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Getting students to prepare for and participate in class—to take an active role in their learning process—can be a daunting task. Because of the associations made among participation, motivation, and learning, finding new ways to encourage students to participate is a concern for instructional communication scholars (Christophel, 1990; Fassinger, 2000; Frymier & Houser, 1997; Howard, Short, & Clark, 1996). Student engagement has become a concern for communication scholars, as well, because classroom participation is one way for instructors to assess students' communication competence (Cegala, 1981; Martin, Mottet, & Myers, 2000; Myers & Brant, 2002). James Applegate (2002), past president of the National Communication Association, calls for the discipline to become more engaged. Classroom engagement is certainly a move in that direction. As such, it is time for communication scholars to develop, test, and share strategies to aid and encourage students to take a more active role in the classroom. Communication instructors need to teach students how to be more competent communicators in the classroom by teaching them how to prepare for and participate in

class, as their participation may lead them to greater classroom involvement and engagement.

Researchers have experimented with various tools to encourage participation. The idea of reading objectives (knowledge level questions about the required reading) has been tested in the past (Rau & Heyl, 1990). Most recently, Simonds and Carson (2000) advocated that instructors use participation sheets, an instrument used daily to rate students' involvement in the classroom, to foster student engagement (See Appendix B). This method requires students to self-assess their own preparation for and participation in class based on a set of pre-established criteria. The concept of testing both tools, reading objectives combined with the use of the participation sheets, is new.

To date, only anecdotal evidence addresses the efficacy of the tools used in tandem. This article presents the results of two studies. The scope of the first, exploratory study is to determine if reading objectives and student extended comments provide evidence of student engagement. The second study explores instructor perceptions of the effectiveness of the tools as they relate to student involvement in class.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Student Engagement

For the purposes of this study, engagement is conceptualized as a combination of behavioral, cognitive, and affective learning. An engaged student does the recommended behaviors, focuses on and reaches higher order cognitive thinking, and, ultimately, has a positive

affect for the intended behaviors. The combination of the three components (behavioral, cognitive, and affective learning) is necessary for optimal engagement.

While student affairs departments on college campuses have been studying student engagement for years — examining the ways to improve student involvement on campus —student engagement is a fairly new concept of study in the college classroom (Allen, 2001; Fritschner, 2000). In 2000, pioneers Alexander Astin (1984), Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson (1987), and other researchers launched an initiative, the National Survey of Student Engagement, to assess student learning and improve the quality of undergraduate education. The survey inquires about how students spend their time preparing for and participating in both academic and extra-curricular activities. Kuh (2001) admits, "although the NSSE survey does not assess student learning outcomes directly, it does provide schools with the kind of information they need to improve the undergraduate experience" (p. 12). In any case, participating schools have found the copious information they receive from the survey helpful.

Involvement Theory

While recent initiatives have focused on student engagement, it was Astin (1984) who piloted key research that made connections between student involvement and learning. His overarching claim is that students learn by becoming involved. While Astin (1984) does acknowledge that motivation is an important aspect of involvement, he considers the behavioral aspect to be most important. "To engage in" and "participate in" are

two of the many phrases that Astin (1984) describes as aspects of the term "involvement." Two of the five most pertinent postulates of his involvement theory include, "(1) Involvement refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects," and "(2) The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in the program" (p. 298). Not only does Astin's (1984) theory add insight to "empirical knowledge about environmental influences on student development" (p. 297), it also provides several practical applications for educators. Astin (1984) deems the most important practical application of his theory to teaching is that "it encourages the instructor to focus less on content and teaching techniques and more on what students are actually doing — how motivated they are and how much time and energy they are devoting to the learning process" (p. 305).

Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

Ultimately, examining student engagement and involvement led Chickering and Gamson to collaborate with Astin and other colleagues at a Wingspread retreat in 1986 to share knowledge and research regarding student involvement. This discussion led to the creation of the *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Kuh, 2001, p. 12). Just as Astin's (1984) theory promoted involvement through active participation and student time, Chickering and Gamson's (1987) publication endorsed involvement with seven themes found

to be imperative for best practices in undergraduate education. Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles of good practice include:

> (1) encourages contacts between students and faculty, (2) develops reciprocity and cooperation among students, (3) uses active learning techniques, (4) gives prompt feedback, (5) emphasizes time on task, (6) communicates high expectations, (7) respects diverse talents and ways of learning. (p. 1)

These principles echo Astin's earlier sentiments about student involvement. Chickering and Gamson (1987) state that "time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task" (p. 3). Their view of learning depicts students as active participants, who must spend time preparing for class by relating the course material to themselves, and then ultimately sharing their knowledge and experience with others.

