COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND APPREHENSION WITHIN THE
LEARNING COMMUNITY CONTEXT

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COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND APPREHENSION WITHIN THE LEARNING COMMUNITY CONTEXT

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Abstract

of

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND APPREHENSION WITHIN THE LEARNING COMMUNITY CONTEXT

by

Rachel McQueen

This study assessed how participation in a learning community connected with a basic communication studies course might result in changes in students’ communication competence and communication apprehension levels. The pre-, post-test design of this study allowed students enrolled in an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) connected to a basic communication studies course to complete the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC) and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) at the beginning and end of the semester. Survey results indicate a considerable increase in competence levels and decreased apprehension levels from beginning semester scores to end of semester scores. Implications of findings and future research are discussed.

________________________, Committee Chair
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Date
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Scholars consider human communication of great importance because communication is a necessary component of everyday life. Whether non-verbal, oral, or written, it is an essential trait every individual possesses. The expertise and comfort level of an individual’s communication abilities vary from person to person and many people consider oral communication apprehensive and challenging.

The phenomena of communication competence, communication apprehension, and learning communities are three distinct areas of scholarly research. Communication competence is the study of the correct communication behavior for a given situation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Communication apprehension is the construct of fear related to communication in various settings (McCroskey, 1970, 1978). Learning communities are learning environments that foster intellectual interaction and shared inquiry (Washington Center News, 1995). Communication competence, communication apprehension, and learning communities have been examined extensively in academic literature but have yet to be examined in combination with one another inside the communication discipline.

Extensive research into apprehension, competence, and learning communities has involved students in classroom settings. Researchers who have examined communication competence and apprehension in educational settings have recognized the impact of instruction on reducing apprehension and improving competence and success.
Communication scholarship to date has virtually ignored one such specific community, the learning community context.

Thus, there is very limited research on learning communities within the communication discipline, despite the fact that learning communities have been around for more than 60 years (Smith, 1991). The limited research that does exist includes Waldron and Yungbluth’s (2007) longitudinal study, which offers insight into improving student communication processes in a communication intensive learning community. Similarly, Edwards and Walker (2007) utilized public speaking learning communities to reduce communication apprehension. Most recently, Piland (2011) deemed that learning communities reduce students’ hesitancy to participate, as there is more focus on working in dyads, student learning teams, and even including personal narratives within the curriculum. All the experiences “enhance students’ knowledge of their communication skills and their ability to articulate course content” (Piland, 2011, p. 15).

Non-communication scholars have determined many benefits associated with learning communities, including increased communication, socialization, student attendance, and participation (Smith, 1991). Mitchel and Renaud (2001) deemed that in practice, a learning community’s holistic approach integrates social and academic aspects of student life and provides a support system necessary for many students to make the huge academic and social adjustment from high school. They argue that, moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach to education, the learning community provides a workable alternative to traditional undergraduate education (Mitchel & Renaud, 2001).
The benefits learning communities provide undergraduates are examined more thoroughly to include the communicative aspects that take place within this context. Accordingly, the present study examines what literature currently exists relating to communication competence, communication apprehension, and learning communities. To tease out specific communicative connections between learning communities, apprehension, and competence, it is necessary to examine both historical and current literature on the above concepts. This study delves deeper into what communicative relationship may exist between learning communities and communication apprehension and communication competence.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW
Learning Communities

Learning communities come in all shapes and sizes and include professional, social, religious, and academic communities (including elementary, middle, high school, and collegiate learning communities). The term learning community is utilized in our education institutions today as a set of classes linked together possibly sharing common assignments, having the same students, and fostering collaboration among the students and faculty of the linked courses (Love & Tokuno, 1999). Though content may vary, nearly all learning communities have one thing in common: shared knowledge. Shared knowledge is achieved in the learning community setting because learning communities seek to construct a shared, coherent educational experience that is not just an unconnected array of courses. In doing so, they seek to promote higher levels of cognitive complexity that cannot easily be obtained through participation in unrelated courses (Tinto, 1998).

Education analysts have described traditional means of instruction as a learning environment often suffering from such problems as disconnected courses, large classes, distant faculty, and limited coordination among instructors, academic advisors, and student support staff. The result is an unengaged, alienated, and under-achieving student body (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007). Student participation in college classrooms is often relatively passive, where “learning appears to be a ‘spectator sport’ in which faculty talk
dominates” (Fischer & Grant, 1983, p. 53) and where there are few active participants (Karp & Yoels, 1976; Nunn, 1996; Smith, 1983). Most college classrooms are not involving, and students continue to take courses as detached, individual units, one course separated from another in both content and peer group (Tinto, 1997). Student learning is enhanced when students are actively involved in learning and when they are placed in situations in which they have to share learning in some positive, connected manner (Astin, 1987). Such involvement in learning can be accomplished by participating in a learning community.

In an effort to address the sorts of instructional problems described above, learning communities seek to create cooperative active learning, strive to integrate the social and academic aspects of students’ lives, and foster the social creation of knowledge (Laufgraben & Shapiro, 2004; Smith, MacGregor, Mathews, & Gabelnik, 2004; Stefanou & Salisbury-Glennon, 2002). Students in learning communities have significantly higher reported grade point averages and higher retention levels than those similar students not participating in a learning community (MacGregor, 1991). Learning communities also provide increased opportunities for conversation and interaction between students and faculty, students and students, and faculty and faculty (Killacky, Thomas, & Accomando, 2002).

A growing body of literature suggests that for undergraduate students, powerful educational settings are the result of factors beyond the form and content of the curriculum. Learning communities provide for a rich, rigorous learning environment,
active participation on the part of students and faculty members, and a sense of community making a positive often profound difference in fostering student success (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Light 1990; Mathews & Smith, 1996; Tinto, 1997). Waldron and Yungbluth’s (2007) study confirmed that students and faculty assigned to the learning community conditions perceived more opportunities to communicate with colleagues and instructors. The results suggest that the learning community design created such communicative advantages as increased opportunities for interaction among faculty, staff, and peers; enhanced feelings of social integration; and increased access to student services. (p. 285)

Reduction of ambiguity and an increase in predictability of the communication situation should be a natural outcome of learning communities (Edwards & Walker, 2007).

