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Cover Page Footnote

Daniel M. Chick is a doctoral candidate at the University of Kansas, where he studies rhetoric and political communication and teaches classes in rhetoric and public address, organizational communication, and persuasive speaking. To Dr. Meggie Mapes, BCCA editor Dr. Brandi Frisby, and the journal's anonymous reviewers, Daniel passes along his deepest thanks for their expertise and assistance throughout the development of this manuscript. Through their collective guidance, knowledge, patience, and persistence, this manuscript became much stronger.

Research Article

Critical Pedagogy of Preparation: Structuring Best Practices for Introductory Course Relevance

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that the public speaking introductory course should follow a pedagogy of preparation. A pedagogy of preparation develops within students a toolkit that has become increasingly necessary for them to become active, compassionate citizens, and to understand what social pressures impact that perception, through the moral and ethical framework of critical communication pedagogy (CCP). To make this case, I propose a theory which structures and legitimizes many existing introductory course practices and, in so doing, articulate a clear narrative of the introductory course's relevance to students, faculty, and the university. I also outline three goals of a preparative pedagogy and explain how these goals are met in public speaking introductory courses through a critical reading of prevailing theoretical and philosophical perspectives.

Keywords: preparation, relevance, critical communication pedagogy (CCP), the public, civic engagement, public speaking.

Introduction

A longstanding problem with the introductory course has been to establish its relevance among students, faculty, and the university alike. Out of the many issues

that inhibit the relevance of the public speaking introductory course, three are most pervasive. First, establishing relevance is a broad, interdisciplinary issue (Fedesco, Kentner, & Natt, 2017), which is a problem that, as of yet, has no consistently effective solution. Students may meet their instructors with resistance to topics, assignments, or even the course environment altogether. They may also perceive introductory courses as extraneous to their studies, or just need to “check the box” to fulfill a curricular requirement imposed by their college or university (Neath, 1996). Public speaking courses are no exception to this struggle, since certain anxieties particularly affect these courses. When coupled with already existing apathies, mean our foundational courses become uniquely reviled by students and instructors alike (Behnke & Sawyer, 1999).

Second, the Western academy has suffered from a change in philosophy. Largely in response to the influences of neoliberal capitalism, as well as external political pressures, universities view education as a mere commodity to be bought and sold every semester. Michael Roth, president of Wesleyan University, explained that universities have shifted their attention to meeting arbitrary requirements instead of fulfilling the needs of students (as cited in Wong, 2016). Students’ top priorities had also historically been the accumulation of material wealth and personal success. They meanwhile demonstrated “little, if any” (Dorn, 2011, p. 1590) interest in courses designed to teach civic responsibility. Of course, an entirely new generation of students has entered the academy. Instead of responding to the needs of newer generations, however, many state governments such as in Wisconsin and Kentucky had conserved educational models that served those outdated priorities, compelling universities to abandon the liberal arts tradition in favor of funding “worker training programs” (Kertscher, 2014; Schreiner, 2017). Such a trend is especially concerning when many first-year students—those who traditionally populate introductory public speaking courses—have in the past come to the university underprepared for rigorous postsecondary education, misinformed about basic civic facts, or otherwise completely unaware of what it means to be civically engaged (CIRCLE Staff, 2013; Kuh, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Clearly, a robust education in the liberal arts, grounded in educating civic responsibility, is under assault from sources internal and external to the university.

Third, a basic lack of purpose further confounds the relevance of introductory courses as our public speaking courses lack a guiding “central narrative that drives its own curriculum” (Fassett & Warren, 2008, p. 2-5). One possible explanation for this lack of central narrative is that there are a substantial number of major paradigms

that guide public speaking curricula, many of which fundamentally disagree on how the course ought to proceed and ultimately compete with one another for visibility and viability. These perspectives include public speaking skills (Verderber, 1991), a broad view of communication theory (Donaghy, 1991), or on theories of specific communication contexts like interpersonal communication (DeVito, 1991), small group theory (Brilhart, 1991), intercultural and multicultural communication (Braithewaite & Braithewaite, 1991). Others have advocated a hybrid approach between practical skills and theory (Pearson & West, 1991). More recently, pedagogues have adapted these theories to suit specific agendas, such as developing ethics (Hess, 2001), explicitly anti-racist skills (Treinen & Warren, 2001), and community building (King, 2006). Likewise, Hunt, Simonds, and Simonds (2009) advocated for critical thinking pedagogy and Upchurch (2014) argued for a public address orientation to public speaking courses, both of which scrutinized the intersections between practical skillsets and critical theory. That so many perspectives exist in competition with or in correlation to one another explains why there is no prevailing or coherent narrative for the introductory course. The problem with such breadth is that articulating a consistent defense of our practices becomes impossible since application of one perspective or multiple perspectives over others can lead to profoundly different outcomes, some of which detrimentally effect student preparedness to address problems in the so-called real world.

To assert that this is a problem with which public speaking pedagogy must grapple is not to say that the above perspectives are without utility. Pedagogy scholarship can and must go farther, however, to explicitly connect the many disparate schools of thought to provide a consistent, holistic narrative. There is a need to coherently bind these paradigms together with a guiding narrative.