Interaction Involvement

Another scholar, Cegala (1981), views involvement as a way to measure communication competence. Cegala (1981) defined interaction involvement as "the extent to which an individual partakes in a social environment" (p. 112). Cegala (1981) recognizes communication competence as "multi-faceted;" furthermore, involvement is one cognitive facet of communicative competence. In agreement with Astin (1984), who deems involvement a behavioral component, Cegala (1981) sees interaction involvement as a performance-based concept. Cegala (1981) contends that involvement is "to take part in an activity…implying some active form of participation

with something (social environment)" (p. 112). In essence, implications of Cegala's (1981) theory suggests that students who are highly "involved" in the classroom should also display higher levels of communication competence and should be rewarded for their participatory efforts.

Instructional Strategies Used to Increase Student Participation

Over time, instructors have experimented with various activities, techniques, and strategies to help build confidence for students and increase classroom participation (Smith, 1996; McKinney & Graham-Buxton, 1993). Grading participation has shown to be another key factor in promoting classroom participation (Christensen, Curley, Marquez, & Menzel, 1995; Fassinger, 1995a; Dallimore, Hertenstien, & Platt, 2004). These scholars were on target with the idea of grading participation, but needed a system to award more than just the top participators.

Gifford (2002), Peterson (2001), and Simonds and Carson (2000) have all found student self-assessment based on pre-established criteria to be an effective and objective way to grade participation. Simonds and Carson's (2000) method of grading participation utilizes a classroom participation sheet that is distributed daily. At the end of each class session, students rate themselves based on the criteria set by the instructor. In order to receive the maximum points, students must come to class, be on time, complete required reading and discussion questions, and be actively involved in the discussion (contributing several insightful comments

throughout the period). At the end of the period, the instructor collects the participation sheets and can adjust students' scores if appropriate.

Not only do the participation sheets designed by Simonds and Carson (2000) promote more preparation for and participation in class, they also provide a dialogue between the instructor and student, which suggests that both parties are responsible for active learning. This dialogue can also enhance their relationship and encourage participation (Myers & Brant, 2002).

Student Preparation for Participation

Preparation, another variable salient to the current study, is also a key indicator of involvement as it is necessary but not sufficient to gain optimal involvement. This variable has been said to influence participation, because if students are not prepared, they may find it difficult to participate (National Survey of Student Engagement Viewpoint, 2001).

Past scholars have recognized the benefits of students coming to class prepared. Fassinger (1995a) found preparation a variable that determines how much students participate. Results from her survey data on faculty's perceptions of student participation suggest, "Preparation is a key factor in students' participation" (p. 32). Also in Christensen et al.'s (1995) study, students self reported being prepared for class as one of the top five indicators of them being most likely to talk in class. However, Fassinger (1995a) found that many times students' and instructors' definitions of "prepared" differ:

> Many instructors have discovered that students feel prepared for class when they meet the minimum requirements for a day (e.g., reading an assignment). Faculty members, however, may feel that preparation entails critical thinking about class material or reviewing readings carefully before class. Thus it seems wise to discuss assumptions about class participation with students.... Instructors may want to reinforce their expectations with assignments such as daily written evaluative responses to the readings. (p. 32)

Students need to be "trained" how to prepare for class. When students are prepared, they will feel more confident sharing their ideas with classmates.

Reading Objectives

As mentioned earlier, reading objectives are knowledge level questions about the assigned reading for each class period. Some skeptics have criticized and labeled reading objectives as "busy work" and have depicted them as a process of simply copying definitions from the textbook or "regurgitating" the text onto paper. Importantly, the intended purpose of reading objectives is to help students prepare for class by allowing them to extend their thinking of the text and plan possible points for class discussions. However, if instructors do not realize this purpose themselves or do not emphasize the intended purpose to their students, students may feel that the assignment is a waste of their time. Also, if students do not use reading objectives to further their critical thinking skills and prepare them for discussion, they may not be engaging with the material as their instructor would intend for them to do.

These concerns led us to develop a strategy that may invite students to engage more with the course material, as the behaviors may lead to engagement. For the current study, students were asked to not only complete the reading objective questions but to also choose two or three questions to extend. Extended comments move beyond the knowledge level by demonstrating comprehension, application, or evaluation of the content. Students prepared the extensions, or "extended comments," by providing personal examples or insights, dialoguing with the material, or asking a question. Students flagged these "extended comments," by placing an asterisk next to the comment.

STUDY ONE

As suggested in previous literature, if students feel prepared for class, they may participate more, which could lead to learning and engagement (Fassinger, 1995a). The quality of the extended comments is an additional concern — that students are utilizing their critical thinking skills and not just "regurgitating" the text. These concerns and a careful review of the current literature leave the researchers with two questions regarding the new strategy of asking students to extend their reading objective answers:

RQ 1: What type of extended comments do students use most often in their reading objectives for the basic communication course?