Learning communities have targeted mainstream students, first-generation college students, honor students, and the underprepared. They may be launched to address a particular issue on campus, such as retention of first-year students, general education, the teaching of writing, student success in gateway courses, developmental or basic skills courses, honors programs, or coherence in the major or minor (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 1991; Light, 1990; Mathews & Smith, 1996; Tinto, 1987).

First-year learning communities seem to have evolved as an antidote to the problems of poor retention and student learning (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007, p. 286). As such, literature has currently been centered around the programmatic levels and has focused on student retention, student satisfaction, student growth, educational goals, and learning outcomes (James, Bruch, & Jehangir, 2006; Malnarich, 2005; Mitchell & Renaud, 2001; Smith, 1991; Taylor, Moore, MacGregor, & Lindblad, 2003; Tinto,
Goodsell-Love, & Russon, 1993; Tinto, 1998); attrition and low graduation rates (Howels, 2009; Tinto, 1989, 1998, 1987); involvement, student persistence, and integration (Astin, 1984; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Mallette & Cabrera, 1991; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977; Tinto, 1997; Tinto & Froh, 1992); student engagement (Zhao & Kuh, 2004); and has mainly been studied by non-communication scholars.

Learning communities vary considerably, but as noted by the National Learning Communities Project (2005), they all share three common commitments to (a) foster coherence and connections among first-year courses, (b) create more meaningful and sustained interaction among students and teachers, and (c) rearrange curricular time and space of both students and teachers. The commitments, particularly the first two, clearly highlight the role communication plays in developing attachments in relationship to the students’ university experiences. Communication presumably also facilitates better instruction through the collaboration of the university staff that comprises the learning community (LC) model employed (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007, p. 287).

Given that students in learning communities learn together, study together, and socialize with one another, they have the opportunity to become a tight-knit group and that opens the door to a supportive network of peers (Lippert, Tittsworth, & Hunt, 2005, p. 15). “Learning communities are attractive because they address, in a myriad of ways, issues of curricular coherence, civic leadership, student retention, active learning,
education reform and faculty development” (Gabelnik, MacGregor, Mathews, & Smith, 1990, p. 10).

The attraction of a learning community environment is often sought after by first-year undergraduate students, many of whom are right out of high school and seeking a structured learning environment to increase their academic success. According to Tinto (1998), learning communities have been proven to promote both academic and social integration, which can lead to overall satisfaction of the college experience, especially for those students from minority cultural backgrounds. Learning communities have been effective in assisting often culturally diverse first-generation college students with multiple ways of socializing, adapting, and contributing to the university as a whole. The intent of the learning community experience is to give students multiple views about themselves and those around them within the larger university realm (James et al., 2006).

When students are part of a cohort or community of peers, their attendance and participation improve, and the groups formed in class often meet outside of class to study and socialize. In addition, when students are exposed to intellectual and cultural diversity through multiple teaching methods and classroom activities, they feel encouraged to explore their own identity and their academic performance and persistence increase. The intent of the learning community experience is to give students greater insight about themselves within larger social and cultural contexts and to increase their confidence in their ability to take charge of their own learning. Tinto et al. (1993) had similar conclusions to that of Quinlisk (1998) who identified that the multicultural environment
of linked courses within a learning community offered culturally diverse first-generation college students means to use multiple ways to present ideas, further enabling them to contribute to the intellectual life of the university.

Research has shown that first-generation, low-income college students experience both isolation and marginalization, especially during their first-year of college (Jehangir, 2009; Law, 1995). Recently, Engstrom and Tinto (2008) revealed that first-generation, low-income students who participated in learning communities were more engaged and more likely to persist from freshman to sophomore year than their institutional peers citing that “the average difference in persistence between learning-community and comparison-group students in the four-year institutions was nearly 10 percent” (p. 2).

Learning communities have been implemented to attract many types of students (i.e., first-generation college students, honor students, mainstream students, etc.) and as “a curricular structure, they can be applied to any content and any group of students” (Tinto, 1998, p. 3). For this thesis, I am concerned with undergraduate Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) learning communities. EOP learning communities are comprised of a set of core courses that groups of freshman students are required to enroll in together. Students of an EOP learning community are often first-generation college students right out of high school who may be educationally disadvantaged, but demonstrate academic potential and motivation to succeed (California State University, Sacramento, n.d.).
Many benefits are provided to undergraduates who are part of a learning community environment. These benefits could also include the communicative aspects that take place within this context. Speculating on this, an interesting question arises: would it not stand to reason that students in learning community courses may also have a different outlook/perspective regarding communication competence and communication apprehension?

There may be a strong positive correlation between participation in a learning community and reductions of the communication barriers that limit many students’ learning. Studying communication and its impact on learning communities may help students and faculty develop strategies to combat communication fears and competencies.

Communication Competence

Communication competence research is diverse and has been studied by scholars from Communication, Education, Psychology, Sociology, etc. and, therefore, does not have a permanent home discipline nor a grounding comprehensive theory, but has been a widely written about topic in the communication field since the 1960s (Spitzberg, 1991). Currently, communication competence literature within our discipline has focused on classroom effectiveness (Canary & McGregor, 2008; Strohner & Richheit, 2008), immediacy (Madlock, 2006), organizational competence (Hilgerman, 1998; Monge, Backman, Dillard, & Eisenburg, 1982), learning (Canary & McGregor, 2008; Kenny & Cooper, 2003; Strohner & Richheit, 2008), job satisfaction (Madlock, 2006; Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006), goal setting (Hilgerman, 1998), and leadership style
(Sharbrough et al., 2006). I provide a background of the concept of competence, as well as a brief review of the differing views of the construct.

There are many definitions of communication competence. McCroskey and McCroskey (1988) note, “in the case of communication competence, the words have been forced to serve many masters; so many, in fact, that no consensual constituent delineation of the construct has yet evolved” (p. 108). Nonetheless, it is still reasonably feasible to identify certain distinguishing advances in research about communication competence.

