course emphasizes some of the ways that these fields of study are interrelated. This course also intends to prepare students for higher-level courses in the department by acquainting students with some of the habits of thought and methods of study that will characterize these higher-level courses. Finally, it is my goal as an instructor to better equip students to understand communication so that as citizens they will be able to engage in contemporary socio-political life. The idea of citizenship is at the core of the course and its teachings.

C205 is a multiple-section course in the spring taught by five Associate Instructors. In the fall semester, our course director teaches a large lecture course and the five AIs each lead two discussion sections. In the following spring semester, each AI is the instructor on record for his/her own class. For the spring semester, I had 50 students with varying backgrounds and ages. There were both CMCL majors and non-CMCL majors and I had each classification (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior) represented in the course. The class revolved around a lecture-discussion format. In that, I would often begin the class with a lecture, but encouraged discussion from the students and often conducted activities that were discussion-based. To gather a better understanding of the course content (including readings and assignments) please see the Syllabus Appendix (Appendix 1). The course is centered on two overarching themes: “Looking Through Communication” (LTC) and “Looking At Communication” (LAC). Each author and/or concept is placed under one of these two headings at the beginning of the semester. By the end of the semester we begin to complicate this distinct bifurcation by reading theorists who can be considered both LTC and LAC.

Objectives

The learning objectives for this course include not only an introduction to the three topoi of the CMCL Department to students but to have them acknowledge the different approaches to understanding and theorizing communication and its cultural impact and role in society. The main objective, in material terms, is for the students to be able to associate each author, theory, and/or concept with LTC and/or LAC. Not only do students need to be able to identify where each author/concept belongs, but they also need to know why it belongs there. In accordance with the course objective of exposing students to different theories of communication and the different elements of our department and the notion of enhancing student understand of communication that leads to more active
citizenship, my goal for the Teagle project was to approach students’ belief and complaint that the course lacked practicality. In the fall evaluations, there was a recurrent theme of student comments that reflected this notion. These types of comments included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Comments – Fall 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Concepts very abstract.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Make more real world connections.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It really helped when you connected the course topics with modern examples that made it easier to understand.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Need to use concise examples.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Some of the course concepts are a little difficult to relate to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Sometimes I felt they (concepts) weren’t always clarified – more examples would have been beneficial.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Waste of tuition money on a pointless class.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Maybe relate the topics and ideas to our life so we have a better understanding.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Come up with more examples for the topics. This could help clarify.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was my intent to implement into the course through my lectures, class discussion, and testing an emphasis on the practicality of the theories examined. The students in the fall believe the course to be too abstract (and hard). There was an inherent resistance to being challenged and disbelief that they gained any value from the course. It is important for students to recognize the value of the course not only to ensure its continued existence at the university, but also due to the important nature of the course in exposing students to different theories of communication.

**Intervention**

The intervention for C205 was to emphasize the practicality of the course through use of real world examples in lecture, class discussion and assignments. An emphasis of practicality is particularly important to my belief in encouraging citizenship and in the idea that citizens who learn to understand communication in the way it is presented in this course are better equipped for contemporary life than those who think of communication as merely a way to transmit information.

My intervention was two-fold in nature. Not only did I need to provide examples for students of how course concepts could be related to the real world, I needed and wanted students to be able to also identify and explain examples of C205 concepts they encountered in their own lives. It was important for the students to be able to recognize
the practicality of the course with their own examples and not rely solely on my thoughts. This also aligns with my learner-centered pedagogical method. Learning is an active engagement of one’s mind with theoretical concepts and the ability to apply such concepts to contemporary issues. To learn is to be engaged with material and ideas not only from the past, but to apply those ideas to current issues and to decipher where those ideas do not work in current society. I believe learning is an everyday and constant occurrence, in which one can learn something new everyday if he/she is willing to do so. In a successful learning situation, the roles of the student and the teacher are not defined by specific boundaries or roles.