RQ 2: Is there evidence of student engagement in the reading objective extended comments for the basic communication course?

Method

Sample. Participants of the study were 93 college first year students enrolled in a required, introductory communication course at a mid-sized Midwestern university. The basic course is a required component of the general education program and services approximately 1,500 students a semester. The focus of the course is public speaking, but it also includes units on group and interpersonal communication. Students from five course sections were asked to participate in the study (with a possible 110 students); however, only 93 students consented to have their reading objectives analyzed for the study. At the midterm, all reading objectives were collected from volunteer students. Thirteen chapters made up the first and second units, which had concluded by midterm. Four of the most substantive chapters were selected for analysis—two from each unit.

Procedure/Data Analysis. The researchers used content analysis to examine students' extended comments within their reading objectives. A combination of two approaches was utilized. First, Baxter's (1991) idea of analytic induction and Spradley's (1979) universal semantic relationships model were used, and three broad categories for students' extended comments were conceptualized: dialogue, personal insight, and questions. In other words, one of the researchers would examine an extended comment and use Spradley's (1979) strict inclusion criteria. As Spradley's (1979) approach was used in the beginning conceptualization stages of the coding

process, the researchers began to notice other emergent categories.

Strauss and Corbin's (1998) methods of open and axial coding were employed. First, the reading objectives were unitized and transcribed. Each extended comment (indicated by the student with an asterisk*) was determined to be a unit. One of the researchers typed all extended comments and bracketed the corresponding question number. Reading objective examples from each of the four chapters were typed on separate pages. At the conclusion of this exercise, 488 extended comments were found from 93 students' reading objectives.

To answer the research questions, a coding instrument (an Access data base) was created and used to categorize the data and to generate reports. A cursory glance at the extended comments enabled the researchers to create many initial categories. Student response categories included dialogue, statements indicating that students agreed or disagreed with content, personal insight, personal example, non-personal example, no example, and repetition of the text and questions. Each extended comment could be seen on the coding form. In addition, at the viewing of each unit, a pull down menu was available to choose what category best represented the students' extended comment.

The initial categories did change throughout the course of data analysis. For example, at the end of the study, the students' category "Dialogue" collapsed responses pertaining to dialogue, personal insight, agreement, and disagreement into one broad category. In addition, a constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used as each unit was compared to

the other units in the category to ensure the cohesion of the categories. When all units were placed into categories, one of the researchers conducted a cursory glance at the units placed under the categories. At this point, definitions for each category were constructed. Therefore, at the last comparison of the units, one of the researchers used the definitions to guide final category placement. In this final analysis stage, several units did move to new categories based on the conceptualizations made for the categories.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of extended comments within students' reading objectives (a measure to help students prepare for class) to determine if evidence of student engagement with course material could be found and to act as a formative assessment tool for the basic communication course. By using simple frequency distributions, the researchers were able to identify evidence of student engagement. Three categories that provided this evidence were dialogue, examples, and questions. The following paragraphs define the categories, provide examples of them, and indicate the percentage of extended comments that fit within that category.

First, students used dialogue to extend their thinking about the material. Dialogue is defined as students having discourse about the text. Thirty seven percent of the students' extended comments were considered dialogue. Dialogue was divided into three sub-categories: personal insight (n= 172), agree (n=6), and disagree (n=2). Personal insight is a sub-category of dialogue and

is defined as expressing an opinion, personal discovery, or offering advice. For example, the following student extended his/her answer to the question "What is ethnocentrism?" by providing a personal insight,

> As a future teacher in the most diverse country in the world, ethnocentrism must never enter my classroom. If I allow myself to display this attitude, my students will undoubtedly follow my example. I also have to have a fairly personal relationship with my students' parents and I would never want to offend them in any way.

The agreement and disagreement categories were also sub-categories of dialogue. Students' extended comments were placed in these categories if their example simply presented an argument that agreed or disagreed with the text. For example, one student extended his/her answer by agreeing with the text about the degree of formality of public speaking. The student stated, "I agree everyday conversation is much more laid back and less nervewracking." In contrast, this student disagreed with the text that public speaking should be ranked the second greatest fear for a majority of Americans. The student responded in his/her extended comment by stating that "It seems crazy to me that giving a speech ranks so high on people's list of fears, I would think going on a blind date or a job interview would be much more fearful."