Traditionally, there have been two core contributors to conceptualizing communication competence: Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1971). Chomsky has been the most significant contributor to the cognitive perspective of competence, which is indicative of potential performance or capability. Chomsky’s view of linguistic competence gives attention to the nature of linguistic knowledge and avoids aspects of performance (Weimann & Backlund, 1980, p. 187). Linguistic competence is generally defined as an individual’s understanding of the structure of the language (p. 187), and Chomsky placed great emphasis on the appropriate rules of communication and the ability to apply those rules in order to communicate effectively.

Hymes (1971) developed the behavioral perspective of competence and challenged Chomsky’s (1965) original notions of the concept. The behavior-orientation of competence emphasized performance and is understood to be dependent on two things: (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use (Hymes, 1971, p. 16).
Habermas (1979) entered the debate in the late 1970s, further challenged Chomsky’s (1965) view of linguistic competence, and created a theory of universal pragmatics, which “presupposed the notion of literal meaning and gave account to the more pragmatic meaning, which pertains to the interpersonal relation established through the illocutionary element of a speech act” (Scharp, 2003, p. 6). According to Habermas (1979), communicative competence (speech-act theory) describes the fundamental system of rules one must master to fulfill a successful utterance, no matter the language or the contexts the utterances have embedded in them. Speakers and hearers share a common language (explained in terms of being able to produce grammatically well formed sentences in accordance with rules they both master) and assume they use their terms (within the common language they share) with identical meanings (Scharp, 2003, p. 7).

In order to utter a sentence, the speaker must fulfill general presuppositions (prior condition) of communication. In being uttered, a sentence is placed in relation to the three general pragmatic functions of the utterance: to represent something, to express intention, to establish a legitimate interpersonal relation. A successful utterance must also satisfy three additional validity claims: it must count as true for the participants-represent something in the world; it must count as truthful as it must express something intended by the speaker; and it must count as right as it conforms to socially recognized expectations. (Habermas, 1979, p. 28)

Habermas’s (1979) view of competence is an explanation of synchronized properties of language that allows contributors to mutually pursue their goals, by communicative competence I understand the ability of a speaker oriented to mutual understanding to embed a well formed sentence in relations to reality, so that the hearer can share the knowledge of the speaker; the hearer can trust the speaker; and the hearer can be in accord with the speaker in shared value orientations. (p. 29)
Consequently, Habermas (1979) supposes that speakers and hearers, inherently possess the communicative competence to bring about this mutual understanding.

According to McCroskey (1985), communication literature provided three primary approaches to communication competence: as cognitive understanding, as a capability of performing certain communication skills, and as achieving effective communication (p. 3). Competence as cognitive understanding is achieved when an individual can “demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate communication behavior in a given situation” (Larson, Backlund, Redmond, & Barbour, 1978). Evaluation of cognitive understanding may be demonstrated either textually or orally (i.e., performance on an exam or a speech, etc.). Interaction involvement is a cognitive dimension of communication competence (Cegala, 1984) and is considered to be a characteristic way individuals process information and respond to messages during fact-to-face communication (Cegala, 1989). Interaction involvement consists of three dimensions: responsiveness, perceptiveness, and attentiveness. According to Myers and Bryant (2002), responsiveness is the “tendency to react mentally to one’s social circumstances and the ability to adapt by knowing what to say and when” (p. 17). Perceptiveness is the ability to assess individuals’ knowledge of what meaning to assign others’ behavior. Attentiveness is the extent a person is aware of stimuli that encompass the immediate environment.

Communication skill performance, according to Allen and Brown (1976), holds that performing the actual behavior is necessary, knowing the correct behavior is not
enough. Rubin, Graham, and Mignerey’s (1982) Communication Competency Assessment Instrument demonstrates this view. Rubin et al. (1990) revealed that communication competence was linked to success in college; high school communication competence was related to higher grade point averages and higher communication competence ratings.

Achieving effective communication, advanced by Wiemann (1977), stresses the successful accomplishment of a person’s communicative goals as a critical attribute of the competent communicator. This view of competence requires one to accomplish one’s goals (effectiveness). Relational communication competence has also been recognized in terms of goal achievement and is seen as the ability to choose a communication behavior that is both appropriate and effective for a given situation. Interpersonal competency allows one to achieve communication goals without causing the other party to lose face (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). Relational communication competence is composed of five major components for each individual in an interaction: motivation, knowledge, skill, context, and outcomes (p. 152). According to Spitzberg and Cupach (1984), to be perceived as a competent communicator, one needs to be motivated to communicate, knowledgeable about how to communicate, skilled in communicating, and sensitive to the expectations of the context in which the communication occurs (p. 152).

McCroskey (1985) further identifies four broad aspects of the communication competence concept: trait-like communication competence, context-based communication competence, receiver-based communication competence, and situational
communication competence (see also McCroskey, 1981, 1982b, 1984). The trait view of communication competence holds that people, not behaviors, are competent. A competent communicator will behave competently in a wide variety of communication situations, including newly encountered ones. Trait perspective researchers believe that not all competent communicators behave the same way in the same situations, but they may still be equally effective (McCroskey, 1985, p. 7). Other researchers have argued that competence can and will change from one situation to another (Rubin, 1982; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). The environment, education, experiences, communication partners, and perceived expectations of the situation can all affect perceptions of communication competence (McCroskey, 1985).

Wilmot (1979) argues, “communication competence is inherently a transaction in which meanings are ascribed between participants in a specific context” (pp. 8-9). A person with context-based competence is typically competent in communication within a given type of context across receivers and time. This type of person may lack competence in another context or even all other contexts (McCroskey, 1985).

A person who has receiver-based communication competence is usually competent in communication with a given receiver or group of receivers across contexts and time. This type of person may lack competence with any other receiver or group of receivers (McCroskey, 1985). Competent communication is a process through which interpersonal impressions are shaped and satisfactory outcomes are derived from an interaction (Spitzberg & Hecht, 1984).
The situational view holds that behaviors, not people, are competent. Thus, a person may behave competently in one situation and incompetently in another (McCroskey, 1985). Redding (as cited in Hecht, 1978) concluded communication traits could not be isolated; instead, effective communication was found to be situation-bound. Larson et al. (1978) also hold a situational view of competence as their definition of communicative competence states, “the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation” (p. 16). The behavioral view of competence, on the other hand, seeks an idealized set of rules and focuses on a range of skills appropriate to a variety of relationships and contexts (Weimann & Backlund, 1980, p. 188).

