

Spring 4-13-2011

Attempting the Critical: Reflections on a Speech Communication 101 Course

Nicole F. Bohr

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, nbohr@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs_rp

Recommended Citation

Bohr, Nicole F, "Attempting the Critical: Reflections on a Speech Communication 101 Course" (2011). *Research Papers*. Paper 51.
http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs_rp/51

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Papers by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.

ATTEMPTING THE CRITICAL:
REFLECTIONS ON A SPEECH COMMUNICATION 101 COURSE

by

Nicole F. Bohr

B.S., University of Wisconsin Superior, 2008

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Masters of Arts Degree.

Department of Speech Communication
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2011

RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

ATTEMPTING THE CRITICAL: REFLECTIONS ON A SPEECH 101
COMMUNICATION COURSE

By

Nicole Bohr

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the field of Speech Communications

Approved by:

Dr. Rachel Griffin, Chair

Dr. Nathan Stucky

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 12, 2011

© by Nicole F. Bohr, 2011
All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Rachel Griffin who has taught me the importance of inviting everyone to my pedagogical table,
To Nathan Stucky who has taught me the importance of caring as an instructor for my students and colleagues,
To John T. Warren who has been my constant mentor and friend throughout my entire Master's career,
To Molly Wiant Cummins, for answering my incessant questions with patience and clarity,
To my mom and the rest of my family who has supported me every step of the way,
To my partner in life, Arthur who's love and encouragement has seen me through when I wouldn't have otherwise,
I thank you all with every fiber of my being.

I dedicate this work to John T. Warren, without him I never would have taken this journey or learned about critical communication pedagogy. Without him I would still be an instructor who never challenged my students or myself. His loss is felt throughout the entire Speech Communication community. I was blessed to have gotten the chance to know him, and even more blessed to consider him my mentor and friend. Thank you John for your dedication to education and for the immeasurable amount of love and light you brought to the lives of all who have known you. I will be forever grateful to you. You are sorely missed by everyone. We love you always.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
LIST OF TABLES	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	3
THEORY	12
METHODS	23
APPLICATION	25
CONCLUSION.....	37
REFERENCES	40
VITA	44

LIST OF TABLES

<u>TABLE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Table 1	8
Table 2	13

Introduction

Half way through my second semester of teaching the Speech Communication 101 course at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC), I watched the following interaction take place between two students about 10 minutes before the class began. The first student, Brian¹, tried to throw a crumpled piece of paper into the wastebasket and missed. John then grabbed Brian's baseball cap off of his head, and informed him that only boys get to wear caps and he was obviously a "pussy" since he missed the basket. In response, Brian elbowed John and replied, "at least I'm not retarded like you." Then John said, "I'd rather be retarded than gay like you." This "teasing" went back and forth for awhile with words and phrases that describe marginalized groups being used to denote each other's weakness. I watched this incident take place and decided that I was going to use this as a discussion point for my class. I wanted to talk to the entire class about sexism and ask these two what they saw as potentially sexist in the comments that they had made. However, I could see the discussion playing out badly in my mind. I thought that the two students would quickly jump to a defensive position and insist that they did not hate women and would never use derogatory names toward them. I could also imagine these boys saying that there is too much violence going on in the world and that they would jump in if they ever saw a man hitting a woman. Because I saw the conversation playing out like this, I never addressed the situation.

Looking back, I realize that while my intentions were good, I lacked the proper background and knowledge to engage in the conversation properly. It was not until I took a Critical Communication Pedagogy course taught by Dr. John Warren, during the second year of my Masters program, that I started to feel that I had a strong enough grasp of the

¹ All student's names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

terminology and background needed to negotiate a tricky conversation about sexism with my students. To many, sexism is seen as the big evil man oppressing, diminishing, hurting, and/or using bad names to describe women. From my perspective, it is hard to talk about sexism with a lot of males because their first instinct (as it is with most people in a privileged position) is to defend themselves and list all of the ways that they are not sexist (Johnson, 2001). Therefore, I had to come up with a way to talk about and process through the assumptions and connotations behind these politically charged words. If I could not help my students see past the oppressive implications of these words, there would be no way that I could help my students start to dig deeper into the areas of power and privilege.

To explore my reflective journey on how to facilitate difficult dialogue discussions, I will use personal narratives to map my use of critical communication pedagogy (CCP). Both of my narratives stem from my experiences as an instructor engaging in difficult dialogues with my students. First, I examine literature relevant to difficult dialogue discussions in classroom settings. Then, I make a call for the use of CCP techniques to facilitate successful discussions. The third section will explore personal narrative as my guiding method to share the process of learning how to use CCP to facilitate these conversations. The fourth section will focus on two of my real life attempts at engaging in difficult dialogues with my students. The first narrative focuses on a time when the discussion did not go well, while the second narrative focuses on a time when the discussion was more successful. Lastly, I will summarize the importance of facilitating difficult dialogues in the Speech Communication 101 classroom and the outcomes of my own attempts to do so.

Literature Review of Difficult Dialogue

When talking about leading difficult dialogue sessions in a classroom, Burbules (2004) lays out many problems that can stem from these dialogues. They can make the classroom uncomfortable and/or unsafe (Burbules, 2004). In addition, some students may not talk at all, while others could dominate the conversation (Burbules, 2004). Further, some people may not speak openly or honestly, and teachers rarely know how or when to constrain the conversation (Burbules, 2004). Many scholars (Allan, 2001; Boler, 2004; Erickson, 2004; Fassett & Warren, 2007, Kumashiro, 2002) argue about the best way to address the concerns that Burbules (2004) so nicely synthesizes. How does an instructor create a public forum in their classroom for a difficult dialogue session? What rules should the instructor set up? Should the instructor silence dominant voices to allow marginalized voices an opportunity to speak up or should the instructor allow the dominant voices to remain and use their contributions as learning experiences? If the instructor makes the choice to silence certain students, it could foster a more engaging critical conversation. However, the cost of silencing students may outweigh the benefits.

Silencing Privileged Students

Megan Boler (2004) addresses the idea of silencing privileged students through an approach she has termed “affirmative action pedagogy” (p.4). Affirmative action pedagogy encourages critical analysis of the larger systems of power and oppression. Further, “[a]ffirmative action pedagogy seeks to ensure that we bear witness to marginalized voices in our classrooms, even at the minor cost of limiting dominant voices” (Boler, 2004, p. 4). I interpret Boler’s claim to indicate that the best environment for a difficult dialogue session is one in which marginalized or often silenced voices are

given agency to talk, even if that means forcing dominant voices into silence. This silencing can be done by not allowing dominant voices into the class in the first place, or by not allowing them to take part in the discussion.

Affirmative action pedagogy creates a space for marginalized voices to be heard and to feel that their voices will be valued (Boler, 2004). It gives marginalized identities an outlet to express themselves, when so often their thoughts and feelings are silenced at micro and macro levels of interaction (deCastell, 2004). However, I can see how an Affirmative Action classroom set-up can have many drawbacks. First, it does not allow all voices to be heard. Second, it can create hostility in the classroom, especially among the students that cannot share their viewpoints. Third, what if those disadvantaged voices do not want to share or still do not feel safe sharing? Most of what is voiced by privileged students are aspects of their lives that are considered normal or “allowed” by societal discourse (Collier, 2005). I think dominant beliefs can be a good starting point for conversation because they give my students explicit moments to analyze how “normal” garners privilege. If you do not meet the criteria for normality (privilege) then you are “abnormal” or “wrong” (Johnson, 2001). Furthermore, can a group learn and analyze dominant discourses if the dominant discourses are silenced? Since dominant discourses need to be analyzed, I think it is a better idea to work to find a balance between dominant and marginalized voices coupled with requiring speakers to be reflexive about what they say. By working with examples of dominant discourse, instead of ignoring or silencing dominant voices, a different types of learning can occur (Li Li, 2004). While it is important to hear and learn from marginalized voices, it is also important to learn from the teachable moments created by dominant voices as well.