Second, students used examples to extend their thoughts. Students' examples made up 35.9% of all extended comments. The examples category was divided into two sub-categories: personal example (n=105) and non-personal application (n=70). A personal example refers to a student's personal experience with the con-

tent. For instance, one student commented on her nervousness as a public speaker during a tough time:

> The first time I ever gave a speech was at my friend's funeral. I'd never been so nervous in my life, but apparently the people liked what I had to say because when I looked out to the crowd everyone was crying and everyone there supported me through that. [sic]

A nonpersonal application is defined as an experience, example, other than a student's own experience. One student provided a nonpersonal application as she/he compared the communication process model to a car. The student said, "They (referring to the components of the communication process model) all have to come together to work. It's like a car, if you have every part you need, except one tire, the vehicle's not going anywhere." On the other hand, this student discussed a nonpersonal example (as it was not his/her own experience but had witnessed the example in a high school classroom):

> In one of my classroom speeches during high school, a girl did a speech on Democrats and Republicans. She did not do any research on the topic, and when she gave her speech she gave it based on what she thought democrats and republicans were. According to her speech Democrats were people who lived in a democracy, and Republicans were people who lived in a republic. This just shows how important it is to know what you are talking about.

Third, 3.5% of the students asked questions (n=17) for their extended comments. One reason students ask questions is to inquire about complicated concepts in the text. For example, one student asked," Could critical

thinking be bad if you think too much?" Another student asked (referring to the differences between self-esteem and self-image), "Are these two things very similar? What is the difference between them?" Students also ask questions regarding their personal assignments. An extended comment in the language chapter showed that this student was applying the concepts of non-sexist language usage to his/her upcoming presentation. The extended comment read:

> In my speech, to save time I want to use "she" for the victims of rape and "he" for the rapists. I'm going to mention that I know that rape happens to both men and women, but I will use the two genders like I said. Is that ok?

A repetition category was also created. The "repetition" category can be defined as only answering the question, not extending the answer or thinking beyond the text, or simply recalling the appropriate information. For example, one reading objective question asks, "What are the three types of perception?" The answer is passive, active, and subjective. One student provided an extended comment for this question. The student's extended comment read, "Three types of perception are subjective, passive, and active." This answer would be categorized as "repetition," as the answer simply recalled appropriate information but did not extend the answer in any way. Only 5.7% of the overall extended comments were categorized as "repetition."

Overall, 76.3% of all extended comments moved beyond the knowledge level by way of comprehension, application, analysis, or synthesis. To do so, students dialogued with material, provided personal and nonper-

sonal examples and insights, and asked questions. Three categories made up 76.3% of the total extended comments. The two most frequent types of extended comments were dialogue (n=180) and examples (n=175). Asking questions (n= 17) was another category that moved students beyond the knowledge level, or "repetition" category. The remaining 18.0% of the data were placed in the "other" category. Extended comments were placed in the "other" category if they were illegible, if they did not mark the example as an extended comment but extended their answer, or if there were no extended comments for the particular chapter.

Discussion of Study One

Astin (1984), who contends that students learn more by becoming involved, by investing "physical and psychological energy" into their studies, would find relevance in the qualitative findings of the present study. First, the simple act of completing the reading objectives expends energy and emphasizes time on task. Second, the idea of students finding links between their own personal experiences, asking questions, and dialoguing with the content of the text is an even greater investment of their time and energy.

In addition, the extended comments for the reading objectives also fit Chickering and Gamson's (1987) view and goal of active learning which states students must relate content to their past experiences and daily lives and make what they learn a part of themselves. By students extending the thinking of the reading objective questions, they are taking the knowledge gained from the text and making it a part of their own experiences.

Currently, there is not a grounded theory regarding student engagement. The authors of this study propose that engagement involves a cognitive, behavioral, and affective component while involvement may only involve the behavioral component. The authors are suggesting that students begin the process of engagement with the extended comments. The results of this exploratory study show two of the three components as students are completing the questions and providing their own comments (behavioral) and, in the process, are reaching higher ordering thinking (cognitive). Anecdotally, students have expressed positive affect toward the exercise (affective). While skeptics may question the process of students completing reading objectives, the results of this qualitative study suggest that students are using the reading objectives and extended comments to engage with the material.

The instructors involved in the present study testified that a preponderance of students involved in the present study remarked about their improvement in class participation in their synthesis papers, a paper that asks students to reflect on their three accomplishments over the course of the semester. This is a noteworthy finding as the students' remarks were completely unsolicited. Study two is concerned with the instructors' perceptions of the effectiveness of these tools.