Research suggests that communication instruction makes a difference for students. Rubin et al. (1990), for instance, noted significant increases in communicative competence over four years of college. In addition, Rubin, Welch, and Buerkel (1995) found that communicative skills of high school students improved over a semester, especially in those areas in which they received instruction. Thus, instruction seems to make a difference in competence levels. After instruction has occurred, the expectation of students is for them to become both more willing and better able to communicate (McCroskey, 1982; Pearson & Daniels, 1988; Rubin, Rubin, & Jordan, 1997).

One of the earliest, and still continuing, areas of research relating to the role of communication in instruction is that which focuses on traits related to communication that impact student orientations and behaviors in the instructional environment (Hurt,
Scott, & McCroskey, 1978). Communication traits have been determined to have a direct association with student learning. Two of the four main communication traits that have received primary consideration include: 1) communication apprehension (CA; “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons”) (McCroskey, 1977, p. 5) and 2) Self-perceived communication competence (SPCC; “how communicatively competent an individual perceives her-/himself to be”) (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 12). The SPCC scale asks subjects to estimate how competent they are in four settings (i.e., dyadic, group, meeting, and public) and/or in three stages of a relationship (i.e., stranger, acquaintance, and friend) on a scale ranging from 0 to 10 (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988).

Accordingly, the present research touches upon a variety of views within the realm of communication competence but is centered around interpersonal communication competence, specifically the trait view of competence because this view encompasses multiple facets of the construct, ideally the range of communication knowledge all students should possess. As previously mentioned, the trait view of communication competence is defined as a person who is “generally competent in communication across contexts, receivers, and time” (McCroskey, 1985, p. 9). This view posits that competent communicators are inclined to choose proper communication behaviors without prior training more so than incompetent communicators are. However, it is not to suggest that both competent and incompetent communicators are incapable of learning how to
become more competent with training. Trait-like communication competence was measured in this study utilizing McCroskey and McCroskey’s (1988) Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC). By focusing on the trait view of competence, I wanted to determine whether or not the following research question could be advanced:

RQ 1: Will students in an introductory-level communication studies course connected with an EOP learning community have considerably higher communication competence scores at the end of the semester when compared with beginning semester scores?

Communication Apprehension

While early research in communication apprehension focused on CA in terms of public speaking (Lomas, 1937), subsequent research has illustrated the utility of the CA construct in understanding multiple communication contexts and experiences (Chen, 1993; Daly, 1987; McCroskey & Beatty, 1984; Toale & McCroskey, 2001) and has since 1970 been a major focus in communication research. Communication apprehension is a construct built upon an oral focus and is defined as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1982b, p. 127). While many consider communication as natural and necessary for daily behavior, not everyone is comfortable engaging in it. Approximately 20% of the United States student and adult population are apprehensive about communication (McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2002). Individuals who experience anxiety and nervousness, or are often fearful of communication, are commonly identified as communication apprehensive.
CA has proven to pervade multiple areas of an individual’s life, including school, work, friendship, and job satisfaction (Butler, Pryor, & Marti, 2004; McCroskey et al., 1986; Richmond & McCroskey, 1985). Research also indicates that in the United States, students with high levels of CA are prone to exhibit overall low academic achievement (McCroskey et al., 1986; McCroskey et al., 2002). The consequences of CA, in general, are negatively associated with students’ overall educational accomplishments (McCroskey et al., 1986), and students who have difficulties communicating are often evaluated inaccurately by their teachers (McCroskey et al., 2002).

**Trait versus State Approach to CA**

Trait CA is conceptualized as high fear or anxiety about potential or actual oral communication encounters (McCroskey, 1977). Such apprehension generally takes the form of approach or avoidance behaviors across a variety of communication situations (Kearney & McCroskey, 1980, p. 534). Spielberger (1966) advanced the concept of trait anxiety. A state refers to a transitory condition varying over time, whereas a trait is seen as a more stable individual difference or personality characteristic. Essentially, this translated down to “how do you feel right now” and “how do you generally feel” (p. 85). The measuring instruments include a specific event or time period under concern. Generally, the trait orientation (commonly measured with the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension: PRCA) (McCroskey, 1970, 1978, 1982b) operates from a predispositional orientation while the state orientation (commonly measured with a

State CA refers to anxieties in particular oral communication situations (Lamb, 1972; McCroskey, 1977; Richmond, 1978; Spielberger, 1966). State CA has been associated with both public speaking situations, dyadic interactions, and can even result during normal communication situations with a specific target individual (McCroskey, 1980a). Certain characteristics of the speaking situation trigger public speaking anxiety. Previous research has identified several variables that contribute to state anxiety reactions i.e., the size and composition of audiences (Beatty & Behnke, 1991; Beatty & Payne, 1983; Gray & McNaughton, 2000), novelty or ambiguity of the speaking situation (Buss, 1980; Beatty, 1988; Beatty, Balfantz, & Kuwabara, 1989; Beatty & Friedland, 1990; McCroskey, 1984; Thompson & Rapee, 2002; Sawyer & Behnke, 2009).

Sawyer and Behnke (2009) posit that trait anxiety is a better predictor of state anxiety when both measures refer to more specific and focused communication situation, both in time and format (p. 92). A trait anxiety measure should be able to predict, at least at a modest level, the level of state anxiety the subject will experience in a given situation (McCroskey & Beatty, 1984, p. 1).

The Effect of CA

Implications of high and low CA in relation to difference settings (i.e., organizational, intercultural, and academic) have been researched (Boening, Anderson, & Miller, 1997; Francis & Miller, 2008; McCroskey, 1983; McCroskey & Richmond,
1979). Despite the setting, current research concludes that CA has an “internal impact” on the individual’s psychology and emotions and an “external impact” in the form of behavior and the creation of social relationships (McCroskey, 1997, pp. 99-100).