Cris Mayo (2004) argues exactly this when she lays out what she believes is the best approach to establishing difficult dialogue spaces. She believes that silencing the dominant voices and the hateful speech, does not do more than put a band-aid over a festering wound. Thus, silencing the “politically incorrect” speech, does not allow it to be analyzed. If thoughts, sayings, “jokes,” and hurtful speech are silenced instead of examined, then they remain unchallenged. Mayo (2004) believes that it is more important to find a balance between all of the voices in the group, and that all voices should have a right to exist and be heard. She further argues that school policies enacted to punish and silence people who are saying derogatory things “are written to prevent substantive change by focusing on simple, relative rules rather than large-scale changes in curricula or social practice” (p.34). For example, if a student yells an epithet at a fellow student in the hallway, they will get a detention. This will, hopefully, teach the student not to yell derogatory things while at school. However, it will not teach them to change their beliefs about marginalized groups nor encourage them to think about how they came to these beliefs about another group of people (Johnson, 2001). Instead, it teaches them how to act in school but not how to act in life. It addresses the *what* of the situation, but does not address the *why*.

Intense Emotions

Kathy Obear (2007) offers another option to establish a difficult dialogue forum. She calls for the instructor to follow the framework she has deemed the “triggering cycle.” Obear (2007) insists that the way to have an effective dialogue about deeply seated and personal issues is by first examining the trigger cycle, which refers to the steps a person goes through when they “experience an intense, often unexpected, emotional

reaction to an external or internal stimulus and are often surprised by how the intensity of their emotion is disproportionate to the original stimulus” (2007, p. 23). According to Obear’s (2007) conceptualization, the triggering cycle explains how a person can process through intense emotions that are created by systemic modes of power and privilege. These emotions often are expressed in difficult dialogue sessions and can hinder one’s ability to engage in dialogue if the emotions are not addressed.

Katherine Obear (2007) lays out the seven steps of the trigger cycle. This cycle explains the steps that a person goes through when trying to understand and process through intense emotions. It encourages students to truly analyze their emotions such as anger, hurt, loss, and sorrow and to see the cause of them. The steps of the triggering cycle are as follows: (1) stimulus occurs, (2) the stimulus “triggers” an intrapersonal “root,” (3) these intrapersonal issues offer a lens through which a facilitator creates a “story” about what is happening, (4) the story a facilitator creates shapes the cognitive, emotional, and physiological reactions s/he experiences, (5) the intention of a facilitator’s response is influenced by the story s/he creates, (6) the facilitator reacts to the stimulus, and (7) the facilitator’s reaction may be a trigger for participants and/or another facilitator (Obear, 2007, p.24). Obear (2007) believes that if each student was to go through the cycle, either in the moment with the fellow participants or before responding, it could help to “re-establish a sense of emotional equilibrium in order to thoughtfully choose an effective response ...” (p. 24). By implementing this framework during difficult dialogues, it allows a person the opportunity to be self-reflexive and to take the time to see where intense emotions come from. Thus, creating a space for emotions such as anger, sorrow, and pain to be processed.

In my opinion, difficult dialogues serve a larger purpose than just processing through intense emotions. If the entire point of a difficult dialogue is to help people process through their feelings, then the macro issues that influenced the micro emotional moments are lost. Instead, the emphasis is put on the experiences of the person and what they are feeling. By “just” processing through feelings, without analyzing the systemic oppression that created these feelings, the trigger cycle ignores the causes of the emotions. If the entire goal of a difficult dialogue session is to process through feelings to “get over them,” instead of opening a space that allows for a discussion of systemic oppression, then these difficult dialogue sessions are not going to help make changes in the world. The trigger cycle calls attention away from the cause of the emotions, and instead focuses on accepting the emotions. Metaphorically speaking, let us say that there are ants in my cupboard. Instead of spraying the outside of my house to stop them from coming in, I am just going to use the trigger cycle to kill the one that I see in my cupboard. While you solve the immediate problem, the ants still exist and can come back. That is how I see the application of the trigger cycle if it is the only purpose of a difficult dialogue session.

Another possible framework to craft difficult dialogue sessions is what Diane Goodman (1995) calls the “Model of Social Identity Development” (p. 38). This model processes through the five stages that both privileged and marginalized groups go through and “reflects a particular way of viewing the world and oneself as a member of a social group” (p.47). Goodman (1995) published a table that lays out the different stages of social identity development. Each stage has the person realizing different aspects of their identity and the roles their identities play within macro system of power. The Social

Identity Model also explains how a student who travels through the stages will eventually be able to understand the role power and privilege plays in their own lives and in the larger world (Goodman, 1995).

Table 1

Five Stages of the Social Identity Development Model

Stage 1	Naïveté	Little to no awareness of social identities and systematic inequality
Stage 2	Acceptance	Participation in the value system, stereotypes and social arrangements of an unjust society
Stage 3	Resistance	Beginning to question the oppressive ideology and seek to uncover and understand the many ways in which inequality is manifested individually, institutionally, and culturally.
Stage 4	Redefinition	Finding new ways of defining/naming one's self and his/her social groups
Stage 5	Internalization	Being able to apply one's identity to and in the different parts of there lives and internalize it.

Adapted from "Difficult dialogues: Enhancing discussions about diversity." By Diane Goodman, 1995, *College Teaching*, 43(2), p. 38. Copyright 1995 by the College Teaching Association.

Every person who enters into a difficult dialogue session may come from a different stage of the Social Identity Development Model or be in a different place within the same stage. This can lead to conflict and the end of constructive conversation. If one person is just learning about their identities and the role they play in the hierarchy of power and privilege and another person is already resisting privilege, then conflict ensues that cannot be easily remedied. If two people are in different spots in their consciousness regarding power and privilege, it is harder to get them on the same page (Stewart & Lozano, 2009). For example, if someone has never heard the term sexism, it is going to be hard for that person to grasp the significance of how their choice to call someone a "pussy" can perpetuate sexism (hooks, 1984).

Defensiveness and Anger

Every time I have attempted to engage in difficult dialogue with my students, I have found that one of the hardest tasks to accomplish is getting privileged students to see past the easy and normalized responses of defensiveness and anger. Take for example issues of race. According to Pinterits, Poteat, and Spanierman (2009), “Scholars have conceptualized a range of affective reactions that White individuals might express in response to White privilege; “These reactions include, but are not limited to, fear, guilt, and anger” (p. 417). This is something that I have seen played out time and time again in classroom settings. People with privileged identities have trouble processing through the implications of their privilege. When this occurs students will, most likely, be unable to reflexively engage in difficult dialogues (Ellsworth, 1989). From my perspective, they will be more likely to let their anger or defensiveness shut down the dialogue than to do the required reflexive work which allows a student to place themselves within the discussion. Some may feel guilty, but quite a few also feel defensive and angry (Utsey, Gernat, & Hammar, 2005). People who represent privileged groups might also fear what their privilege does to others. A number of privileged students may feel their privilege does not exist, or that they do not perpetuate the systemic cycles that give them privilege because they do not actively set out to oppress anyone. For example, a White man may not think that he has any white or male privilege, but instead insist that he got the promotion because he worked harder. Thus this man does not take into account that he was raised in a world the supported him as capable and worthy of the promotion (Johnson, 2001). Privileged people get angry because they have been taught that being sexist or racist is a bad thing done by bad people, and so they dislike the “insinuation”

that they are bad people because of their access to power and privilege (Warren & Hytten, 2004).

Anger can be seen as a defensive response when coupled with a privileged identity such as Whiteness or able-bodiedness (Pinterits, Poteat, & Spanierman, 2009). For example, when I asked my students to name one way they perpetuate a system of oppression, Stan who identifies as a white, heterosexual, male athlete, was the first to get angry. He insisted that there was no way he would oppress somebody. He has gone to candle light vigils for fallen gay soldiers and volunteers at the Women's Center. I explained to him that while that was nice, there are still ways that he is perpetuating oppression. I asked him what type of service he expects at a restaurant and why he expects that service. I then asked other people if they receive the same service. During this discussion, one of my Black students spoke up about the poor service he almost always receives. It was a great micro example about White privilege in play. Furthermore, by denying that systemic privilege exists, the privileged can justify these problems as being caused by someone else, rather than by them (Warren & Hytten, 2004).