In their foundational essay on the *pedagogy of relevance*, Fassett and Warren (2008) provided a helpful roadmap to guide communication pedagogues down this path of creating a cohesive narrative, inclusive of multiple paradigmatic approaches. The scope of their argument was to advocate a number of substantial theoretical goals, such as to “challenge and revise seemingly ‘teacher-proof’ textbooks, policies, and curricula” (p. 15), “engage, not simply accommodate, diversity” (p. 20), “embrace an understanding of pedagogy as teaching and research” (p. 24), and “recover communication education from abandon” (p. 27). They acknowledged that these “are not ideas wholly original to us,” but they are sentiments commonly “expressed by ourselves and our colleagues in convention hotel bars, in reviewer and respondent remarks, and in the hallways outside our offices” (p. 15). To meet these goals, they

recommended a few solutions such as embracing a critical, reflexive lens and reframing the public speaking course as the introduction to a rich academic tradition rather than a so-called *basic* foundation. In essence, Fassett and Warren proposed an agenda to rectify institutional difficulties. They charged communication pedagogues to develop a toolkit that addresses the needs of general education and communication studies curricula while also developing an appreciation, in and outside of the classroom, of skills taught in public speaking courses.

I believe there is ground on which to expand their ideas to incorporate useful, rigorous strategies that already ensure public speaking courses meet the goals of critical communication pedagogy. Thus, in what follows, I build upon Fassett and Warren's *pedagogy of relevance* while reconciling it with existing literature as to the direction, scope, and morality of the foundational communication course by advocating a *pedagogy of preparation*. My purpose here is to continue the scholarly dialogue on the relevance of the introductory communication course, specifically the public speaking track, by connecting and extending many of the major pedagogical approaches. As I show, a critical pedagogy of preparation accentuates the relevance of public speaking and a skills-based curriculum in relation to students' civic responsibilities. It also deemphasizes the role of commodification endemic to the contemporary academy by focusing instruction on the development functional skills in addition to students' capacity to recognize (and reckon with) social pressures or expectations, many of which have been recognized in the literature to date. The skillsets accentuated here transcend mere classroom practice into material community engagement.

To make this case, I first define a preparative pedagogy. Contrasting with antecedent conceptions of skills-based pedagogies, I provide a theoretical perspective (grounded in critical communication pedagogy) that structures and legitimates the practices of introductory course instructors who prepare students to be "good" citizens in a deliberative democracy. Second, I outline three goals of a preparative pedagogy: create an environment in which students are comfortable with expressing big ideas, to make clear the fundamental connectedness of the public, and openly express the importance of informed and ethical civic engagement for a robust deliberative democracy. Third, I conduct a critical review of literature to discuss a strategy agenda for the classroom, including some best practices to develop critical thinking, research and information literacy, and political awareness. I conclude by discussing implications for this argument, most notably its impact on narrativizing

the broad appeal of the introductory course and suggestions for future implementation.

Critical, Skills-Based Pedagogies

I begin defining a preparative communication pedagogy agenda by briefly discussing how this theory counters many prevailing assumptions through an application of critical communication pedagogy (CCP). By arguing in favor of preparing students to thoughtfully engage with the public, I do not infer the goal of the course is to prepare students with skills that simply lead to jobs. Instead, I seek to problematize this perspective by calling attention to the inherent disciplinary roles introductory course instructors have. Drawing from tenets of CCP, I delineate the space in which a preparative pedagogy operates: the civic consciousness of communication students.

Perspectives emphasizing marketplace demands assessed the utility of communication pedagogy by what it could provide to the capitalist marketplace. Generations of scholars exhaustively researched necessary skills used on the job (for example, see: Bendtschneider & Trank, 1990; Zabava Ford & Wolvin, 1992). Some scholars have argued that good communication skills are necessary for success in the job marketplace (Stern & Hailer, 2007). Others have oriented their public speaking courses to meet the economic needs of employers and teach practical skills to make students competitive for entry-level positions (Hunt et al., 2001). Employers, after all, have noted that good communication skills make good employees (Bean-Mellinger, 2018). Crucially, vocational skills-based programs serve important roles in society and are well-suited for many students.

Communication studies is not (and should not be) merely tied to vocational training, however. Viewing the introductory public speaking course, or any university course for that matter, as a means to an economic end disciplines a participant into performing a mindlessly commodified role in society. Foucault (1995) reminded us that the most important function of disciplinary power is to *train*, to “bind” (p. 170) persons to roles and systems of normativity. If introductory communication course instructors accept their role as disciplinarian in a globalized society, however, they must come to terms with the idea that assessing the introductory course through its basic utility to the marketplace is axiologically, ethically, and intellectually bankrupt. As Kuh (2009) offered, although a “litany of badges, certificates, and the like” (para. 3) can indicate a student’s proficiency with certain skills (such as those produced by worker training programs), these certifications (by their nature) cannot cultivate

broad intellectual curiosity, nor “knowledge of world history and cultures and other ‘indulgences’ such as crafting understandable prose and judging the veracity and utility of information” (para. 2). Kuh’s example shows that commodifying our courses doom them to a never-ending quest in which they long for external sources of gratification. Moreover, it demonstrates the perilousness of framing pedagogy as a means to train students to accept subordination to the capricious, ever-changing whims of the marketplace. As Kuh asserted, this outcome would be “catastrophic” for “individuals, our national prosperity, and the long-term well-being of a civil, democratic society” (para. 8).