Because CA is experienced internally, the only potentially valid indicant of CA is the individual’s report of that experience—self-reports provide the only potentially valid measures of CA (McCroskey & Beatty, 1998, p. 223). McCroskey’s PRCA-24 has been the most widely employed and reliable self-report measurement of CA (Levine & McCroskey, 1990; McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985).

The external effects of CA have been widely documented. The three major behavioral reaction patterns include communication avoidance, communication withdrawal and communication disruption (Daly, McCroskey, Ayers, Hopf, & Ayres, 1997; McCroskey, 1977, 1983, 1984, 1997; Phillips, 1997). Researchers have agreed that the effects of high CA, as opposed to low CA, are progressively negative in a person’s life (Francis & Miller, 2008). For example, one may attempt to avoid an uncomfortable communication situation, rather than confronting it. However, when avoidance is not an option, communication withdrawal is the next feasible alternative. The withdrawal alternative may be complete or partial silence and can be seen in a variety of contexts such as in a public speaking setting, in a meeting, class or small group, or dyadic discussion (McCroskey & Beatty, 1998, p. 224).

Communication apprehension is conceptualized as a causal agent in student success, both academically and interpersonally. CA has been found to be related to
overall grade point average and standardized achievement scores. Interpersonal effects of CA generally indicate: high CA people experience emotional distress during or anticipating communication, prefer to avoid communication, and are perceived by others and themselves as less competent, skilled, and successful (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989, p. 101).

The high CA student is less likely to become involved with campus activities and less likely to communicate with peers, advisors, counselors, or professors who may offer social comfort and academic support. CA typically elicits anxiety, which leads to avoidance behaviors, cognitive deficits, and performance failures. In academic settings, high CA students receive lower grade point averages and have higher dropout rates than low CA students (McCroskey et al., 1989). Oral communication apprehension can impede an individual’s communication and social opportunity (Francis & Miller, 2008) as well as diminish the opportunity for communication-skill development (Daly et al., 1997; McCroskey, 1983).

Communication apprehension (CA) in the classroom has been widely studied and found to have numerous debilitating effects upon student success potential in the college environment, including a decrease in the quantity and quality of interaction with instructors. Students with high CA tend not to remain in an academic environment as long as students with low CA (Ericson & Gardner, 1992). High CA students tend to enroll in classes requiring little interaction with the instructor or other students and tend to drop out of those classes having such requirements (McCroskey & Sheahan, 1978;
Richmond & McCroskey, 1992). High-CA students are “less likely to communicate with peers, advisors, counselors, or professors who could offer social comfort and academic assistance” (Jordan & Powers, 1983, p. 22; McCroskey et al., 1989, p. 101).

Exhibiting high CA can hinder an individual’s communication ability and social opportunities. Implications of high and low CA in relation to difference settings (i.e., organizational, intercultural, and academic) have also been researched (Boening et al., 1997; McCroskey, 1983; McCroskey & Richmond, 1979). Regardless of the situation, CA has an “internal impact” on the individual’s psychology and emotions and an “external impact” in the form of behavior and the creation of social relationships (McCroskey, 1997, pp. 99-100). According to McCroskey (1983), high CA is seen as a potential inhibitor of the development of both communication competence and communication skill and as a direct precursor of negative communication affect. Low CA, on the other hand, is seen as a facilitator of the development of communication competence and communication skills and as a precursor of positive communication affect (p. 18).

Students with high CA often struggle to connect with instructors and other students and, as a result, may not fully engage in the learning process, which is problematic. By identifying individuals or groups (i.e., learning communities, first-generation students, or non-first-generation students, etc.) with CA and developing strategies to alleviate their CA, new opportunities can be created that will allow and encourage them to improve their ability to communicate (Francis & Miller, 2008, p. 41).
Since students with high CA are often at risk for academic failure, it is important to promote awareness of the impact of communication and to help students develop communication skills (McCroskey & Payne, 1986). Research shows that students who are academically at-risk have higher levels of communication apprehension in certain contexts (Chesboro et al., 1992) and that students who are high in communication apprehension are at a distinct academic disadvantage in typical classrooms (Lippert et al., 2005; Rosenfield, Grant, & McCroskey, 1995).

There appears to be less research on the relationship between students with high or low CA and their first-generation collegiate status. As Francis and Miller (2008) posit, to date there is minimal and insufficient research conducted within the realm of communication apprehension that focuses on first-generation college students. Thus, the learning community context, specifically first-generation learning community participants and their social-communicative needs, warrants further exploration and understanding.

CA has been proven to be a monumental concept within the communication discipline. This concept should now seek to include addressing the learning community context, as the following posed research question may help to enhance the CA construct and/or aid in the development of implementing best practice approaches for reducing and/or minimizing the levels of CA of learning community students:

RQ2: Will students in an introductory-level communication studies course connected with an EOP learning community have considerably lower communication apprehension scores at the end of the semester when compared with beginning semester scores?
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The current study was an investigative assessment of communication competence and communication apprehension (CA) within a learning community context. The research questions sought to examine the level of students’ communication competence and communication apprehension within a learning community context, specifically seeking to determine what relationship, if any, existed between levels of competence and apprehension among students who had participated in a basic communication studies course while connected with a learning community. The literature reviewed in the previous sections suggest a potential relationship of increased levels of competence and decreased levels of apprehension at the end of the semester in students who had participated in a basic communication studies course connected with a learning community. This section presents the method used in this study.

Participants

The current study employed a survey research method. Surveys from 80 participants were administered and collected. Of those, 14 surveys were eliminated because they were deemed incomplete. Of the 66 usable questionnaires, there were 41 (62.1%) from female participants, 24 (36.4%) from male participants, and one from a participant (1.5%) not indicating gender. Participant ages ranged between 16 and 20 with a mean age of 17.91 (SD=.655). The first-generation collegiate status of the participants included the following: 43 (65.2%) were the first in their family to attend college; 24
(36.4%) were not; and one (1.5%) declined to state. All 66 (100%) of the participants had the class standing of freshman level.