Another reason for defensiveness and anger from students who represent privileged identities is that it is easier to be defensive and angry than it is to admit weakness (Loschiavo, Miller, & Davies, 2007). For example, Loschiavo, Miller and Davies state, "... when men enter difficult dialogues, they anticipate that their experiences as men will not be understood, accepted or validated" (2007, p. 195). I see fear of rejection so engrained in American society that people will go to extraordinary lengths to avoid it (Yoder, 2007). To avoid fear and rejection, most people turn to things

that have worked before such as anger and defensiveness. If a student comes across as angry or defensive, then maybe the whole discussion will just be dropped and the costly realities of privilege will not be exposed. This common reaction continues to unfairly protect privilege and allows privilege to remain unchallenged and continue the oppression of marginalized people (Garrison, 2004).

Offering another example, Loschiavo, Miller and Davies say, “we have seen men rationalize (cite logical reasons for inequality) and deflect (change the topic of inequality to one that is less threatening) the dialogue in conversations about sexual assault prevention” (2007, p. 196). This reaction allows men to remain in an “ignorant” non-reflective role. In this role, they will not have to say what their privilege does, they will not have to see what they get for their privilege, and they get to blame somebody else for the oppressions going on in the world, instead of exposing their weaknesses. In my classroom, this strategy surfaces when Gary states that he should not have to suffer under Affirmative Action because he has never owned slaves or when Sarah says she is not homophobic because she does not care what people do in the privacy of their own homes. The very beginnings of difficult dialogue sessions are usually met with very similar comments, but while processing through them, many students start to see their roles within systems of power (Stewart & Lozano, 2009).

Having reviewed the literature, it seems that there is no perfect way to engage in difficult dialogue. While I find some of these approaches to the creation of difficult dialogue spaces more problematic than others, I think that all of them have the same goal in mind. They all want to help create a space where people can openly talk about issues that influence their lives (Boler, 2004). This is a space in which people are not looked

down upon for their privileged or marginalized identities, but instead are able to analyze their privilege (Mayo, 2004). Then, through self-reflective analysis, they are able to start considering who they are, and what may dictate the impact of their power and privilege (Goodman, 1995). I cannot see anyone approach working in every situation. If a person is not sure what stage of the social identity model they are in, helping them work through the triggering cycle might help them realize where they are and how their identities have influenced their thoughts and beliefs (Obear, 2007). Being able to discuss these beliefs in a place where they will not be forced into silence and will be asked to be reflexive about what they think can allow a difficult dialogue discussion to be successful (Mayo, 2004). By successful, I mean one in which the participants are able to talk about tricky and touchy subjects without immediately becoming angry, defensive, or silenced. From my perspective, critical communication pedagogy can be useful in creating successful spaces for difficult dialogues to happen.

Critical Communication Pedagogy as Theory

This is the point of my classroom--- to engender first the critique and second the opportunity to talk about these issues; I want them to struggle with the questions, the issues, the complex matrix of race plus gender plus class plus power plus... I have worked to build this space, with their support, their questions, and, to some extent, their indulgence, to make this moment possible. (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p. 38)

This quote is from one of the major texts on critical communication pedagogy.

Fassett and Warren (2007) clearly articulate the core assertion that CCP is necessary for engaging in difficult dialogues in the classroom. The quote above synthesizes the heart of my teaching philosophy and is what drives the way I have learned to set up my classroom. Their insights also exemplify my reasoning for establishing a space to have discussions about deeply personal, vulnerable, threatening, and touchy subjects such as

homophobia, sizism, racism, and gender violence. I want my students to be able to critique their lives, I want them to start examining the intersectionality of their identities, and I want to collaborate with them to create a space that will allow us to do this. These aspects of teaching are important to me because they are the best way that I can make a change in the world. The first step to creating change is to create awareness. It is also important for me to try to ensure that my students feel important. I want my students to learn to be critical, not just learn information that is promptly forgotten after the test. Instead they can learn about a new way to live their lives, and maybe even let this new knowledge spur them into starting to making changes that influence oppressive systems. I believe that theorizing my teaching experiences through CCP will allow me to do this.

Fassett and Warren (2007) list ten fundamental commitments that draw together critical communication educators. Of these ten commitments, seven explicitly speak to engaging in difficult dialogue sessions.

Table 2

Seven Commitments of Critical Communication Pedagogy

Commitment 1	Identity is constituted in communication.
Commitment 2	Understanding that power as fluid and complex.
Commitment 3	Culture is central to critical communication pedagogy, not additive.
Commitment 4	Embrace a focus on concrete, mundane communication practices as constitutive of larger social structural systems.
Commitment 5	Embrace social, structural critique as it places concrete, mundane communication practices in a meaningful context.
Commitment 6	Language (and analysis of language as constitutive of social phenomena) is central.
Commitment 7	Reflexivity is an essential condition for critical communication pedagogy.

Fassett and Warren's (2007) first commitment positions identity as created through communication. Ting-Toomey (1993) states that identity is, "the mosaic sense of self-identification that incorporates the interplay of human, cultural, social and personal images as consciously or unconsciously experienced and enacted by the individual" (p. 74). This definition of identity is useful to my pedagogical style because it synthesizes the importance of looking at all aspects of, and influences, on one's identity before entering into a dialogue. It also stresses the fact that identity is created by many different forces; from television, to parents, to friends. Negotiating one's identity is a constantly ongoing process (Ting-Toomey, 1993). Talking with others, self-reflecting, and trying to fit in with peers and society, all help shape a person's identity (Alexander, 2010). Yet communication has an exceptionally strong influence on identity as well (Shin & Jackson, 2003). From the basics of language that toddlers learn from listening to their parents, to research assignments given in high school that have students investigate their heritage, to young adults who buy a \$125 pair of jeans to fit in with their clique; every step of the identity negotiation process is done with and through communication (Cooks, 2010).

In terms of identity and identities in the classroom, an instructor who takes CCP into account works with his or her students to help them learn who they consider themselves to be. If we do not take time to think about who we are and how we got to this point in our lives, we cannot enter into a socially conscious dialogue (Fassett & Warren, 2007). If a person does not know what has created their feelings or has constituted their background, they subsequently will not know what is currently influencing their beliefs, thoughts and feelings. For example, as a teacher I make a point to ask my students to

deconstruct a derogatory comment when it is said in my class. When my student Stan said that a course reading was “retarded,” I asked him what he meant. He meant that the reading was long, stupid, and repetitive. I then asked the class what the actual term “retard” meant. In its denotative definition, it means to slow. In its connotative definition it refers to a person who has a below average IQ which keeps them from being able to function in “normal” day to day life. Our class discussion moved forward to talk about why society allows “retard” to exist as a negative word, and how the media and the world’s view of mentally challenged people allows that phrase to usually exist unchallenged. Further, most of my students agreed that they use that term often and while they do see it as somewhat problematic, they rarely have anyone challenge their use of the word. This short discussion allowed my students the chance to practice self-reflexivity and to start to examine the role their past plays in their derogatory word choices. Most identities are created around what people have and/or have not been told and what they have and/or have not been exposed to (Johnson, 2001). In addition, the ways they have/have not been silenced or oppressed plays a role (Freire, 2003). All of these things make up one’s own identity and influence the person who will be entering into difficult dialogues. Until a person self-reflexively knows who they are, identity cannot be discussed transparently.