One key concept demonstrating critical communication pedagogy’s utility is that it problematizes commodified notions of education. CCP envisions a “fundamentally student-centered, dialogic” framework that is “attentive to power and privilege” (Fassett & Rudick, 2016, p. 579), centers culture and identity as fundamental to communication praxis (Calafell, 2010; Fassett & Warren, 2007), acknowledges the complexities, fluidities, and contingencies of power as it operates within the public (Fassett & Rudick, 2018; Rudick et al., 2017). Courses which utilize this framework develop within students and instructors alike a “cultural/ideological contextual identification” (LeMaster, 2017, p. 83; see also: Rudick, 2017). Introductory courses must therefore provide means through which participants may unlearn harmful disciplining, and also do so in a way that orients them toward meaningful, ethical, and transformative social performances (LeMaster, 2019). Consequently, CCP calls upon instructors to act as “visionary change agents” fostering students’ “singularly unique contribution” (Leeman & Singhal, 2006, p. 236-237) to the public. Instructors should encourage students to take risks, give students space to demonstrate the content of their character, and work toward dismantling the structural inequalities preventing their self-actualization (LaWare, 2004). Thus, rather than disciplining students into a commodified system, critical communication pedagogy acknowledges that good citizenship is what Fassett and Warren (2007) described as “a habit and practice that must be learned” (p. 71) through ethical engagement with peers from all walks of life.

Critical communication pedagogy also destabilizes epistemes imposing a singular or universalized mode of communication and emphasizes the ongoing epistemological evolution of discourse (Fassett & Warren, 2007).¹ Combining theory

¹ See also: Kelly (1996).

and praxis, critical pedagogy prepares students for global citizenship by attuning them to the impact of their actions at the micro and macro levels (Patterson & Swartz, 2014), and trains students axiologically in the utility of multiple modes of thinking, behaving, and speaking (Powell, 1996). It calls upon scholars to reflect on the process through which knowledge is created and shared, evaluating the privileges inherent to intersectional components of identity such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and/or ability and how they manifest through discourse (Crenshaw, 1991; Ono, 2011; Ono & Sloop, 1995). Moreover, critical pedagogies seek strategies inclusive of traditionally marginalized voices to create an ever more comprehensive assessment of a communicative environment. An explicit recognition that core tenets of citizenship (such as civic engagement, public discourse, and a vibrant democracy) are the product of an ongoing axiological and epistemological process provides one effective way for introductory course instructors to accomplish this (Edwards & Shepherd, 2004). To maintain this commitment in instructional contexts, LeMaster (2018) explained that instructors should maintain a healthy suspicion of themselves and their connections to institutionalized sources of power. LeMaster and Johnson (2018) further clarified that instructional praxis should utilize discursive frameworks that dismantle reductive bases of knowledge and, ultimately, systems of oppression.

Additionally, critical communication pedagogy problematizes ontological impositions of neoliberal ideology endemic to the contemporary academy (Jones & Calafell, 2012; LeMaster, 2015). CCP sees imposed social constructs for what they are: a fantasy, an artifice, something that, once upon a time, social actors thought they could attain by committing the very barbarism they accused others of having. Broader critical approaches that ground critical communication theory, such as from Latour (1991), Mouffe (2005), Crenshaw (1991), hooks (1991, 2015) and Ghabra and Calafell (2018), bolster this claim. Latour (1991) explained that such impositions are nothing more than entrenched social constructs. Imposing ideals at a cultural level is, at its core, a process which allowed those with power over others to institute a system in which we were able to “distinguish between the laws of external nature and the conventions of society” (p. 130). Rather, the structure of society and culture, the system in which the political functions (Mouffe, 2005)—the very fabric of our collective being—has always been comprised of a number of interconnected hegemonic networks into which we are habituated from birth (Crenshaw, 1991; Ghabra & Calafell, 2018; hooks, 1991, 2015).

Though a pedagogy of preparation does adequately prime students for a globalized, fragmented, intersectional workforce, developing practical skills necessary

for employment is a consequence of preparation, not the purpose. Yes, students' ability to perform with basic competency affords instructors a sense of gratification. Yes, students' ability to performatively demonstrate basic competency of skills is an essential part of the assessment process. However, current approaches to the introductory course which are influenced by neoliberal capitalist perspectives offer problematic solutions that would condemn the introductory course to function as a site of repression by forcing instruction that is merely instrumental to professional outcomes rather than as a site for experimentation, community-building, and personal growth. Thus, in the next section I outline how a pedagogy of preparation provides an alternative.