Measures

The survey instrument was self-administered and included a “consent to participate” form indicating to participants that this survey was part of a master’s thesis and the information gathered would only be used in this particular study and would be kept anonymous and confidential (see Appendix A). The Likert-type items in this survey were used to measure communication competence (12 items), communication apprehension (24 items), and included four social demographic questions requesting participants to provide information on age, gender, class standing, and first-generation collegiate status (see Appendix B). The entire instrument included a total of 36 Likert-type questions and four demographic questions.

The SPCC

The Self Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) scale was administered to the participants in the current study to answer the research question pertaining to students’ perceptions of their own competence as communicators in different contexts. Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) was used as in previous research where it yielded reliability estimates above .90. The SPCC also has high face validity in that it is a self-report measure that directly asks the subjects to estimate their own communication competence in 12 contexts on a scale of 0 to 100. The contexts are generated by crossing four types of communication settings.
(public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, talking to one other person) with three types of receivers (strangers, acquaintances, and friends) (p. 110).

Self-report measures are the more commonly utilized approaches to measuring communication competence (Duran, 1983; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988; McCroskey & Payne, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 1985; Spitzberg, 1983; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Weimann, 1977) and have been found to be reliable when used with college student populations (alpha reliability= .92) (Richmond & McCroskey, 1989). The use of self-report measures is also a legitimate and appropriate research strategy within the discipline of communication (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 109). Chronbach’s alpha reliability in this study ranged from .68 to .90 for each of the four contexts: speaking in interpersonal conversations, .70; speaking in groups, .69; speaking in meetings, .72; speaking in public, .82; speaking to strangers, .90; speaking to acquaintances, .88; and speaking to friends, .84 with a combined total reliability of .92 (M=2.18, SD = .83).

The PRCA-24

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) scale was administered to the participants in the current study to answer the research question pertaining to learning community students’ perceptions of their own fears of communicating in different learning contexts. McCroskey’s (1970) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) is the most frequently applied CA assessment scale. The PRCA-24 contains 24 items designed to assess an individual’s level of apprehension regarding communication in four speaking contexts – meeting, dyad,
public, and group – and is a Likert-type self-report measure. The PRCA-24 offers the advantage of “(1) easiness and inexpensiveness, (2) usefulness to assess anxiety response across various communication contexts, and (3) high reliability” (McCroskey, 1970, p. 70). The PRCA-24 was selected because it is one of the most widely used measures of communication apprehension and has well established reliability and validity rates that have ranged from .93 to .95 (Levine & McCroskey, 1990; McCroskey et al., 1985). The reliability in this study ranged from .69 to .85: speaking in interpersonal conversations, .74; speaking in groups, .69; speaking in meetings, .78; speaking in public, .85, speaking to strangers, .84; speaking to acquaintances, .83; and speaking to friends, .77. Alpha reliability for the total score was .89 (M=1.95, SD =.76).

Procedure

Sample Selection

A convenience sample was employed in this study. I administered two surveys (see Appendix B) along with a consent form (see Appendix A) to students in three separate sections of an undergraduate basic communication studies course (i.e., two Communication Experience sections and one Introduction to Public Speaking section) connected with an EOP learning community at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). Students in an EOP learning community at CSUS enrolled in a basic communication studies were given two pre-test surveys, the SPCC and the PRCA-24, at the beginning of the semester and two post-test surveys, again the SPCC and the PRCA-24, at the end of the semester. These surveys were administered to compare the
differences, if any, in participants’ CA and communication competence levels between the beginning and the end of the semester. Ultimately, this research helped determine whether or not there was a significant increase in communication competence levels and a decrease in CA levels after students’ exposure to a communication course connected with a learning community.

In an effort to tease out the specific effects of the learning community on diminution of communication apprehension and increased competence among students, a brief follow-up survey was sent to the students during the following semester via an online survey tool Survey Monkey. Time reflect and separation of context of the community from the students may have provided needed perspective on the students’ perceptions in regard to the value of and role learning communities play in student support, student experience, and communication. The survey was brief to focus attention on the learning community experience and to minimize student effort and increase response rates (see Appendix C).

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the questionnaires was entered into and processed via analysis software SPSS (the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 18.0. Upon receipt of completed surveys, the data was manually transferred from the original surveys into the software program. To investigate the research questions, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the difference in scores for both apprehension and competence.
Results

Research question 1 asked whether students in an introductory communication studies course connected with an EOP learning community would have increased communication competence scores at the end of the semester when compared with beginning semester scores. Previous research established that differences exist in both context and relationships (Rubin et al., 1997). Repeated measure ANOVAs were used separately in this study for context (dyad, group, meeting, and public) and relationship (stranger, acquaintance, friend) for all responses for pre- and post-test scores. Results from ANOVA indicate a considerable increase in communication competence levels from beginning semester scores to end of semester scores. Specifically, results in the group context increased significantly as well as in the relationship with strangers. Results were similar for the other contexts (dyad, meeting, and public) and relationships (acquaintance and friend). The total increase from beginning to end of the semester also showed a significant increase and are statistically significant in all contexts and relationships ($r = .58, p = \leq .001$). See Table 1 for a summary of results.
Table 1

*SPCC Scores Beginning and End of Semester*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning Semester</th>
<th>End Semester</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total SPSS</strong></td>
<td>77.22</td>
<td>83.69</td>
<td>73.59</td>
<td>1,510</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyad</td>
<td>84.69</td>
<td>88.99</td>
<td>34.59</td>
<td>1,515</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>73.93</td>
<td>80.01</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>1,513</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>73.99</td>
<td>79.47</td>
<td>41.91</td>
<td>1,513</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>84.25</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>1,513</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>70.16</td>
<td>95.42</td>
<td>1,512</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>85.51</td>
<td>41.03</td>
<td>1,512</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>91.29</td>
<td>92.45</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>1,514</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*SPCC scores range from 0.00 to 100.00. The higher the SPCC score, the greater the competence.