Power is ephemeral; it is never the same in two situations according to the second CCP commitment. A slight change in atmosphere, group make-up, or group consciousness can change the power structure and the amount of power each person partaking in a conversation has (Fassett & Warren, 2007). In every given situation there is a power structure (Johnson, 2001). The minute a person opens his or her mouth and

those around them listen to what is being said, the person speaking has access to power. However, that power shifts when the person who is speaking is interrupted. For example, when I am talking to my students about the guidelines for an upcoming speech and there is a lot of whispering going on, I start to lose power because my students are listening to each other instead of listening to me. However, when I stop mid-sentence and wait, within a few seconds my students will realize that I have stopped talking and usually they will stop as well. The person who has the floor and everyone else's attention, is usually the person with the most power in the room, so once their attention is back on me, and my power is reinstated, I can continue to go over my guidelines. In a classroom, the person with the most power is, more often than not, the instructor. Allowing some students to talk, silencing others, posing questions, and even simply standing at the front of the classroom, all imbue the instructor with more power than anybody else in the class (Turman & Schrodt, 2006). However, if the instructor has the knowledge and desire to share power, they can.

While instructors will always have more power than their students, they can still give students the opportunities to access power for themselves. More importantly as Garrison (2004) states, “[t]eachers should approach teacher-student dialogues with the assumption that students have a great deal to teach as well as learn” (p. 93). Based on Garrison's (2004) insight, I believe that it is important for a teacher to work *with* their students, not teach *at* them. Even though I know I am probably better versed in Speech Communication than my students, I know my students are better versed in other things. I can and do learn a lot from them, so long as I remain open to them teaching me.

In order for discussions to take place where everyone feels that their voice is heard and cultural differences are positively recognized, culture must be positioned as a central aspect of dialogues, according to CCP commitment number three. Further, culture must be seen at the heart of the conversation rather than as an afterthought (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Culture is everywhere and influences everything. It denotes what holidays to celebrate, what words to use, and what clothes to wear (Collier, 2005). It is taught to us from the moment we are born and becomes an intrinsic part of our lives. Most of us do not even think about the role culture plays in our existence, until something (or someone) comes along and threatens our culture or treats our culture as inferior to theirs (Johnson, 2001). When this threat occurs, most people want to stand up and fight for their way of life (Freire, 2003). However, that does not mean that everyone can fight; sometimes people are forced to silence their cultural beliefs, practices, and identities or face terrible repercussions (Faulkner, Calafell, & Grimes, 2009). Offering an example of silencing in academic settings, Faulkner, Calafell and Grimes (2009) share poems with Hello Kitty as the central character. They chart Hello Kitty's journey through her education from when she remains silent when her professor stared at her butt, to when men on the bus shouted derogatory things at her. Fearing for her course grade if she angered her professor and afraid for her safety on a bus full of men, Hello Kitty felt her only option was to remain silent.

Students, especially, can be forced into silence or risk being ostracized by their peers. Take for example a student who is teased by a classmate for the way he looks. If he reports the teasing to the instructor, then there is a good chance that he will end up enduring further torment and threats to his masculinity (which further perpetuates

negative gender stereotypes). The moment dominant culture is ignored or considered commonplace, can be the moment that bigoted thoughts, phrases, and comments start to surface. Once they are taken for granted and not immediately addressed or critiqued, they start to do harm. Once people start to feel harmed, productive dialogue typically shuts down and there is no longer a welcoming space for this dialogue to occur. Although many dominant cultural beliefs are learned at a young age and engrained as a part of people's lives, they can be challenged via CCP, which will allow critical discussions to occur.

Commitment number four of CCP is rooted in the belief that every choice a person makes and every prejudice or instinct a person has about someone else, is created by larger societal rules and regulations that dictate the "proper" and "normal" ways to act and live (Fassett & Warren, 2007). The way we talk is influenced by something larger than the context of a specific conversation. The words we choose to use are influenced by our upbringing, access to power and privilege, access to education, social interactions with others, and even the media we chose to engage with. Speaking is a learned skill, and learning is heavily influenced by those in power (Shor, 1987). I was privileged to have grown up in a mostly White, middle class, suburban school district. This meant that I was able to focus on my education. I had teachers who were paid well to help me learn, and a family that encouraged me to put my education first. It was not until I became a teacher that I truly started to see the role power plays in education. Some of my students did not have access to the same powerful education that I did. It was not until I had access to more power and more education that I was able to realize that different dialects of the

English language did not measure up to dominant understandings of proper speaking skills, but instead denoted a different upbringing.

Without being mindful of privilege and voice in the classroom, those who are not systemically marginalized will end up with the dominant voices because they have rarely been forced or even asked to be quiet. If we force silence on them during discussions, in alignment with affirmative action pedagogy (Boler, 2004) it may help them somewhat imagine what it is like to be a member of a marginalized group but it will not help everyone involved learn how to critique dominant discourse. The entire point of conducting difficult dialogues is to create a space where a group of people can critique dominant discourse and learn how systems of power have denoted what is normal and therefore privileged, and subsequently what is not (Stewart & Lozano, 2009). In alignment with difficult dialogues, CCP also sets out to help people critique language and culture so that larger systemic modes of power and privilege can be deconstructed.

The mundane conversations embedded in oppressive systems must be examined and are great prompts for difficult dialogue sessions. This is the fifth CCP commitment. I would take this idea a step further, and say that the *lack* of mundane communication practices is also constitutive of larger structural systems. Further, as Kumisharo (2002) discusses at length in his book *Troubling Education: Queen Activism and Antioppressive Pedagogy*, what makes talking about oppression difficult is that the way we talk about it can perpetuate the very cycles we are trying to deconstruct. Critical communication pedagogy provides my students and myself with the very tools needed to talk about power and privilege. These tools include the ability to: critique everyday conversations that perpetuate power and privilege (Lovaas & Jenkins, 2007); analyze language and

word choices and the power that words have (Fassett & Warren, 2007); critique word choices that have been habituated into American discourse (Nainby, 2010); and emphasize self-reflexivity which allows us to learn from our own mistakes (Cooks, 2010). Using CCP, we can also understand that by “othering” or “marginalizing” one group, you are distinguishing that they are different from the “norm” (Warren & Hytten, 2004).

A useful way to start analyzing power, privilege, and oppression in the classroom is to examine micro everyday conversations as being more meaningful than the precise context in which the conversation takes place (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Critiquing mundane communication practices is important because everything a person says and does from the trivial good morning to the making of a Klu Klux Klan snowman in their front yard (Kauder, 2010), comes from some aspect of their lived experiences. Jim Garrison (2004) describes this well when he states, “[i]nfants are not born with cultural meanings, values, and so on, and they only acquire them by participating in the discourse practice of their culture” (p. 90). Given this reality, if one does not critique the actions of others and themselves, how can they learn? Whether a person changes based on this critique is not nearly as important as the person understanding the critique, where the critiqued beliefs come from, and the systematic structure that brought these beliefs into existence. Using myself as an example; it was important for me to realize that my mother and teachers brought me up to believe that a colorblind view of my students is the best way for a teacher to treat everyone equally. This was an important piece of knowledge because I was able to use this reflective information to understand my frustrations when one of my Black students did not speak “properly.” Before learning about CCP, I would

have just graded him down because I would do so if he was a White student. With my new knowledge about cultures and upbringings, I am able to recognize cultural differences and see people as individuals instead of assuming that everyone is or should be the same. We are trained from a young age to not talk about certain things, and the reason why we are trained not to talk about them is built into the rules that exist in the structured society that CCP educators are seeking to critique.

Language is at the root of communication. It both creates societal structures, and works within them. According to the sixth CCP commitment, critical analysis of language can help students understand the power structure in the classroom (Fassett & Warren, 2007). In accordance with creating spaces for difficult dialogue, language is important to analyze because language is a major site of privilege; words are what informs everyone of the power structures in play (Shin & Jackson, 2003). For example, if English is your first language and you are attending a U.S. American school then you do not have to constantly translate what everyone around you is saying. Also, when you speak, you will not have to worry about being understood or your accent bringing your nationality into question. In addition, you do not have to worry about being “othered” or considered foreign, and therefore unwelcomed in America. An accent (or lack there of) is a major signifier of class, upbringing, first language, and privilege (Shin and Jackson, 2003). If someone is worried that they will not be understood due to an accent or because the dominant language is a second language, than they are more likely to remain silent.