Establishing Relevance through a Pedagogy of Preparation

A pedagogy of preparation rooted in broad, discontinuous (i.e., differences in; multiplicative perceptions, descriptions, understandings of)² theory of citizenship conditions students for ethical growth in an increasingly globalized society. It emphasizes the relevance of the introductory course by developing practical skills such as reflexivity, intersectional research practices, and information literacy. Each lesson must be rooted in the idea that these skills can transcend the classroom into robust community and political engagement at the micro and macro levels. Thus, an overall *trajectory* for the course begins to develop, one in which each lesson symbolizes a commitment to fundamental critical principles through praxis.

Critical, transformational instruction acknowledges the socially constructed nature of reality, which allows the class to grapple with “the language of what is” (Mora, 2016, p. 179) to problematize how things are now and thoroughly develop idealized versions of what could be. However, instructors need not articulate a “blueprint” of what an ideal, socially just society looks like. Instead, this practice entwines ethical, moral, social, and intellectual traditions to form critical social justice receptivity among students (Frey et al., 1996, p. 110-111). The key distinction between creating receptivity and imposing blueprints of appropriate civic engagement is the latter's perpetuation of universalized norms, whether intentionally or not. Instructors should instead deconstruct notions of universality and inspire students' critical engagement with their surroundings. As Jo Sprague (1992) explained:

² See: Foucault (1972).

A transformative intellectual is not merely concerned with giving students the knowledge and skills they need for economic and social mobility, but with helping them discover the moral and political dimensions of a just society and the means to create it (pp. 8-9.)

By engaging with this mission daily, a pedagogy of preparation resists tokenizing “complex theoretical commitments and ideals” (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p 114). Of course, as Fassett and Warren argued, “specific acts, specific interactions, localized moments, are not, in and of themselves, critical communication pedagogy” (p. 115). A pedagogy of preparation addresses this challenge by encouraging students to consider the “nature and function of the experience” (p. 115), articulate their interpretations, and be receptive toward principled disagreements. Instructors should openly articulate these purposes to students, which creates an impetus for participants, both students and instructors alike, to reflect on their growth as members of the public. Through these characteristics, instructors can operationalize an overarching critical narrative for the introductory course and develop within students a toolkit through which they can critically engage with the world around them, uncover its connectedness, ask big questions that suspect structures of power at play, and become socially and civically aware citizens.

The development of these skills ensures that a pedagogy of preparation transcends neoliberal or capitalist interpretations of skills-based pedagogy and establishes a coherent, communicable narrative for the importance of the introductory course. It does so by furthering three crucial goals for communication pedagogy that are widely agreed upon in the literature.

Expressing Big Ideas for Justice with Confidence

The first crucial goal to establish relevance is to inspire students’ confidence in developing big ideas built upon a learned ethic of and an intent toward social justice.

Then, the goal is to inspire students to express those thoughts in an ethical way. To accomplish this aim, a CCP approach integrates assessment grounded in critical communication theory, wherein instructors decenter the classroom as the sole locus of public speaking praxis by orienting discussion toward issues of local, national, or global importance. Problem-posing questions should be used to deconstruct existing frameworks, value sets, or biases that surround these issues that lead to domination, while inspiring reflexivity among those joining the conversation (Abendschein et al., 2018). To adequately prepare students for citizenship beyond the college classroom,

instructors must seek broader engagement with ideas that go beyond basic competencies. It grants students space in which they can “critically question and produce messages about the social and civic contexts in which we all interact” (p. 63). The best questions that students raise will in turn generate new questions and spur discussion onward on the necessary role of engaging with one’s community. Introductory public speaking courses provide an effective space to orient students toward building just communities by functioning as a mode for performative instruction on how to ask questions about notable public issues, what good questions include, and why they need to be asked.

For students to forge their own path to intellectual development, make sound normative judgments, and establish a clear set of values that center community justice, instructors must take the necessary first step in asking problem-posing questions to students. Normative judgment is an important step in scrutinizing how society functions in the abstract and, more practically, what kind of information is useful for citizens to make sound decisions (Schudson, 2017). Thoughtfully engaging in these practices at every opportunity trains students first by modeling how these conversations should take place, then by encouraging thoughtful and reciprocal engagement from them. When the instructor performatively embodies their character, the performance affords students a way to see how it is done firsthand (LaWare, 2004). Then, student repetition of these skills in the classroom prepares them to critically and ethically engage with the world around them after the conclusion of instruction.

A preparative pedagogy furthers this idea by encouraging students to develop perspectives substantiated by thinking critically about material conditions in which people live and acknowledge what Harding (1991) described as the social situatedness of knowledge production. Such a perspective offers a series of tools through which students can put to use “their own judgment, experience, and intelligence rather than just swallowing whole what they hear and read from more dominant voices” (Leeman & Singhal, 2006, p. 233). Absent these concerns, asking problem-posing questions runs the risk of furthering domination.