STUDY TWO

After examining the students' work and finding that the extended comments encouraged students to engage

in a high level of cognition, the researchers were interested in the instructors' perceptions of the tools. One concern was whether students were using the preparation tools (reading objectives and extended comments) to plan, in advance, their contributions in class (assessed using participation sheets). Another concern was whether this had an effect on the climate of classroom discussions. As Fassinger (1995a, 1995b) and Fritschner (2000) found that students' and instructors' perceptions differ regarding classroom preparation for and participation in class, the following questions were advanced:

RQ_1: How will the use of reading objectives and participation sheets affect the instructors' perceptions of their teaching and instruction of their classes?

RQ_2: Will the instructors perceive any notable differences between the classes that were required to complete the reading objectives and participation sheets and the classes that were not required to complete the reading objectives and participation sheets?

Method

Instructors. Five instructors (GTA's) teaching two sections each participated in the study. The instructors were chosen based on competence, availability of teaching two sections, and willingness. Control and quasi-experimental groups were utilized. The instructors were trained in the summer of 2002 to facilitate the quasi-

experiment. All five instructors were Caucasian (4 female, 1 male). While one of the course sections for each instructor was assigned to the quasi-experimental condition, the other course section was assigned to the control condition. Class sections were randomly selected to be a part of either the quasi-experimental or control conditions.

Procedure/Data Analysis. At the end of the semester, the graduate teaching assistants were asked several open-ended questions via a questionnaire about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the reading objectives and participation sheets for preparation and instruction. The instructors were also asked to describe any notable differences between the quasi-experimental and control groups. The researchers used content analysis to examine the instructors' responses to the open-ended question, which were completed at the end of the semester.

The two questions were: (1) How did the use of reading objectives and participation sheets affect your teaching? and (2) Did you observe any notable differences between the class required to complete the reading objectives and participation sheets and the class that was not required to complete the reading objectives and participation sheets? Each question was independently coded using a constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each unit was compared to the other units in the category to ensure the cohesion of the categories. When all units were placed into categories, the researchers once again did a cursory glance at the units placed under the categories. For each questionnaire response, "I" denotes the instructor (numbered from one to five).

Results

The purpose of the study was to recognize the instructors' perceptions of the instructional strategies. The first open-ended question asked the instructors whether the use of reading objectives and participation sheets affected their teaching. The vast majority of the responses indicated that the use of the tools affected their teaching in a positive way (with 42 units describing advantages for both the students and instructors and eight units describing disadvantages for both students and instructors). Two main themes emerged from the data: advantages for students and instructors, and disadvantages for students and instructors.

Advantages for students and instructors. Three of the five instructors acknowledged that reading objectives, specifically, helped prepare students for discussion, activities, and exams and provided students with a foundation of knowledge and "framework for discussion" (I3). Two of the five instructors also commented on how extended comments helped students to think more critically about the material. In addition, several instructors commented that the extended comments aided the apprehensive students. "Many times I had to encourage students to share starred examples [extended comments]. This also gave the less outgoing students the opportunity to share personal experiences, when they might not have been apt or willing to share before" (I3). In addition, one instructor added, "During almost every class meeting the students seemed not only prepared to be actively involved in class discussion, but

were enthusiastic about the material and the class as a whole" (I5).

Next, instructors commented on the advantages of participation sheets. Two of the instructors mentioned that participation sheets gave students greater accountability as well as allowed for more clarity in expectations for participation due to the rubric. One instructor summed both ideas by saying, "Participation can sometimes be an ambiguous grade for students, but the use of participation sheets with criteria allows the students to know exactly what needs [sic] to be done each class period to earn full points for participation" (I1).

Overall, instructors felt that the use of both reading objectives and participation sheets helped create a strong sense of community and promoted students' success in the classroom. Because of these tools, one instructor felt that his "class climate was outstanding" (I5). Another instructor felt that because of the written communication that the instructor and student can share, it shows the students that "I was a teacher who cared" (I3).

Also, three instructors commented on how these tools aided in students' success both in this class and in other classes. One instructor noted the following:

> Many times, students want to do well, but they do not know how … especially freshmen. They are not given the tools to succeed. These tools are an excellent way to get students started, in a sense. Hopefully, they can apply these ways of learning to other classes through the remainder of their college careers. (I3)

Instructors overwhelmingly felt that reading objectives allowed them to be better prepared for class. "I

was able to plan my discussion and activities based on concrete information that the students were (should have been) familiar with" (I2). Instructors also noted that they liked using participation sheets because they stimulated dialogue with their students. "The participation sheets also allow me to be able to connect with my students every class period through written commentary" (I1). In general, instructors enjoyed using both reading objectives and participation sheets, because they felt the tools helped them build a relationship with their students. "The additional written dialogue with the students paid off because I found myself learning more about the student's attitudes and learning styles" (I5).