The final CCP core commitment focuses on the importance of self-reflexivity. When students can reflect on their beliefs, upbringings, and morals and see how they have been influenced by larger societal pressures, they can learn that they are not the sole

cause of their prejudices (Fassett & Warren, 2007). The same goes for instructors such as myself. I remember when I took the time to be reflexive about the situation I opened this paper with. Even though I did not handle the situation properly, or at all, I still learned from the situation. I learned from my errors; I learned from inaction and I realized the importance of not letting my fears of failure stop me for creating teachable moments from problematic everyday discourse. Without reflexivity, I may not have come to the same realizations.

According to Cooks (2010), “The moral aspect, always present in critical work, demands a self-reflexivity in teaching...” (p. 302). Cooks (2010) closely links morals to self-reflexivity, but I think the link between the two is even stronger than she articulates. By doing self-reflexive work, it forces a person to really look at why they have the morals that they do. To believe in something blindly because you always have is understandable, but after discovering the reasons why you believe something, new realizations may help amplify or change your beliefs. For example, once a student realizes that her high school teachers treated her badly because of the color of her skin, she may be able to realize why she does not like school. Her dislike of school has little to do with the homework or the course load, but instead is rooted in the deep feelings of pain and sorrow brought on by racist teachers.

Using CCP to implement and guide difficult dialogue sessions is not easy since every group of students will be different. Therefore, each situation will yield different results. Further, every classroom will need the instructor to facilitate the dialogue differently. To promote a space in which these difficult dialogues can occur to allow for the analysis of systemic oppression, the instructor must work with the students in the

context of who they are at the intersections of privileged and marginalized identities. As a means to do so, critical communication pedagogy allows for a space to discuss issues that may have never been discussed before. It encourages self-reflexivity, previously silenced voices to speak out, and asks dominant voices to analyze their positionalities. Finally, CCP asks everyone to work with each other, instead of only working with those people of the same privileged status. All of these things must take place and must be ephemeral. Thus, “As students learn about differences, they can also constantly reflect on ways in which *what they learn* makes different knowledges, identities, and practices possible” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 60).

When the notion of difficult dialogue is partnered with CCP, people lives, beliefs and thoughts can change. Dialogue will stall when students feel that they do not have the agency to make mistakes or that they cannot speak up and share their viewpoints. If they feel they cannot challenge the things being said, then this can further promote the very systems these dialogues are setting out to dismantle. However, critical communication pedagogy can create a space which gives all speakers agency to contribute regardless of past experiences and also provides the opportunity to challenge systemic privileges.

Methodology

When personal narratives, the stories that come closest to the human experience, are used as pedagogy, they can be windows offering views of different worlds and people. In this way, personal narratives become lanterns that illuminate the real and imagined fences that divide us as human beings. (Ingram, 2009, p. 7)

In this essay I use Critical Communication Pedagogy to theorize my implementation of difficult dialogue discussions with my students. To do so, I am using personal narratives as a means to map the implementation of CCP techniques in real life

situations. Personal narratives allow for both internal and external dialogue to take place and be critiqued while showcasing the application of CCP techniques in the classroom. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1989), narratives allow for both personal and social experiences to be structured in a way that will value the quality of the experience being narrated. When talking about systems of power and privilege, narratives are a powerful means to express individual experiences that are often at the very heart of difficult dialogues for both students and teachers.

“Narrative method, in its simplest terms, is the description and restorying of the narrative structure of varieties of educational experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989, p. 261). Narration allows a scholar to provide detailed descriptions and real life experiences, in the form of stories, and use them as a site for investigation. From my perspective, there is no better way to exemplify critical communication pedagogy practices than by relating real life attempts to implement these complex and yet practical teaching strategies. Narrative inquiry allows for free conversations and personal stories (Abdallah, 2009). This method provides the researcher with the chance to incorporate thoughts and feelings, as well as extrinsic observations of what is taking place (Abdallah, 2009). When working with difficult dialogues which are deeply rooted in mental processes, emotions, and past experiences, it is hard to only use external observations. My use of narrative allows me to delve into the heart of the difficult dialogue sessions and examine them from my perspective as an instructor (Abdallah, 2009). Narrative is less of an application of a scholarly technique as it is a matter of delving into and taking part in the situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). It also allows for reflexivity to be included in the research which is essential given my focus on CCP (Cooks, 2010).

Culture and history are embedded within an individual's narrative, which allows narrative to be a site for the analysis of culture and systems of power (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989). Further, "[a] narrative is able to render the concrete particularities of experience" (Crites, 1975, p. 26). Crites (1975) explains what narratives provide researchers that no other form of research is likely to provide. What I like about narratives is that they allow me to map my perspectives on and uses of difficult dialogue sessions. Likewise, through narrative, I can ground my understanding of CCP in real life classroom examples by talking through my experiences, considering my failures, and honoring my successes. It is one thing to say I think critical communication pedagogy would work in a given situation; it is another thing to be able to narrate the process of bringing CCP to life in my classroom.

Personal Narrative Application

Both narratives that follow map contrasting attempts at using critical communication pedagogy techniques to engage in difficult dialogue sessions with my Speech Communication 101 students. The first narrative shows how my failure to implement proper CCP techniques created a situation in which the difficult dialogue session failed. This narrative centers on issues of gender violence, blaming the victim discourse, and a lack of application of CCP techniques that allowed systemic modes of power and privilege to remain unchallenged. The second narrative maps how CCP created a positive learning experience. This narrative centers on issues of sizism, earned and unearned privilege, and sexism. In the second narrative, I share how I implemented CCP techniques to challenge systemic modes of power and privilege.

Narrative 1: "Some women like to get hit."

My first attempt at establishing dialogue surrounding difficult issues, was sparked by an earlier class discussion about popular culture, specifically music. My students and I were talking about how gender identities are portrayed through music. We talked about everything from “Man I Feel like a Woman” by Shania Twain, to “Crazy Bitch” by Nickelback. I asked my students if they had heard the Eminem featuring Rhianna song, “Love the Way You Lie,” and most of my students said that they had. However, when I asked them what they thought about the song, I got luke warm and somewhat empty responses. For example, my students talked about the song’s catchy tune, the beat, and the easy to learn chorus sung by Rhianna. After further inquiry, I discovered that most did not even know the words of the song, with the exception of the chorus. I saw this as a perfect chance to make my first attempt to generate difficult dialogue on a sensitive subject matter.

I planned our entire class period by writing a detailed lesson plan which included: playing the song, giving my students the opportunity to look at the lyrics, having a discussion about the gender violence inherent in the song, and providing information on campus resources for any of my students who have had a personal connection to gender violence and/or just need to talk to somebody about what we covered in class. I printed off the lyrics so each student could have their own copy. Then I filled my copy with comments, questions, and problems that I found with the lyrics. In addition, I re-familiarized myself with the basics of domestic violence issues and support. To prepare for the activity, I legally downloaded the song so that I could start class by playing it while my students looked over the lyrics and underlined any parts that they found disturbing or problematic. The specific aspect of the song that I anticipated critiquing was

when Eminem raps, “If she ever tries to fuckin’ leave again, imma tie her to the bed and set this house on fire” (Eminem, 2010). I also planned on having a conversation about Rhianna’s lyrics in the chorus. I wanted to problematize what it means to “love the way you lie” or “like the way it hurts” (Eminem, 2010). I was sure that this was going to be a great and fruitful discussion. I thought that my students would realize how popular culture can perpetuate domestic violence, and that everyone would leave class more informed about issues surrounding music and domestic violence. As an instructor, I felt very prepared for this discussion.

As planned, I started class by passing out the lyrics and playing the approximately five minute song. While the song was playing, I saw my students diligently struggling through the lyrics. Some were underlining practically everything, while others just underlined a word or sentence here or there. The song concluded and I began to facilitate the class discussion. “Alright, so what did y’all underline?” [Long pause] “What is a part of the song that you found problematic?” [No response from the class] “Or disturbing?” [Still no response] “Or maybe something you just wanted to bring up as a question or topic for discussion?” At this point, I shut my mouth. I was not going to talk anymore. I was going to sit through the silence (however awkward) and wait for a student to speak up. This was one of the most awkward times that I have ever had in the classroom. Although no one was speaking in my class, my mind was full of voices. I was nervous that there was not going to be any response at all or that I was not going to like the responses offered. This silence reminded me of why I did not like to conduct these types of conversations in the first place. However, I was facilitating this conversation so I felt my only option was to wait.