Building a Fundamentally Connected Public

A second goal for public speaking course pedagogy is to develop students’ capacity to acknowledge, build, and maintain connections within the publics of which they are or will be part (Fassett & Warren, 2008). Connectedness relies on the ability of those in the public to communicate effectively with one another. Hannah

Arendt (1968/1998) noted that discourse creates bonds as an essential function of human plurality, or the notion that humans “inhabit the world” (p. 7-8) equal with, yet wholly distinct from one another. Through speech and action, humans “reveal this unique distinctness” (p. 176) and display our capacity for cognition, initiative, and communication. We show “who” and “what” we are as humans by speech and action, respectively, and enter into “a web of human relations” (p. 184), or an intricate network of connections in which words and deeds are shared among those residing within it. In this “web” of human relations, we discursively construct a sense of self, this notion of who and what we are as humans, in relation to one another through stories of our deeds.

The stories educators tell about the world in which students will enter can greatly impact the perceptions others may hold of us as well as the lives of others. It is essential to ground any conception of the public with a consideration of “hegemony and marginalization that occur” (Kahl, 2014, p. 3) in communities. To do so is to make the most of all we, as scholars and educators, have learned to “fashion for ourselves social or civic or professional relationships that are self-sustaining, nurturing, hopeful, and make possible more equity for people who have been historically disenfranchised” (Fassett & Warren, 2008, p. 6). A critical public calls out to those within it to broaden horizons to the disenfranchised, uplift its members, and allow all an equitable space in which to discursively construct their own humanness. To enact a pedagogy responding to this call is to create an environment in which critical skills learned in the foundational course endure in students even after its conclusion.

Developing such an environment requires a strong focus on information and resource literacy. This is so because the information landscapes in which students mature have become increasingly complex, building from traditional epistemological structures like empiricism to more recent developments in the literature which appreciate embodied perspectives. Navigating the complex information ecologies that exist in communities (Lloyd, 2010), especially those in which community members are informed through particular bodily experiences (i.e., race, class, sex, gender, etc.), is of course no small task. Students should therefore learn, broadly, what these and other sites of knowledge are, how to understand them, and how to rely upon them to understand the world around them. As I show, a preparative pedagogy is well-suited to address these concerns.

Fostering Civic Values and Engagement

A third central goal connects to the previous two: fostering active citizenship through civic engagement. As Cook (2008) described, citizenship is a collective identity with shared fundamental values and developed through action. As a concept at the core of civic engagement, it is also recognized as being an active, not a passive, role; it demands knowledge and skills used explicitly in service of the community. In essence, a citizen accepts their social obligation to use critical thinking and advocacy skills, which include recognizing what Johnson and Lewis (2018) described as self-actualizing discourse that defines and delimits spaces, communities, and peoples, and actions that contribute to their worldbuilding (LeMaster & Hummel, 2018), to build better communities.

Following this idea of citizenship's necessarily active role is the need to discern what activities take place and emphasize those which will enable students to become enthusiastic citizen participants. As Harter, Kirby, Hatfield, & Kuhlman (2004) argued, we, as educators, "have the power to inspire, excite, and engage—it is our responsibility to determine the appropriate techniques for using such power" (p. 169). Traditionally, service learning had been an important tool to harness this power. Through service, "students are afforded the opportunity to practice what they are learning in their disciplines, in community settings where their work benefits others" (Applegate & Morreale, 1999, p. 11). A focus on the community can lead to a number of beneficial outcomes, such as information retention and a richer learning environment (Cook, 2008). Furthermore, the public speaking and hybrid communication introductory courses have been excellent forums in which to implement this pedagogical approach (Wahl & Edwards, 2006), as they are an inherently praxis-oriented.

A preparative pedagogy builds upon this rich tradition by developing students' understanding of civic values with an added appreciation of differences that exist across multiple publics. Hirsch (1994) identified this process as the "development of citizenship or civic competence" and makes this obligation clear "by conveying the unique meaning, obligation, and virtue of citizenship in a particular society or the acquisition of values, dispositions, and skills appropriate to that society" (p. 767). Enacting a critical preparative pedagogy therefore requires a careful strategy for classroom best practices that keeps in mind the above goals, and explicitly articulates them through instruction.

The goals outlined here lay the foundation for a coherent narrative describing what the introductory course is all about. It reminds invested stakeholders that the course maintains its relevance because it addresses more important needs than the jobs marketplace. It does so in two important ways. First, it establishes the centrality of communication's constraining role in the process of social construction at the offset of students' academic careers. Critical interrogation of the processes through which the public produces discourse prepares students for a lifelong process through which dominant power structures may be questioned. By coaching students to appreciate connectedness despite difference and to question the world around them, instructors can create the conditions through which power is respectfully and forcefully interrogated. The importance of this process is explained by Foucault (1981), who explained that the "production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers" (p. 52). Second, a preparative pedagogy respects and fulfills the discipline's historical tradition of public address scholarship. A public address perspective keeps in focus the goals of creating good citizenship through the lens of ethical, reasoned public deliberation (Upchurch, 2014). Good communicative behaviors should not pertain entirely to vocational training, but rather should reinforce good habits of political and civic participation more broadly. Thus, in the next section, I outline practical ways to achieve these goals that I and other critical pedagogues have operationalized.