Research question 2 sought to determine whether end of semester apprehension scores of students in a basic communication studies course connected with an EOP learning community would decrease from beginning semester scores. Repeated measures ANOVAs were also used separately for context and relationship responses. Results indicate that scores in all contexts (dyad, group, meeting, and public) significantly decreased from beginning semester scores. Total PRCA scores also decreased significantly and are found to be statistically significant ($p \leq 0.001$). See Table 2 for a summary of these results. To summarize, a positive relationship was shown between participation in an EOP learning community connected with a basic communication studies course and increased competence levels, as well as reduced apprehension levels among participants.
Table 2

PRCA-24 Scores Beginning and End Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Beginning Semester</th>
<th>End Semester</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total PRCA</td>
<td>67.08</td>
<td>63.72</td>
<td>37.69</td>
<td>1,487</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyad</td>
<td>14.25</td>
<td>14.03</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1,506</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>15.91</td>
<td>15.08</td>
<td>20.94</td>
<td>1,507</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>16.89</td>
<td>15.82</td>
<td>34.11</td>
<td>1,505</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>19.11</td>
<td>17.82</td>
<td>34.15</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*PRCA scores for context range from 6.00 to 30.00 and total scores range from 24.00 to 96.00. The higher the PRCA score, the greater the apprehension.

The follow-up survey sent to participants during the following semester revealed a positive relationship between participation in a learning community and feeling supported as a learner; 78% deemed their experience in the learning community was very supportive; 73% of participants revealed their learning community was the main element having the most positive effect on their communication competence; and 65% believed their learning community helped the most in reducing their fears about communicating in class or campus activities.
Chapter 4
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter reviews the results of the statistical analysis reported in the previous section and provides a discussion of the findings in this study. Potential limitations and suggestions for future research are also provided.

Discussion

The results confirm a strong relationship between communication competence and communication apprehension, specifically showing that after participation in a learning community and exposure to a basic communication studies course, students’ communication competence levels increase and apprehension levels decrease. It is no surprise to say then that communication instruction does make a difference, and at the end of the semester, the attainable goal is that of increased competence levels and decreased apprehension levels, allowing for the possibility of a student population showing the more competent the communicator, the less apprehensive the communicator.

Research question 1 was “Will students in an introductory-level communication studies course connected with an EOP learning community have considerably higher communication competence scores at the end of the semester when compared with beginning semester scores?” Results of this study show that yes, end of semester competence scores increased when compared with beginning semester scores. The overall total competence levels increased from beginning to end of semester, which is significant. However, the most notable increase in competence levels was found in the
group context and stranger relationship. There are a number of explanations for the results that occurred. The design of the learning community and the nature of a basic communication studies course can both help explain this increase. Learning communities are designed to facilitate more interaction among students often including working in groups with other students who may or may not be strangers and “have proven to provide a richer communication environment, including more contact with students and faculty” (Waldron & Yungbluth, 2007, p. 296). The same can be said about participation in a communication studies course, as many introductory level courses touch upon a variety of areas within communication (i.e., group, dyad, public, interpersonal, etc.). These areas offer increased exposure to different communication situations and allow for students to gain experience in different communicative settings (Rubin et al., 1997). Students may start out as strangers but do not stay that way for long due to the constant interaction with others both in a basic communication studies course and within the learning community context.

Learning communities open the door to a supportive network of peers; as students learn, study, and socialize with one another, they have the opportunity to become a tight-knit group. These strong ties with peers are developed through frequent communication within the learning community (Lippert & Associates, 2005). An important outcome of this research question is the significant relationship between increased communication competence and student participation in a learning community. If it could be shown with additional analysis that participation in a learning community is a predictor of change in
competence levels of students, then teachers can have more options to adopt attributes of a learning community design in their pedagogy. With a better understanding of this relationship, this study can offer insight to teachers about student perceptions of communication they can use to increase their classroom effectiveness while maximizing students’ competence levels.

Research question 2 was, “Will students in an introductory-level communication studies course connected with an EOP learning community have considerably lower communication apprehension scores at the end of the semester when compared with beginning semester scores?” Results of this study suggest a strong yes, as all contexts of PRCA (dyad, group, meeting, and public) scores significantly decreased from beginning to end of semester scores. These findings may be indicative of course exposure to both a basic communication studies course and participation in a learning community. Results help to re-confirm similar findings of reduced apprehension due to communication studies course experience (Rubin & Associates, 1997) and provide a much needed look at the connection of communication in the learning community context.

Communication is a vehicle for learning and can only help connect individuals in culture and in community. The social support received by participating in a learning community program may make communication in all contexts (dyad, group, meeting, and public) more feasible for students who have any sort of apprehension about communicating. This social support may have a cultural connotation between members of a learning community, as learning communities foster social, albeit communicative
support between peers. According to Waldron and Yungbluth (2007), learning communities resulted in communication enhancements in a variety of situations, specifically demonstrating that “learning community students were more inclined to communicate with peers, faculty and university support staff” (p. 295). Similarly, Frymier and Houser (1997) deemed that when students receive supportive communication from and discuss course content with peers, they report less apprehension about communicating, as well as learn more.

Given a positive correlation between participating in a learning community and reduction of communication barriers that limit many students’ learning, the results of research question 2 also help support research question 1, as competence and apprehension levels have been shown to have an inverse relationship (Chesbro et al., 1992; Rubin et al., 1997). Knowing that this inverse relationship exists will allow teachers to enhance and develop different strategies to combat communication fears and competencies, ideally finding a model that matches the student population (i.e., a learning community framework, etc.).

Limitations

Although this thesis expands the existing knowledge about communication competence skills and communication apprehension levels of students, several limitations should be noted. This thesis does offer insight about communication and the learning community context. However, the results of this thesis were obtained via a single college campus measurement and from one specific type of learning community context (EOP).
and may not be reflective of all learning communities or college campuses. In addition, the results may have proven to be a stronger predictor of increased competence and decreased apprehension levels coupling participation in a learning community and exposure to a basic communication studies course had there been a comparison of students in similar courses not connected to a learning community. Future research should seek to include such comparisons.

Lastly, the follow-up survey used in this research was extremely brief and neglected to pose a larger variety of questions related to the value of the learning community and the role it played in supporting students as learners. To avoid this in future studies, a more detailed survey should be sent to the students either with the initial pre- and post-test instruments or again as a follow-up survey during the following semester. This would allow for a more detailed explanation of teasing out the specific effects of the learning community on diminution of communication apprehension and increase of communication competence among students.