As a teacher, I did not feel that this was the appropriate type of discussion for cold calling. I did not want to force anyone to talk, especially on a subject that could be hard for them to process or could be deeply personal to them. My caution stemmed from the reality that I did not know who may have come from a background of violence or who may currently be in a violent relationship. I also did not know if this was a subject that could make my students uncomfortable, make them feel too vulnerable, or even create an unsafe space. Therefore, I just waited. Thirty-seven long seconds later, one student raised his hand and talked about Eminem's character rapping about an altercation in which the woman in the relationship said she was leaving him and he refused to let her go (Eminem, 2010). He found this problematic because everyone is their own person and has the right to leave a situation anytime they want to. My student asked, "If they can't leave, doesn't that make them a slave?" This conversation continued for about five minutes with students explaining certain lyrics as promoting gender violence before the conversation dwindled down again. Then, I pitched my original question back to my students. "What else? Was there any other part of the song that you found problematic?"

In response, a Black male student, whom I know was born and raised in downtown Chicago, raised his hand. I called on him and he said, "I do not find anything problematic with these lyrics, because some women like to get hit." In reaction to his comment, I found myself speechless. I could not believe that he had actually said this! I had not prepared for a student to say something like this! His interpretation was definitely *not* part of my lesson plan. Every student in my class was supposed to realize how awful domestic violence is. They were supposed to leave my class feeling more enlightened. I never expected that someone would actually think that violence against women was

acceptable. After processing through all of this, I decided that I would see if I could get my students to police themselves. I “knew” I could not be the only one who found this student’s comment troubling. I asked my students, “What do you think? Is this true?” I figured someone would step in and explain how that comment was troublesome. If no one else did then I would. I felt it would have a stronger impact coming from peers than it would from me and I was pretty sure that at least one of my students would challenge his perspective. However, this is not what happened. Instead another male student, who identifies as a Latino from Chicago, spoke up. He talked about his sister, who “is in an abusive relationship. But she keeps going back to him, with two kids in tow. I agree because she keeps going back. So she deserves what she gets because she chooses to go back to him.”

With this comment, I was unable to remain silent. I had hoped that a peer would bring up how the notion that “some women like to get hit” reproduces sexism. I also wanted someone to voice that those few women who may “like the way it hurts” (Eminem, 2010) often have ongoing struggles that stem from violence in their childhood. In response to these two comments, I launched into a mini-lecture about violence begetting violence, how blaming the victim discourse operates, and what some scholars who study gender violence have to say about the issue (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993; Feldman & Ridley, 2000; Johnson & Ferraro, 2004; Ryan, 1976). In particular, I highlighted that gender violence is highly under reported and deeply steeped in gender norms. I also stated that I have never met a single person who thinks that being hit is a sign of love that has not encountered some form of violence by a loved one in their past. We then continued with the discussion and talked about a few other lyrics that

people found violent, problematic, and/or disturbing. Finally, I thanked the class for their willingness to talk about a hard subject like this, reminded them of their assignment for the next class period, and sent them on their way.

After class was dismissed, I sat in the empty classroom for awhile and attempted to process through what had just happened. This was certainly not how I thought class was going to go. This class discussion did not follow my lesson plan. To shed light on my experience, I find a quote by Kumashiro (2002) to be very useful. He says,

I presumed to know my students: what they already knew, how they would respond to the lesson, where they needed to go, what would get them there. By leaving little room for what is uncontrollable and unknowable in education, and by expecting my knowledges to be affirmed and replicated by my students, my preparation also left little room for addressing ways that learning can be unexpectedly difficult, discomfoting, and even emotional. (p. 7)

Kumashiro (2002) helps me understand how this conversation went the way it did. It helps me process through and reflect on the assumptions I made and the errors my assumptions created. Connecting CCP to Kumashiro's (2002) insight, I now realize the importance of grounding conversation in a united understanding of terminology as well as the importance of asking students to be reflexive about their word choices in the moment.

Critical communication pedagogy allows a space to process the difficult, discomfoting, and emotional aspects of difficult dialogue discussions (Fassett & Warren, 2007). It allows everyone the chance to make mistakes, even the instructor. All that CCP asks is that you be reflexive in analyzing your mistakes in order to learn from them. Mistakes are what allow a person to grow. For example, the mistakes that I feel I made in the judgments about my students on the first day of class helps me to realize the

prejudices and preconceived notions I have about what makes a “good” student.

Realizing I made these judgments based on clothing style, eye contact, and where they sit in the classroom, CCP allows me the chance to analyze why I made the assumptions that I did and why these assumptions are problematic. I have since been able to work towards not making judgments and instead getting to know my students before forming an opinion about them or their dedication to their education. If mistakes go unnoticed or unchallenged then they can never be corrected. If a person is never forced to look at the way they are, and what has happened to get them to where they are, then it will be hard for someone to move forward and better themselves.

I have no idea if my students left class that day feeling a stronger need to examine the music they listen to or if they believed that domestic violence is a continuing problem. As I was looking over my notes and journaling about the experience, I also realized that while I had written down information about the Women’s Center and other organizations that address and give aid to victims of domestic violence, I had not relayed this information to my students. This got me thinking about what else I had not done. I felt that this class was a total failure and I was reminded why I usually gloss over tough topics. Engaging in self-reflexivity, I realized my fears about tough topics and difficult dialogues in the classroom which include not knowing: how to respond to intense emotions, how to deal with students when tempers flair, or how to handle having my own privileges brought to the forefront. Perhaps the biggest reason for my avoidance is the fear that I will not have the knowledge or the tools to conduct these dialogues in a way that is productive instead of hurtful.

While I knew what I was trying to accomplish, neither I nor my students were properly prepared to benefit from CCP or engage in successful dialogue. I had not asked my students to be reflexive when they shared, which is one of the core fundamentals of critical communication educators, according to Fassett and Warren (2007). Although I had talked with my students about the importance of identifying oppression, I went in assuming that my students would completely understand how patriarchy and sexism allow gender violence to exist. I also assumed that my students understood the importance of analyzing a song like this. I felt that they would find problems with statements that blame the victim instead of the perpetrator; which Kumashiro (2002) positions as problematic. Overall, I thought that the class discussion would be about *how* domestic violence is problematic, not whether or not domestic violence *is* a problem.

Via CCP, I have since learned that I cannot make assumptions about what my students know. I have also learned that I need to start difficult dialogues with my students by talking about the terms power, privilege, and oppression before talking about gender violence, sexism, and blaming the victim rhetoric. Instead of assuming my students are already aware of these things, we need to map them out together. I cannot take any knowledge for granted. With all of this new knowledge in mind, I was committed to trying again. This time around, guided by CCP, I made several explicit choices to ensure that our class conversation would be more critically conscious. These choices included talking about power, privilege and oppression; working with my students to determine what these words meant and being mindful of my assumptions about what they already know (Fassett & Warren, 2007; Johnson, 2001; Kumashiro, 2002). To give background about the idea of sizism, and to start with macro instances of sizism before immediately

asking them how they perpetuate the cycle, were also changes I would enact. The next narrative will show how my implementation of CCP techniques allowed me to engage in a critical, reflexive, and difficult dialogue with my students.

Narrative #2: "Guys who do that are total douche bags."