Disadvantages for students and instructors. Four of the five instructors expressed that the time it takes (both inside and outside of the classroom) to use both reading objectives and participation sheets is a disadvantage of these instructional resources. One instructor had not used reading objectives or participation sheets prior to the study and found that the amount of time was an adjustment:

> It took extra time to allow them to fill them (participation sheets) out and to explain the procedure the first few class periods. This put me behind as I usually use the entire class period anyway. However, once the class and I became acclimated with the participation sheets, it became much easier. (I4)

Another instructor commented on the amount of time required outside of class:

> Using the reading objectives and participation sheets increased the amount of paper work and grading re-

> quired throughout the semester. However, this review and grading did allow me to identify and address questions and problem areas for students who indicated they were confused or concerned. (I2)

Even though the instructors found the time commitment a limitation, they all expressed that it was "worth it" (I5).

Research question two sought to explore if the instructors' perceived any notable differences between the quasi-experimental and control groups. Three main themes, distinguishing differences between the groups, emerged from the data: discussion, climate, and connection with students.

First, descriptions of the control and quasi-experimental groups were similar for all five instructors. The instructors mentioned that the students who were required to complete the reading objectives and participation sheets had a higher quantity and quality of participation. One instructor noted, "The largest difference that I noticed was that the experiment(al) [sic] group was able to answer questions correctly and more often" (I4). Another instructor commented, "The non-participation sheet class did NOT participate as much… they were much harder to coax into discussion – they didn't seem to know the readings as much" (I3).

In addition, the instructors reported that the class required to complete reading objectives and participation sheets generated more class discussion as well as more insightful comments. One instructor described her experimental group by saying, "discussion was much more smooth and insightful" (I1). Another instructor confirmed this notion by saying, "The amount and quality of class discussion was much higher in the class

required to complete the reading objectives and participation sheets" (I2). Ultimately, one instructor commented that his students reported using the new-found skills in other classes, as well. "Students also commented that they would feel more willing to engage in other classroom discussions because of the positive experiences in this class" (I5).

The second difference three of the five instructors commented on was the class climate. One instructor described her quasi-experimental group's climate as "involved and seemingly interested in the material" (I1). In contrast, two of the instructors depicted their control groups as more distant and one even went as far as to say the climates between the quasi-experimental and control groups were "like night and day" (I1). Not only did the students seem disinterested in the material, another instructor felt that the students "did not get to know each other," and "didn't seem to enjoy the class as much (I3).

The third difference three of the five instructors discussed was the connection they felt with their students. Several instructors felt that the reading objectives and participation sheets were an excellent vehicle for dialoguing with their students. One instructor commented, "With the use of participation sheets/R.O., I can connect with each student individually with written commentary, but it is difficult to get that kind of one on one interaction with each student verbally each class period" (I1). Another instructor felt that the tools enabled her to check for comprehension, " If they were not learning then I had an open means of communication with them through the participation sheets and reading objectives" (I4). Ultimately, one instructor revealed that not having

the reading objectives and participation sheets caused a loss of connection with the control group, "I can tell you that I honestly liked them less than my participation sheet class" (I3).

Discussion of Study Two

The instructors' open-ended comments provide insight to research questions three and four. Even though there is no quantitative evidence that students learn more by using the tools, the instructors' comments revealed that the tools were beneficial and did make a difference in students' level of participation and learning. The responses to the open-ended questions provided evidence that instructors found the tools to be beneficial for both students and instructors. The major themes will be discussed.

First, instructors found reading objectives and participation sheets to be beneficial tools in the instruction of their classes. The instructors felt the reading objectives helped both students and instructors prepare for class by providing a framework for discussion. Instructors also felt that the reading objectives helped students gain a greater comprehension of the material, with the extended comments helping the students relate the material to their own lives. The instructors felt the participation sheets helped students by holding them more accountable for their own participation. The overall advantage for instructors to use participation sheets was the connection that they made with their students through the dialogue on the participation sheet. Overall, the instructors claimed that the combination of using both reading objectives and participation sheets got

students involved and helped establish a more successful discussion and class climate.

Second, instructors did find that the tools increased students' level of participation through their observation of notable differences between the control and quasi-experimental groups' participation. Three main themes distinguished the two groups: discussion, climate, and connection with the students. The instructors noted that the quasi-experimental group had more and higher quality participation. The instructors found that the quasi-experimental groups' class climates were more positive; students established a greater rapport with each other. In addition, the instructors felt that they made a stronger connection with the students in the quasi-experimental group because of their one-on-one written dialogue interactions and involving discussions they encountered with their students every class session. Because of the notable differences between the classes, all five instructors felt the tools had strong benefits for students and will use the tools again. Despite a few skeptics at the beginning of the quasi-experiment, all of the instructors incorporated the use of the tools for their classes the next semester.