Both student and teacher have the opportunity to learn from one another and hence are simultaneously both the teacher and the student. The student/teacher relationship is very much a reciprocal relationship. Teachers should be willing to accept new ideas and be willing to learn from their students just as their students are willing to learn from them. This reciprocal nature is at the core of a productive, sound student/teacher relationship. I believe in Paulo Freire’s idea (as expressed in Pedagogy of the Oppressed) that a teacher should not assume to know everything about a material and be willing to learn from her students. The classroom environment I want to create is one in which the instructor is not the “puzzlemaster.” According to Nancy Chick in Exploring Signature Pedagogies, “at some point, a cycle had been created: we accept or claim students’ interpretive dependence as they expect us to give our interpretations to them (the consumers of these interpretations), which they then mirror back to use on exams and in essays” (45). I want to break this cycle.

In order to address the deemed practicality of the course, I did several things. First, I directly used practical examples of course concepts in my lectures. This included incorporating examples from students who participated in an on-line forum in which I encouraged them to incorporate course concepts with their everyday lives. Second, to test whether or not I was adequately emphasizing the practicality of the course, I had the students do a mid-semester evaluation and reflected on the end of the semester evaluations (See Appendix 2). Finally, to test students’ ability to recognize the practicality of course concepts, the final exam included “real-world” questions that focused on how course concepts related to practical communication situations. This final element of the intervention was an assessment of student understanding of the practicality of course concepts.

**Assessment/Data**

The following data reflect the evidence of student learning that related directly to my intervention.

**Mid-Semester Survey Questions:**
The following three questions were part of a mid-semester survey I gave to my students in the spring semester. The following includes the statement from the
survey and a chart indicating the percent of the students who strongly agreed, agreed, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagreed.

Statement 1: The real world examples provided in class enhance my understanding of course concepts of “looking through communication” and “looking at communication.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement 1</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statement 2: Assignments in which I sought real world examples enhanced my understanding of course concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement 2</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statement 3: What I learn in this course is useful.

Exam Questions:
The following bar graph shows the difference between the fall and spring semester as it relates to correctly selected responses to four exam questions. These four exam questions (multiple choice) were exactly the same on the fall and spring final.
End of the Semester Evaluations:
The following are comments from the spring semester evaluations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Comments – Spring 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Cortney is always excited to teach us and mixes things up in lecture with clips or pictures to give helpful examples and apply the course concepts to real life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Cortney does a good job of applying what we’re leaning to real life scenarios.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis/Reflection

The data reflects an apparent understanding by students of the practicality of the course – although possibly not to the extent I would have wanted. With the mid-semester evaluations, the students overwhelming agreed/strongly agreed that the “real world” examples used in the course helped their understanding of the course concepts of “LTC” and “LAC.” However, this was not true of the statement asking the students if they believe what they learn in class will be useful outside the classroom. Although, I would argue that the disagree/strongly disagree percentages would have been even larger in the fall semester. This data, along with the end-of-the-semester evaluation comments, seem to indicate that my attempts to incorporate the “real world” into the course did change student learning/understanding.

There may be more room to emphasize how these “real world” examples can be used in the practical life of the student. To me, the lack of student comments at the end of year pertaining to the class as “a waste of time” also indicate a shift in student belief in the value of the course. Through the use of examples (some generated by students) in lecture and discussion, students were able to not only grasp the concepts in a more concrete matter, but could also understand how these concepts alter/change their own perceptions (and hence is practical in the way they understand communication and culture). Finally, through my own observation with my students, there were a lot fewer complaints about the class as pointless especially as compared to the fall semester.

In response to the data, there would be a couple of things I would do differently in the future. First, I would try to have the students generate even more of the examples I used in the course. I think often I relied too heavily on my own examples that the students (possibly due to age) could not relate to. Second, I would have cut down the number of readings in the course. I believe the students could have been more engaged and interrogated each reading if they had less of them. And through this more in-depth analysis, the students would have been more capable of understanding the practicality and importance of each reading. Finally, with C205, I tried to use both concrete examples and general principles of the theories to enhance comprehension but I now wonder if I am emphasized the examples. In How People Learn, the authors indicate that a balance of both examples and general principles is the most effective method for student transfer. I am not positive that I had a good balance in the course.
References