My second attempt to use CCP to generate discussion in my classroom surrounded the subject of sizism. The class period before the conversation, I distributed an article that was published in SIUC's *Daily Egyptian* newspaper. It was an editorial about sizism on campus (Mullison, 2011). I asked them to read the article and come into the next class ready to talk about it. Before we even got onto the topic of sizism, I took the first half of class to talk about what an "ism" is and how they operate. I explained to my students that systems of power and privilege exist in our world, and dictate everything from what clothes a person should wear to who is more deserving or qualified for a job. My students were easily able to list some of the well known isms including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism, but only three students admitted that they had ever heard of sizism before I assigned the *Daily Egyptian* article. To frame our discussion on sizism, my students and I first had a conversation about power, privilege, and oppression, calling heavily on the work of Allan Johnson's (2001) book, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. I showed them Johnson's (2001) diversity wheel, and I asked them to identify one aspect of their identity that is privileged and one aspect of their identity that is disadvantaged.

Throughout the class discussion, we talked about how privileges are advantages one group has that another group does not, whether they are earned or unearned (Johnson, 2001). The discussion then morphed into a talk about how these privileges give some

people power over other identity groups (Kumashiro, 2002). Next, we dialogued about the importance of recognizing these systems and how it is usually easier to find the ways that these systems are oppressing us instead of the ways that we are benefiting from them (Johnson, 2001). I then challenged all of my students to state one aspect of their identity that is privileged and one aspect of their identity that is marginalized. This helped to illustrate the idea that we all benefit from some systems of power and privilege, but that there are other systems that force us into subordinate roles (Freire, 2003).

Once I felt my students understood these terms and how they played out in the world, we began centering our discussion on how sizism was taking place on campus. We first defined sizism as the discrimination against a person based on their physical size, mainly centering on people that are considered overweight by societal norms (Nachmias, 2011). Then we covered how we see sizism playing out on campus from the comments that we have heard people say in the court yards, to the size of the desks in lecture halls. Barry, a self-identified heterosexual White male, commented on how he hates it when he hears “a guy call his girlfriend fat, chunky, or whatever.” He further stated, “It’s never okay to make someone feel bad about the way they look. Guys who do that are total douche bags.” Instead of just letting this statement stay where it was, I took the time to work through Barry’s use of the term douche bag. I asked him to explain what he meant by the phrase and, more specifically, by his choice to use the term douche bag to mean something stupid, wrong, or inconsiderate. This showed, in accordance with CCP, the importance of always analyzing language, particularly language that is part of our everyday verbiage (Fassett & Warren, 2007). Most people do not take the time to analyze the phrases they use on a daily basis, but by employing CCP techniques, we are able to

challenge and analyze derogatory phrases that are far too commonplace in American discourse.

Working with the class, we deconstructed the term *douche bag*. We talked about what a *douche* is; it is a female hygiene product. We talked about what happens when we use language associated with females and female bodies to describe a person who is bad, wrong, or inappropriate. This time, our critique raised awareness about the way word choices perpetuate both sexism and sizism. By bringing awareness about what the term *douche* implied (literally and figuratively) and about the large systemic issues of patriarchy surrounding using feminine hygiene care as a negative description of a man, we were able to use CCP techniques and apply them to our discussion of sizism. After asking Barry to be self-reflexive about his word choices, I realized I should do the same with the rest of my students and myself. Likewise, CCP's call for self-reflexivity meant we had to take our discussion a step further than only talking about the ways others reproduce sizism. Thus, CCP asks us to look at how we participate in this system as well. More specifically, what have we heard, said, thought, or done to further the oppression of sizism in our everyday lives? I also requested that they be reflexive about their thoughts and actions and we discussed common place language that perpetuates the belief that being bigger than average was bad. Lastly, we addressed how sizism is a more acceptable form of discrimination because of television, movies, magazines, and the modeling industry interpretation of what makes a "beautiful" woman. These popular culture artifacts function to reinforce, sanction, allow, and in some cases even encourage, sizism.

My students and I worked through this entire conversation and this class ended well. I asked them to journal about the discussion and received a lot of positive feedback.

My students indicated that the discussion went well, that they learned a lot, and that they were looking forward to the next discussion. I consider this to be the best dialogue session that I have had with my students and I believe that it was productive because we implemented critical communication pedagogy techniques. I only hope my future discussions can go this well.

When I first attempted a difficult dialogue discussion with my students, I did so without having the necessary knowledge to help my students be reflexive. I did not know how to unpack systemic issues or how to help my students think about power and privilege. I charged into the discussion assuming that my students knew about power and privilege and that they were able to analyze and critique the ways that power and privilege inform our everyday lives. I entered the discussion thinking that my students had the same knowledge of power and privilege as me, and I was unprepared for the limited perspectives that my students brought into the conversation. Due to my lack of knowledge about CCP techniques, I created a space that allowed for sexism and blaming the victim rhetoric to be perpetuated. I had the desire to challenge my students' ways of thinking, but I did not have the skills.

After studying CCP techniques and working to embody its core fundamentals, I entered into a second dialogue discussion much more informed in the ways my students' roles, culture, language, and upbringing influence the dialogue. This time, my students and I processed through terminology, biases, and issues together. We also discussed how power and privilege play out in macro and micro instances to impact our lives. By introducing all of my students to the key concepts, instead of assuming they were already familiar, we were able to challenge many thoughts, beliefs, and viewpoints that

perpetuate systemic power and privilege. The second time around, I was more prepared to handle, question, and critique the unexpected. I knew how to work through tough situations instead of using silence or long speeches that teach *at*, rather than works *with*, my students.

Conclusion

Using personal narratives to map my application of CCP in difficult dialogue discussions allows me to illustrate the importance of introducing the ideas of power and privilege to the next generation of college students. “I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing” (Freire, 2003, p. 17). Freire (2003) exemplifies my reasoning for engaging in difficult dialogues with my students. Society and social norms are not created by a single person or a single way of knowing. Norms are created, reified, and reinforced by those with power and sway. The only way to start working against norms is by raising awareness of them, which is the point of my dialogues with my students. There are far too many phrases that are part of everyday American vocabulary that are bigoted, discriminatory and prejudiced. Phrases such as, “that’s gay,” “don’t be a pussy,” “what a douche bag,” and “that’s so retarded,” are said everyday by students just like mine and rarely get challenged or problematized.

The main reason these phrases go unchallenged is because they discriminate against disadvantaged, silenced, and oppressed people who cannot stand up for themselves or are often ignored when they do (Johnson, 2001). These phrases are constantly used in mainstream television, movies, and magazines. They are said every day by thousands, if not millions of people. They have been used so many times that most

people do not even see the prejudices in them, they just see them as words that describe when people are acting weak, dumb, or both. Since most people do not even realize that these phrases are oppressive, what better place to educate about the power of words than in a Speech Communication 101 classroom?

From my perspective, the introductory speech communication class is about more than writing speeches. It is about how people communicate. If we can start new college students off with the knowledge of the power and privileges that influence their lives, then they can perhaps choose to spend the rest of their lives (or at least their college career) examining these systems and coming up with ways to combat them. A small percent of people make it to college and an exponentially smaller amount continue on to graduate school. If students are not exposed to the notions of power, privilege and oppression until graduate school, so few people will ever have these issues brought to their attention. If we can start these conversations earlier, than the exposure rate will be higher. This is the first step to creating change: raising awareness.

Simply making discussion about power and privilege a requirement for an introductory class is not enough. Instructors, like myself, must be able to have these conversations in a way that will allow their students to be reflexive about their upbringing, societal pressures, and the impact they have on these systems and these systems have on them. Instructors must also be prepared to meet resistance because our first instinct when confronted with privileged resistance is to keep decorum and stop intense emotions from being expressed. By “keeping decorum” the pleasant atmosphere will be maintained, but so will the oppressive forces that devalue marginalized standpoints and perpetuate dominant discourse as acceptable (Alexander, 2005). Through

this essay, I have demonstrated that one way to prepare instructors to engage in these discussions is by having them read about, work through, analyze, and apply critical communication pedagogy to their classroom instruction. I believe that if instructors are aware of these techniques, encouraging them to engage in difficult dialogue as opposed to shying away from topics that are hard to talk about, will be an easier task.