Future Research

This thesis did measure students’ self report outcomes of communication (i.e., more confidence, less communicative anxiety) within the learning community context, but it is still unknown what longitudinal effect communication skill and increased confidence levels will have with students who participate in a learning community and continue their college careers. Future research should seek to examine a larger population of students over a longer period of time, ideally throughout their collegiate
careers, but at least through the sophomore and/or junior year. Yee and Niemeier (1996) deemed, “the benefits of longitudinal analysis include increased statistical power and the capability to estimate a greater range of conditional probabilities” (p. 6). Allowing for a longitudinal study would also provide an opportunity to involve other college campuses, and in turn, being able to study a larger student body would also provide a more diverse population of students.

Future research could also examine what role competence levels and teacher apprehension and teacher expectations may play in the learning community context. Instructors play an important role in student perceptions and expectations. Frymeir and Weser (2001) examined the expectations students have of instructors and how those expectations influence “students’ reactions and classroom communication” (p. 314) and determined that highly apprehensive students had lower expectations for instructor communication behavior in regard to immediacy, clarity, and humor. Are students’ perceptions and/or expectations of their teachers’ communication behavior related to their perceptions of competence or apprehension? It may be worthwhile to determine if student perceptions of instructor communication behavior alter their communication skill and confidence levels.

Finally, expanding on the current study to include the comparison of students in similar courses not connected with a learning community should be another line of research considered. Examining both student populations, learning community and non-learning community participants in similar courses, would help develop a deeper
argument for the important role of communication and learning community based learning. This expansion could be the next opportunity to determine a more precise role learning communities play in combating students’ communicative barriers and increasing their communicative competencies.

Conclusion

A clearer understanding of the relationship between communication competence and communication apprehension should be the ultimate goal of educators. In this study, the introduction of communicative concepts within the learning community context has been added to the discussion among communication scholars. Participation in a learning community coupled with a basic communication studies course has shown to decrease apprehension levels and increase competence levels among students. With this richer understanding of the levels of CA and communication competencies of EOP learning community students, teachers, learning community faculty, and all those involved in the community, creation, implementation, and success could enhance and develop more effective best practice approaches for reducing and/or minimizing CA levels of students. Educators will also be able to maximize the full potential of communication competencies of learning community students. Best practices should be able to determine those things facilitating competence and diminish CA.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate as a Research Subject

You are invited to participate as a research subject for a thesis conducted by Rachel McQueen, a graduate student in the Communication Studies Department here at Sacramento State. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of communication in different learning contexts. This information is important because it may help us better understand students’ classroom communication behaviors. The goal is to learn how to help students communicate better in classroom or training contexts. You will be given two short surveys. The first survey consists of a 12 item question and scale response. The second survey consists of a 24 item question and scale response and four demographic questions. Together, they will take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

You are asked to PRINT your name and date below if you are willing to participate in this survey. All information you provide for this study will only be used in this particular study and will be anonymous and confidential.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact my advisor:
Mark R. Stoner, Ph. D.
Professor, Communication Studies, CSUS
(916) 278-6668

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Printing your name below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in this research.

__________________________________________
(Print) Name Date
APPENDIX B

Pre- and Post-surveys

Survey 1

Directions: Below are twelve situations in which you might need to communicate. People’s abilities to communicate vary a lot, and sometimes the same person is more competent to communicate in one situation than in another. Please specify how competent you believe you are in each one of the situations described below. Indicate in the space provided at the left of each item your estimate of your competence.

Please specify any range from 0 to 100. Presume that:

(0) = not competent at all
(100) = completely competent

There are no right or wrong answers. Please work quickly and simply record your first impression.

___ 1. Present a talk to a group of strangers.
___ 2. Talk with an acquaintance.
___ 3. Talk in a large meeting of friends.
___ 4. Talk in a small group of strangers.
___ 5. Talk with a friend.
___ 6. Talk in a large meeting with acquaintances.
___ 7. Talk with a stranger.
___ 8. Present a talk to a group of friends.
___ 9. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
___ 10. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
___ 11. Talk in a small group of friends.
___ 12. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.
Survey 2

Directions: This section is composed of 24 statements concerning feelings about communicating with others. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you:

(1) Strongly Agree
(2) Agree
(3) Are Undecided
(4) Disagree
(5) Strongly Disagree

There are no right or wrong answers. Many of the statements are similar. Please work quickly and simply record your first impression.

___1. Dislike participating in group discussions.
___2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.
___3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.
___4. I like to get involved in group discussions.
___5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.
___6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.
___7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.
___8. Usually, I am comfortable when I have to participate in a meeting.
___9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.
___10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.
___11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.
___12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.
___13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance, I feel very nervous.
___14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.
___15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.

Please continue answering the following questions indicating the degree to whether you:

(1) Strongly Agree
(2) Agree
(3) Are Undecided
(4) Disagree
(5) Strongly Disagree
16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.
17. While conversing with a new acquaintance, I feel very relaxed.
18. I’m afraid to speak up in conversations.
19. I have no fear of giving a speech.
20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech.
21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.
22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.
23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.
24. While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.

Social Demographic Data

25. Age:______
26. Gender: Male______ Female_______
27. Class Standing:
   A. Freshman  B. Sophomore  C. Junior  D. Senior
   E. Unclassified  F. Other (Specify) ___________________________
28. Are you the first in your family to attend college?  Yes  No

Thank you for your time.
APPENDIX C

Follow-up Survey

1. Learning communities are intended to support you as a learner. Comparing your experience in your learning community with your experience in courses not in learning community, how supportive is a learning community?

   A  very supportive
   B  somewhat supportive
   C  about the same
   D  less supportive
   E  very unsupportive

2. Which of the following elements of your academic experience here would you rate as having the most positive effect on your communication competence?

   A  my learning community
   B  my advisor
   C  one of my instructors
   D  one of my peers
   E  nothing has had a positive impact

3. Everyone has some fear or apprehension about talking in class or giving presentations more or less. Which of the following has helped the most in reducing your fear of communicating in class, or campus activities?

   A  one of my peers
   B  my advisor
   C  one of my instructors
   D  my learning community
   E  nothing has had a positive impact
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