Preparative Pedagogy: A Strategy Agenda in Action

To this point, I have outlined a number of important goals that are widely shared among critical communication pedagogues and described key areas where a preparative pedagogy will further those goals. Though, questions remain: how, then, does preparation meet the goals of critical communication pedagogy? How is it actualized? To answer these questions, I look to three skills of interest to introductory course curricula: critical thinking, information literacy, and political engagement. As Hunt, Simonds, and Simonds (2009) explained, these skills are "inextricably linked" to one another and "are some of the most essential for students to acquire" (p. 2-3) to become thoughtful citizens in the 21st century.

Critical Thinking, Confident Expression

Critical communication pedagogy necessarily maintains that the development of practical skills cannot happen without also developing student capacity for critically

thinking about the flow of power through discourse (LeMaster, 2015; 2018). Assignments encouraging students to develop their critical thinking skills, animated by globalization and intersectionality, furnish a method through which instructors can build the foundation necessary for an ethic of justice that must undergird confident expression. Introductory course instructors must therefore explicitly prioritize the development of critical thinking throughout the semester, communicate this priority, and follow through with assignments and evaluation. This commitment may be made evident in even the smallest assignments (e.g. in-class discussion). For example, in her role as instructor of a professional communication course, Kienzler (2001) theorized ways to make that happen, such as orienting discussion around critically engaging questions that acknowledged and interrogated overarching assumptions present in students' idea of 'good' public engagement.

Concerned with practical, if hypothetical, implications, Kienzler (2001) asked her students to consider:

If an engineer clearly delineates a robot factory for building sport shoes, what does that report say about the society and company sponsoring the factory? Who will benefit from the factory? What will the former shoe stitchers do to support themselves and their families now? Such examinations generally lead students to explore various ethical issues. (p. 320)

Kienzler's questions tasked students with pondering a number of key consequences of a single decision. She then complicated discussion about potential consequences by intently focusing on the implications of socio-economic status. Her questions presupposed a hierarchical, top-down implementation of a robotic factory that would replace many human workers, which destabilizes income and brings a higher profit margin to those at the top of the hierarchy. By asking her students problem-posing questions about the impact of a single decision, she asked them to consider the connectedness of each person working in the hypothetical organization. She compelled students to consider the idea that one person's choice to automate a production facility has bearing over countless others. In turn, students begin to question the ethics of that decision. By questioning prevailing ethical systems, such as prioritizing profit over workers, she inspires students to begin the process of becoming civically aware citizens bound together by the political, social, and economic systems of which they are but a small part. Students begin the long process

of synthesizing, analyzing, and evaluating those systems to determine whether it works for them. In-class discussion further affords students the opportunity to articulate a decision, provide reasons for their decision, and defend it among peers.

Stronger Communities through Information and Resource Literacy

Likewise, if the stories instructors tell are not inclusive, then clearly the whole story is not told. As advocates of CCP have explained, it is important to appreciate and understand difference to tell better, more inclusive stories about history (Fassett & Warren, 2008). One way to accomplish this is through developing an intersectional literacy of information and resources. The Association of College and Research Libraries (2016) defined information literacy as “the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning” (para. 5). Hunt, Simonds, and Simonds (2009) instructed pedagogues to consider taking active steps to encourage information literacy, such as incrementalizing research and organization processes of core assignments through the use of step-by-step worksheets, thorough guidance through database inquiries, and in-class assignments to assess source accuracy and credibility.

An intersectional ethic undergirding information and resource literacy tasks students with considering whose voices have benefitted from domination and ways in which research practices are affected by the flow of power. These considerations include, but are not limited to, citationality (Pham, 2019), language choice (Sowards, 2019), whiteness (Asante, 2019), and personal genealogies (Na’puti, 2019). Strongly contemplating these topics can help students unlearn domination and work toward an ethic of explicit anti-bigotry (Wanzer-Serrano, 2019). In effect, strong bases of information literacy will boost students’ capacity to enact public good (Mouffe, 1992; Asen, 2017) through connectedness, solidarity, and critical thought grounded in effective research practices. In so doing, they begin the work of fostering cross-marginalization solidarity.

One way to train students in an intersectional ethic of resource credibility is through the use of nonpartisan resources such as the Media Bias Chart (n.d.) and the American Democracy Project’s (ADP) Digital Polarization Initiative to create in-class assignments. The Media Bias Chart is the product of rigorous evaluation of dozens of news outlets from the United States and the United Kingdom and ranks sources according to the quality of news reported and perceived bias (“How Ad Fontes

Ranks News Sources,” n.d.). An assignment tasking students with filling in a blank template of the reputability curve found on the site can introduce them to a myriad of possible sources and categories of source reputability, partisan slant, and reputation for accuracy (e.g., journal articles, news outlets, outright propaganda). Although it does have its limitations, it provides instructors and students the opportunity to ask necessary questions about the quality and bias of favored news sources, such as why an outlet scored where it did on the curve and which communities’ narratives are consistently privileged by an outlet.