OVERALL CONSIDERATIONS

Pedagogical Implications

Taken together, the analysis of the extended comments and the instructors' comments suggest that instructors should consider using reading objectives, extended comments, and participation sheets as strategies to promote student engagement in the classroom. On a

global level, the use of the tools has implications for the way we spend time in class. By implementing these tools, we are making it clear to our students that we expect them to come prepared for class (by reading and reflecting on the material ahead of time) and to participate in class (by offering their insightful ideas to their classmates for discussion). Instead of spending class time lecturing over material that students should have read before class, instructors can afford students the opporunity to practice communication skills by sharing insightful contributions with classmates.

On a local level, based on results of this study, the reading objective questions and extended comments have been revised (See Appendix A). The reading objectives are now all knowledge-based questions. For higher order thinking, a separate page has been added for students to add their extended comments. For the purposes of the current studies, students placed an asterisk next to their extended comment. Currently, students have the opportunity to define what type of extended comment (dialogue, example, or question) they are offering and have the space provided to extend their thoughts. In addition, the answers to questions and a sample of all three types of extended comments for chapter one have been completed for students to reference. This addition provides students with a model of the intended level of involvement and will bring clarity and credibility to the instructional strategies.

Reading objectives and participation sheets are instructional strategies that should be employed in a variety of instructional contexts. Classes that are not typically as interactive may be able to see immediate benefits of inviting studens to take a more active role.

Obviously the tools would need to be adapted, but large lecture hall classes that students perceive to be more teacher oriented may be able to benefit, as well. These tools would allow instructors who typically rely on the lecture approach to invite discussion among students. Reading objectives and participation sheets may also appeal to students who are more reticient, as the students have the opportunity to plan, in advance, possible contributions to class discussion.

Even though much education literature advocates active learning and a student-centered philosophy, there are still instructors subscribing to the more traditional paradigms. In contrast, there are instructors who contend that they have a student-centered philosophy but then cannot provide evidence of how they are practicing their philosophy in the classroom. Most unfortunate, students still view their role in the classroom as passive. Shelton, Lane, & Waldhart's (1999) study found disheartning results; when asked about their role in the classroom, only 1.9% of the student respondents labeled their role as "active" (p. 409). Perhaps implementing strategies such reading objectives and participation sheets is a step toward helping instructors practice their active learning philosopy and helping students alter their perceptions of their role in the classroom.

We are facing a new generation of students. Strauss and Howe (2000) name today's students the "Millenial" generation – a generation they depict as more affluent, better educated, more ethnically diverse, and more focused on teamwork and achievement. This study suggests that the use of extended comments allows students to demonstrate higher order thinking, from a

sample of predominately first year students. These results show that students are capable of engaging with course material at a higher level. They are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge. We need to give our students more credit and challenge them to use their knowledge and share it with others. As this generation of students will be focused more on teamwork and achievement, it is crucial that we help them develop and use the higher order thinking and oral presentation skills that they will need to become competent communicators. They will not gain the skills by simply listening to their instructors lecture; rather, they will gain the skills by practicing them. Reading objectives and participation sheets are two tools that help students practice using these skills.

Limitations and Future Research

Even though the appropriate methodology and a fairly large sample were utilized, no study is without its limitations. In terms of the first study, only one of the researchers categorized the data. Perhaps, the results could be made more generalizeable if coders had been trained and utilized. Then, peer debriefing and intercoder reliability could be calculated and reported in the analysis. These two items would help bring more rigor to the current study. In addition, no psychometric measures of student cognitive or affective learning were employed in the current study. As a result, it is very difficult for the researchers to quantify the amount of learning that took place based upon the instructional resources tested in this study. Future research should seek to address these issues.

In terms of the second study, great care was taken to train the instructors to utilize the participation sheets and reading objectives. Obviously, we would have had a very difficult time identifying meaningful differences between the groups had the instructors been unable to use these resources appropriately. However, that training process sensitized the instructors to the nature and purpose of our research. As a result, the instructors may have generated answers to our questions based on a desire to help us find what we were looking for. Despite this potential for bias, we feel strongly that the individuals participating in this research answered our questions honestly. Several of the instructors did not utilize these tools in their classes prior to this research. Indeed, they found their experience so beneficial that they are now strong advocates for student engagement generally and participation sheets and reading objectives specifically. Nonetheless, future research should examine these tools using more controlled experimental conditions.