Appendix 1
(assignments and schedule for Spring C205)

Assignments
Most assignments for this class will be submitted electronically via OnCourse. After submitting your assignment, double-check to make sure that it has posted correctly. OnCourse sends a confirmation email if you have properly submitted your assignment. Always check to make sure you have received this email and save it in your inbox so that you have evidence that you have turned in your assignment. If there happens to be a problem with OnCourse, you may email me the document, or bring a hardcopy to my mailbox. Technical difficulty is not an acceptable excuse for late work. Unless specifically stated otherwise, all written assignments are to be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in 12-point Times New Roman font. Late assignments are not accepted. There are no “make-ups,” there is no “extra credit.” It is your responsibility to contact me regarding any special circumstances that may affect your ability to complete an assignment before it is due. I will respond to these circumstances on a case-by-case basis. The following is the grade breakdown for the course:

Participation: 7% – 70 pts
This portion of your grade is based on your active and respectful contributions to class discussion and in-class written assignments. This portion of your grade is at my discretion.

OnCourse Forum: 8% - 80 pts (4 posts each worth 2% - 20 pts)
Throughout the semester, students will be assigned 4 weeks in which he/she will post a 100 to 200-word response to Wednesday’s reading by Tuesday at 5pm. These posts will help lead the review of Monday’s reading. Each week, I ask that all students read the responses and be prepared to engage in a robust conversation. For the posts, I expect you to do one (or more) of the following: compare/contrast the reading to other concepts/authors discussed in class; apply concepts to an example of something you have observed on TV, in another class, or in “real” life; provide a thought-provoking question; or discuss why you think that reading “looks through communication” or “looks at communication.” For some weeks, I may provide you with a prompt to discuss on the forum.

Reading Responses: 15% - 150 pts
There will be three 1-page paper responses to questions regarding class readings (each worth 5% - 50 pts).

In-Class Midterm Exam: 20% – 200 pts
A multiple choice and short answer exam given in class.

Take-Home Midterm Exam: 20% – 200 pts
A 2-page take-home written essay.

Final Exam: 30% – 300 pts
A multiple choice and short answer exam given on the scheduled final exam day and time.

**Week 1**
Mon. 01/10 & Wed. 01/12 – Course introduction and orientation

**Week 2**
Mon. 01/17 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – No Class

**Week 3**
Wed. 01/26 – Peters [read pages 10-31]

**Week 4**

**Reading Response #1 due on OnCourse by midnight**

**Week 5**

**Week 6**

**Week 7**
### Week 8


**Wed. 03/02** – Martin, J. “Mr. Jefferson’s Fiasco”; “In the Quest for Equality, Civilization Itself is Maligned.” In Common Courtesy: In Which Miss Manners Solves the Problem that Baffled Mr. Jefferson. New York: Atheneum, 1985.

*Reading Response #2 due on OnCourse by midnight*

### Week 9


### Spring Break

**Mon. 03/14 & Wed. 03/16** – No Class

### Week 10

**Mon. 03/21** – Lincoln, A. “The Gettysburg Address.” November 19, 1863.


### Week 11


**Wed. 03/30** – Turner [read pages 43-57]

### Week 12


*Take Home Exam Due in Class – no exceptions*


### Week 13


Reading Response #3 due on OnCourse by Thursday 04/14 by midnight

**Week 14**

**Week 15**
Mon. 04/25 – In Class Review – No Assigned Readings
Wed. 04/27 – **Final Exam**

* This is a tentative schedule that is subject to change. Be sure to check OnCourse for additional readings, assignments and materials.
Appendix 2

Mid-Semester Evaluation

Classification: Freshman / Sophomore / Junior / Senior

Major:

Required Course? Y / N

Previous CMCL course experience:

1. The real world examples provided in class enhance my understanding of course concepts of “looking through communication” and “looking at communication”.

   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

2. Assignments in which I sought real world examples enhanced my understanding of course concepts.

   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

3. What I learn in this course is useful.

   Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

4. Which real life example from class has been the most clarifying for your understanding of the course concepts of “looking through” and “looking at”? 