Likewise, the ADP’s Digital Polarization Initiative (n.d.) emphasizes important digital researching skills, such as managing difficult emotions inspired by digital content and quickly finding truth on the web. It is well known that the internet is full of trolls (i.e., people who seek to harm communities through various means, ranging from “clever pranks to harassment to violent threats” [Stein, 2016, para. 3]), fake news, malevolent memes, and conspiracy theories (Bond, 2019). Malicious content like this can be difficult to wade through; tensions can flair and feelings can become hurt by such behavior. The ADP’s Mike Caulfield (2017) presented a number of strategies, tactics, and habits to help students decipher truthful information in such a complex environment. Students are given a reader-friendly guide on how to deal with these burgeoning issues, reminding them that it is okay to feel certain ways based on the information they receive and to use that emotion as an impetus for the need to fact check. Furthermore, Caulfield explained ways to dig deep into a resource, including following citations to primary sources, identifying sponsored content, and utilizing sometimes difficult to find tools in search engines.

Another way to develop students’ resource literacy is through partnership with the university library. While instructing students on speech construction and presentation, instructors should encourage collaboration between library staff (Hunt, Simonds, & Simonds, 2009). Introductory courses partnered with the library boost information literacy and encourage robust student learning and performance in conducting research and crafting strong arguments (Herakova et al., 2017). Furthermore, libraries are important public resources that bridge accessibility gaps. The library’s fundamental value is the opportunity for all to use its services equally in a safe and non-threatening environment for all regardless of age, ability, or any immutable qualities (Open Door Collective, 2017). It is essential to foster these relationships in order to emphasize our obligations to one another and our communities.

These skills and resources ultimately prepare students to view the information they receive from news outlets, peers, social media, or other sources with an appropriately critical lens and teaches the importance of utilizing essential public resources. Indeed, these are but a few methods through which students can understand the process of source evaluation in the introductory course in a way that fosters their connectedness to their community. Discussion of source reliability and credibility, as inspired by resources such as the Media Bias Chart and the American Democracy Project's Digital Polarization Initiative, instills in students the co-constitutive nature of discourse by uncovering intricate, often covert subjectivities behind our sources as well as our evaluation of them. Partnering with the library, too, teaches the importance of connectedness in the knowledge building process and the usefulness of communal resources.

Civic & Political Engagement across Difference

A preparative pedagogy will, at the nexus of critical thinking and information literacy skills, help students develop a learned ethic of political engagement. Part of what drives critical communication pedagogy is an aspiration for the growth of communication skills so students can “believe in themselves and thus become active in the ‘politics’ around them” (Leeman & Singhal, 2006, 239-240). Instruction time should therefore focus on, and expressly orient students toward, exercises of political or social controversy to build evaluative skills essential to healthy deliberative democracy (Hunt et al., 2009). In the age of fake news and hyperpartisan, polarized, and often just plain angry public deliberation (“Political Polarization in the American Public,” 2014), the skills taught in the introductory course are needed now more than ever. More particularly, instruction about best practices in political engagement should challenge well-intentioned, yet ultimately reductive ideas that target students, such as get out the vote movements that place high premium solely on the “sexiness” of voting (#VotingisSexy, n.d.; Herken, 2016; URGE, n.d.). Of course, voting is the fundamental culmination of deliberative democratic action. Yet, these campaigns do not properly motivate possible constituents to develop “unsexy” skills necessary to come to reasoned, thoughtful conclusions.

Introductory course assignments consistently prove to be effective as modalities for inspiring engagement at all stages of political engagement from most “sexy” to least. For instance, persuasive speech assignments such as one of its trendiest permutations, the problem-solution speech, develop and assess students’ ability to describe problems, provide at least one reasonable solution to the problem, and

defend their position with relevant evidence. Healthy deliberative democracy subsists on this process of inducement, which instructors can emphasize by tying these assignments to political engagement practices. Instructors can operationalize these practices in a number of ways. For instance, I ask my students to prepare and deliver a persuasive speech as though they are speaking to their district's congressperson. The assignment called for them to thoroughly research the representative's positions on a number of topic areas such as their stance on crime laws, energy and environmental policy, budget and economy, foreign policy, among others. Then, students were to take a side and articulate why in the form of persuading the congressperson to stay the course or change their opinion on the student's topic of choice. Creating the speech in response to specific policy areas called upon students to use critical thinking and information literacy skills developed throughout the semester to actively engage with local and national politics simultaneously. It called upon students to use these skills to ask problem-posing questions about positions and votes on issues. Questions could take forms such as, "Who does this vote help and who does it hurt?"; "What are the implications of what I would do differently?"; "What are the values and assumptions that led me to this conclusion?"; and "Why does my representative not have a developed stance on this issue?" Then, comparing the representative's record to their own values and available evidence, students made and defended normative, evaluative judgments about why the decision was (in-)correct. By enacting this assignment, I began to develop students' strong civic consciousness that not only acknowledged a politics underneath an appealing façade, but also some best practices on how to grow their awareness.

David Kahl (2014) further envisioned ways instructors can enable such social awareness in the introductory course. In Kahl's experience, speech assignments requiring students to examine how hegemony functions in their communities and/or environments hybridized delivery and critical awareness praxis. Consequently, a preparative pedagogy responds to this idea that there is no inherent conception of reality, community, or justice without imposing norms on others. For students to discover that 'reality' is constituted by communicative practices within the broader discourse community, critical pedagogy dictates that instructors devise a principled set of practices for students to learn that allows them to come to a reasonable decision based on the particulars of a situation. Furthermore, intersectional research practices (i.e., seeking out marginalized voices) and service-learning projects give students experience in making conscientious choices for their communities.