The introductory speech communication class is a core requirement for most liberal arts universities. Imagine if every one of these classes talked about power, privilege, difference, and oppression. If this were to happen, we could create a whole new generation of students, who think about the ways power and privilege shape their lives and how they both reproduce and combat power and privilege. From my perspective, it is the best way to change the world and truly start working against the “isms” that have been in place for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

If I had had the knowledge of critical communication pedagogy way back when I had the interaction with John and Brian that I opened this paper with, the outcome of that situation would have been different. I would not have kept silent, nor would I have allowed their word choices to exist unchallenged. Rather, I could have attempted to engage in a difficult dialogue which would allow all of us to learn together, learn from each other, and work as a group to create a better world, or at least a better classroom. However, I did not have this knowledge and neither will the average student unless a conscious change to college curriculum is made.

REFERENCES

- Abdallah, M. M. S. (2009). Towards a methodological improvement of narrative enquiry: A qualitative analysis. *Online submission*.
- Alexander, B. K. (2005). Embracing the teachable moment: The black gay body in the classroom as embodied text. In E. P. Johnson & M. G. Henderson (Eds.), *Black queer studies: A critical anthology*. (pp. 249-265). Durham, NC: Duke UP.
- Alexander, B. K. (2010). Critical/performative/pedagogy: Performing possibility as a rehearsal for social justice. In D. L. Fassett & J. T. Warren (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of communication and instruction* (pp. 315-331). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Babcock, J. Waltz, J., Jacobson, N., & Gottman, J. (1993). Power and violence: The relation between communication patterns, power discrepancies, and domestic violence. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61(1), 40-50.
- Boler, M. (2004). All speech is not free: The ethics of “affirmative action pedagogy.” In M. Boler (Ed.), *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence* (pp. 3-13). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Burbules, N. (2004). Introduction. In M. Boler (Ed.), *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence* (pp. xiii-xxxii). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Clandinin, J.D., & Connelly, M. F. (1989). Narrative and story in practice. *Teachers College Press*, (1)1, 258-281.
- Collier, M. J. (2005). Theorizing cultural identifications: Critical updates and continuing evolution. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 235-256). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cooks, L. (2010). The (critical) pedagogy of communication and the (critical) communication of pedagogy. In D. L. Fassett & J. T. Warren (Eds.), *SAGE handbook of communication and instruction* (pp. 293-314). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Crites, S. (1975). Angles we have heard. In James B. Wiggins (Ed.), *Religion as story* (pp. 23-63). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- deCastell, S. (2004). No speech is free: Affirmative action and the politics of give and take. In M. Boler (Ed.), *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence* (pp. 51-57). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Ellsworth, E. (1989). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59(3), 297-324.

- Eminem. (2010). Love the way you lie. [Eminem featuring Rihanna]. On *Recovery* [CD]. Compton, CA: Aftermath Entertainment and Shady Records.
- Erickson, I. M. (2004). Fighting fire with fire: Jane Elliott's antiracist pedagogy. In M. Boler (Ed.), *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence* (pp. 141-158). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Fassett, D. L., & Warren, J. T. (2007). *Critical communication pedagogy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Faulkner, S. L., Calafell, B. M., & Grimes, D. S. (2009). Hello Kitty goes to college: Poems about harassment in the academy. In M. Prendergast, C. Leggo, & P. Sameshima (Eds.), *Poetic inquiry: Vibrant voices in the social sciences* (pp. 187-208). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Feldman C. M., & Ridley, C. A. (2000). The role of conflict-based communication responses and outcomes in male domestic violence toward female partners. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 17(4-5), 552-573.
- Freire, P. (2003). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th Anniv. Edition). New York, NY: Continuum.
- Garrison, J. (2004). Ameliorating violence in dialogues across differences: The role of eros and logos. In M. Boler (Ed.), *Democratic Dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence* (pp. 89-103). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Goodman, D. (1995). Difficult dialogues: Enhancing discussions about diversity. *College Teaching*, 43(2), 47-52.
- hooks, b. (1984). Feminism: A movement to end sexist oppression. In M. Adams, W.J. Blumenfeld, C. Castaneda, H.W. Hackman, M.L. Peters, & X. Zuniga (Eds.), *Readings for diversity and social justice*, (pp. 337-229). New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Ingram, I. L. (2009). Creative maladjustment: Engaging personal narrative to teach diversity and social justice. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, 7(1), 7-22.
- Johnson, A. (2001). *Privilege, power and difference*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Johnson, M. P., & Ferraro, K. L. (2004). Research on domestic violence in the 1990s: Making distinctions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 62(4) 948-963.

- Kauder, R. (2010, December 1). KKK snowman spreads holiday hate in hayden. Retrieved from <http://www.KXLY.com>.
- Kumashiro, K. (2002). *Troubling education: Queer activism and antioppressive pedagogy*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Li Li, H. (2004). Rethinking silencing silences. In M. Boler (Ed.), *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence* (pp. 69-86). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Loschiavo, C., Miller, D. S., & Davies, J. (2007). Engaging men in difficult dialogues about privilege. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 1(1), 193-200.
- Lovaas, K. E., & Jenkins, M. M. (2007). Introduction: Setting the stage. In K. E. Lovaas & M. M. Jenkins (Eds.), *Sexualities and communication in everyday life: A reader* (pp. 1-17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Mayo, C. (2004). The tolerance that dare not speak its name. In M. Boler (Ed.), *Democratic dialogue in education: Troubling speech, disturbing silence* (pp. 33-47). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Mullison, D. (2001, February 13). Sizism is unacknowledged prejudice. *Daily Egyptian*. Retrieved from http://dailyegyptian.com/2011/02/13/vox_21411_kh/.
- Nachmias, J. (2011) Shape and size discrimination compared. *Vision Research*, 51(4), 400-407.
- Nainby, K. (2010). Philosophical and methodological foundations of communication education. In J. Warren & D. Fassett (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of communication and instruction* (pp. 11-31). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Obear, K. (2007). Navigating triggering events: Critical skills for facilitating difficult dialogues. *The Diversity Factor*, 15(3), 23-29.
- Pinterits, J. E., Poteat, V. P., & Spanierman, L. B. (2009). The White privilege attitudes scale: Development and initial validation. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 56(3), 417-429.
- Ryan, W. (1976). *Blaming the victim*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Shin, C. I., & Jackson, II, R. L. (2003). A review of identity research in communication theory: Reconceptualizing cultural identity. In W. J. Starosta & G.M. Chen (Eds.), *Ferment in the intercultural field: Axiology/Value/Praxis International and Intercultural Communication Annual XXVI* (pp. 211-240). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Shor, I. (1987). *Critical teaching and everyday life*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Stewart, D. L., & Lozano, A. (2009). Difficult dialogues at the intersections of race, culture, and religion. *New Directions for Student Services* 1(125), 23-31.
- Ting-Toomey, S. (1993). Communicative resourcefulness: An identity negotiation perspective. In R. L. Wiseman & J. Koesster (Eds.), *Intercultural communication competence* (pp. 72-111). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Turman, P.D., & Schrod, P. (2006). Student perceptions of teacher power as a function of perceived teacher confirmation. *Communication Education*, 55(3), 265-279.
- Utsey, S. O., Gernat, C. A., & Hammar, L. (2005). Examining White counselor trainees' reactions to racial issues in counseling and supervision dyads. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 33, 449-478.
- Warren, J. T., & Hytten, K. (2004). The faces of Whiteness: Pitfalls and the critical democrat. *Communication Education*, 53(4), 321-339.
- Yoder, J. D. (2007). Women's bodies: Objects of appearance. In J. D. Yoder (Ed.), *Women and gender: Making a difference* (3rd ed.) (pp. 213-236). Upper Cornwall-on-Hudson, NY: Sloan Publishing.

VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Nicole F. Bohr

Date of Birth: October 28th, 1985

388 Warren Rd. Lot 12, Carbondale, Illinois 62901

8871 Naples St. NE, Blaine, Minnesota, 55449

NFBohr@hotmail.com

University of Wisconsin, Superior
Bachelor of Science, Theater, December 2008

Research Paper Title:

Attempting the Critical: Reflections of the Speech 101 Classroom

Major Professor: Dr. Rachel Griffin