Several additional avenues of investigation are worth noting. Initially, the researchers have already seen the benefits of using this information as a formative assessment for the basic communication course. However, now that the format of the assignment has changed, it begs to be analyzed again. This time other modes of analysis may be useful. For instance, it would be intriguing to find out if students' extended comments are now more in depth, reveal more self-disclosure, or increase level of participation in class. Additionally, the levels of critical thinking students engage in the most could be explored using Bloom's Taxonomy as a coding scheme. Finally, it would be profitable for researchers to

explore the extent to which students transfer these participation strategies to other classes, including classes that do not stipulate a graded participation requirement.

CONCLUSION

The current studies show the significance and importance of asking students to apply what they read for class to their own lives in some way. Many traditional college courses ask students to listen, take notes, and memorize information for the test. The current study shows that students are capable of much more than simply regurgitating their textbook. We, as instructors in the classroom, need to expect more from our students. Students should be expected to apply course concepts to their own lives by providing their own examples, insights, and questions instead of relying solely on copying down examples provided by the instructor. It is only when students engage with the material through preparation and participation that they will become more competent communicators and fully understand the learning process.

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APPENDIX A

Name: **Sample**

LUCAS READING OBJECTIVES

Chapter 1: Speaking in Public

1. Why is it normal — even desirable — to be nervous at the start of a speech?

   The body actually responds, as it would in any stressful situation, by producing extra adrenaline. It is good to be nervous; the nervous energy can be beneficial as it helps energize the speaker.

2. How can you control your nervousness and make it work for you in your speeches?
   1. Acquire public speaking experience.
   2. Prepare.
   3. Think positively.
   4. Use the power of visualization.
   5. Know that most nervousness is not visible.
   6. Don't expect perfection.

3. What is critical thinking?

   Critical thinking is focused, organized thinking about such things as the logical relationships among ideas, the soundness of evidence, and the differences between fact and opinion.

4. List and define the seven elements of the speech communication process.
    1. Speaker: the person who is presenting an oral message to the listener.
    2. Listener: the person who receives the speaker's message.
    3. Message: whatever a speaker communicates to someone else.
    4. Channel: the means by which a message is communicated.
    5. Feedback: the messages, usually nonverbal, sent from a listener to a speaker.
    6. Interference: anything that impedes the communication of a message. Interference can be external or internal to listeners.
    7. Situation: the time and place in which a speech communication occurs.

5. What is ethnocentrism?

    Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own group or culture is superior to all other groups or cultures.

Name: **Sample**

EXTENDED COMMENTS — CHAPTER ONE

Item # **2** Type of comment: **Dialogue (agree)**

I agree with the book's strategies for dealing with nervousness, because I have used several of them. This past summer I went to a job interview that was very nerve-wracking. I practiced possible interview questions, just as I would practice my lines for a play. I also pictured myself going into the interview and thinking that it would be a positive and successful experience, just as I did before the night of a big performance. After using these techniques, I actually did have a successful interview, because I was able to conquer my nervous. I ended up getting the job!

Item #**4** Type of comment: **Personal Example**

I have an example of interference. I was giving a speech in high school one time and was very annoyed with my classmates. Some of them were doing other things — talking to their neighbor, reading the school newspaper, one person even walked in during my speech. All of these disturbances caused both internal and external interference in my communication with them. It caused internal interference, because it made me nervous and had to refer to my note cards more often than I had done when rehearsing my speech at home. It caused external interference, because the noise caused the listeners to be distracted from my message.

Item # **5** Type of comment: **Question**

If I avoid ethnocentrism, does that mean that I must agree with the values and practices of all groups and cultures?

APPENDIX B

CLASS PARTICIPATION SHEET

Attendance and active participation are a necessary part of this course. Each class period you will grade your participation. Please fill in your score (whole numbers only) based upon the following scale and provide a rationale for your score. Scores may be adjusted if the point value is not consistent with the rationale or the criteria for evaluation.

10 = Outstanding participation (completely prepared for class having read all of the required readings, fully completed the reading objectives and provided at least 2 comments/chapter, contributed to the classroom experience for self and others, allowed/encouraged others to contribute in class; had insightful comments/ questions for classmates and instructor; took a leading role in class activities)

8 = Good participation (prepared for class having read required readings and partially completed reading objectives with at least 1 comment/ chapter; offered good comments and took an active role in class activities)

6 = Average participation (looked over readings and attempted to minimally complete reading objectives, responded to questions adequately; moderately prepared, participated in class activities)

4 = Poor participation (poorly prepared; no attempt to respond to reading objectives, responded to questions, but briefly and with little elaboration; came to class late)
2 = Came to class, but contributed little or nothing; Arrived in class more than 10 minutes late.
0 = Absent from class; entered class during another student's speech.

*Note that on days where students are tardy, the maximum number of participation points is 4.
*Reading objectives must be completed prior to class. Any student attempting to complete objectives during class discussion will forfeit participation points for that day.

Date	Grade	Rationale