The demonstration of best practices here shows that what we already offer to students in the introductory course satisfies the need for a coherent narrative. Given what we now know about the course and the academy writ large, what I sought to do was develop theoretical support for these practices in light of Fassett and Warren's (2008) call. I believe that critical communication pedagogues prepare our students in creative, insightful, and intelligent ways. As I have shown by critically reading existing pedagogy literature, we as instructors do work every day that tell compelling stories about who we are as a discipline to introductory course students.

A Coherent Narrative for the Introductory Course

To conclude this article, I turn back to concerns about the prevailing theme of the introductory course. Scholars featured in our journals about communication pedagogy worried over the lack of a “driving narrative to guide our actions, frame our past, and project our future” (Fassett & Warren, 2008, p. 4). Communication pedagogues, especially those with a critical flair, anxiously wonder what a postmodern introductory course looks like in an age where all the once-held-dear rules rapidly evaporated. “What is the purpose of the introductory course?”, we may timidly ask ourselves. “As its instructors, what is our purpose in this new landscape?”

In answering these questions, I looked to what historically our most basic purpose of the introductory course has been and how it has developed in practice. I started from the assumption that the ability to communicate well is an integral part of the human condition. Arendt (1968, 1998) explained that good communication drives the connectedness of our world and allows everyone to convey their own narrative to the world. Foucault (1995) described communication's function to constrain thought and implement sources of power in cultures. Others have described its liberatory powers that grant us the capacity to question our surroundings and interrogate powers-that-be. Public speaking courses provide students an essential venue in which these essential tenets of communication develop “in ways that unite and treat all people with respect and dignity” (Ruiz-Mesa & Broeckelman-Post, 2018, p. 208).

By considering who we are and what we provide to the world, we can create a strong narrative focused on a clear central purpose for the introductory course. Antecedent literature cited here has shown that a clear idea of what our course has to offer exists. Therefore, I developed a theoretical lens that legitimizes and structures a series of pedagogical best practices that communicate and firmly situate our purpose to prepare students for civic engagement across difference. I also defined three goals

central to this perspective and outlined strategies to develop essential skills for ethical participation in the public. Furthermore, I anticipated and addressed some potential avenues of resistance to the notion of “preparation” in general. It is important to continue validating the pedagogy of preparation by testing it with case studies of classroom interaction and course texts. However, its initial identification carries two key implications concerning (1) the practical application of critical communication pedagogy, which is central to the great anxieties about the trajectory of the introductory course, through assignments we create and skills we develop. It also (2) provides a coherent, holistic narrative for the introductory course.

The first key implication of this argument is that a *pedagogy of preparation* offers another way of advancing critical communication pedagogy as a major paradigm. To date, much of critical communication pedagogy theorizing has been focused on agenda-setting. Fassett and Warren’s (2008) foundational essay is a wonderful guide for critical communication pedagogues, even over a decade since its publication, that also sets an effective example of this point. Agenda-setting is a crucial undertaking to be sure, and it will certainly remain so *ad infinitum*, since it is vital to maintain a healthy reflexivity to ensure our discourse explicitly works to liberate and does not reify systems of domination (LeMaster, 2018). A *preparative pedagogy* builds on their approach by making public speaking classrooms better environments for our students to develop so-called real-world skills that are firmly grounded in ethics of social justice. Moreover, the rhetorical and pedagogical traditions undergirding *preparation*, which are fundamentally rooted in active citizenship and public address, intently focuses its perspective on ethical, moral, and reasoned public deliberation.

Second, a *pedagogy of preparation* shows that it is crucial for theory to account for the ways our instructors practice what is written through case studies and/or accounts in the literature. The above examples clearly demonstrate that so many of us already encourage thoughtful research practices for students that “respond directly to [their] lives in and beyond the classroom” (Fassett, 2016, p. 35, 38-39). While a great anxiety about the trajectory of the introductory course exists, and likely will continue to exist, it is important to remind ourselves that so many of us already do the things, practice the skills, and teach the lessons necessary for students to find their own path to intellectual development, make sound normative judgments, and establish a clear set of values. It is a site, as Abendschein, Giorgio, Roth, and Bender (2018) explained, for “fresh thinking, experimental activities, value exploration, clashing ideologies, and open conversation” (p. 62), which attests to our ability to prepare students for what comes after graduation.

Perhaps, then, our anxieties about who we are, what we do, and how we make this all relevant to students are merely displaced anxieties about choosing the right wording for our purpose. We need a clear mission statement for our courses that can simultaneously satisfy demands from university curriculum and ease students' reticence about taking the course altogether. I propose we explicitly communicate our intentions by articulating the following: "In the introductory course, we prepare students for what comes next after graduation. We develop skills essential to functional workplaces and healthy democracies, such as critical thinking, information literacy, and political engagement. We prepare students to uncover the connectedness of the world around us, to ask questions that interrogate structures of power at play, and to become socially and civically aware citizens."

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