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Exploring Agricultural Communications Students' Perceptions of Communication Apprehension and Writing Apprehension in the Classroom

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Abstract

Employers have identified oral and written communications skills to be the most important skills graduates should possess when entering the workforce. In order for faculty to better understand their students' oral and written communications skills, they should understand what apprehension the students have toward oral and written communications. Specifically, no studies have been found that explore communication apprehension (CA) or writing apprehension (WA) in agricultural communications students. The purpose of this study was to qualitatively explore agricultural communications students' perceptions of CA and WA. Participants believe agricultural communications instructors set up an environment that is conducive to changing behavior. However, students realized and identified areas of improvement that could help them lower their CA and WA. Recommendations for practice are provided in order to help alleviate CA and WA in agricultural communications students.

Keywords: Communication Apprehension, Writing Apprehension, Agricultural Communications, Self-Efficacy, Social Cognitive Theory

Introduction

Early in agricultural communications programs, much emphasis was placed on writing. However, agricultural communications is an ever-evolving degree program due to technological advances in communications, changing agricultural demographics, and external trends (Doerfert & Miller, 2006). Irlbeck and Akers (2009) found that agricultural communications graduates are entering the workforce with a satisfactory skill set in photo editing, page layout, public relations, graphic design, and radio production. However, graduates do not have a satisfactory skill set in writing, photography, news editing, and Web design. Morgan (2012) conducted focus groups with alumni from the University of Georgia to better

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understand the competencies students in agricultural communications should possess. He found participants emphasized the importance of writing regardless if they went into a career that demanded writing skills or not, which is parallel to findings in other studies (Irlbeck & Akers, 2009; Morgan, 2010; Sprecker & Rudd, 1998; Terry et al., 1994). Another skill set participants deemed important was public speaking, which one focus group said was the second most important skill students should possess behind writing (Morgan, 2012). Others have also found public speaking to be an important skill (Morgan, 2010; Terry et al., 1994). Furthermore, Morgan's (2010) study found verbal communication was the most important communication skill identified by practitioners.

Beyond the agricultural communications discipline, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities and the University Industry Consortium conducted a study to understand the soft skills new graduates need (Crawford et al., 2011). "Soft skills are personal or coping skills in working with other people that a person needs in order to be successful" (Fernandez, 2003, p. 263). Seven soft skill clusters were developed including communication skills, leadership skills, and professionalism skills. Two descriptive characteristics of the communication skills cluster were effective oral communication and effective written communication. Participants (students, faculty, alumni, and employers) were asked to rank the seven clusters in order of importance. Overall, the communication skills cluster was ranked as most important. More than half (53.3%) of the employers surveyed ranked the communication skills cluster as the most, or second most, important skills cluster (Crawford et al., 2011). In order for today's students to be successful in the workforce, faculty should teach verbal and written communication skills; therefore, understanding what apprehension students possess will benefit them in this endeavor.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon social cognitive theory and the concept of self-efficacy. Social cognitive theory is based on the idea that "human functioning is a product of the interplay of intrapersonal influences, the behavior individuals engage in, and the environmental forces that impinge upon them" (Bandura, 2012, p. 11). In the social cognitive view, people are neither driven by inner forces nor automatically shaped and controlled by external stimuli. Rather, human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocality (see Figure 1) in which behavior, personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other (Bandura, 1986, p. 18)

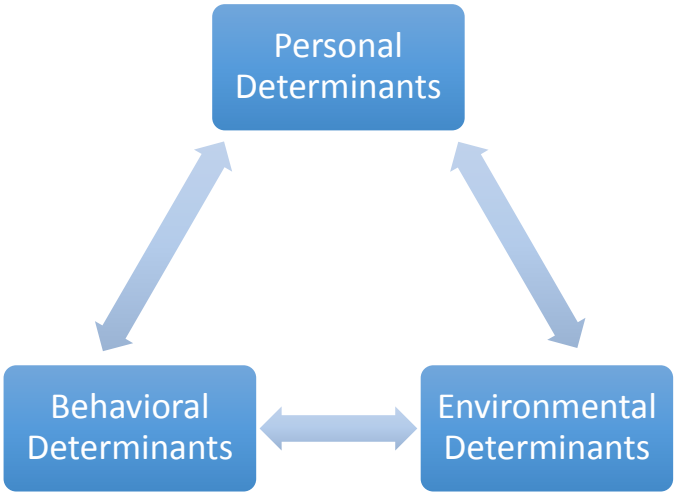

Figure 1. This model shows the relationships between behavioral, personal and environmental determinants in accordance with Social Cognitive Theory. Adapted from "On the Functional Properties of Perceived Self-Efficacy Revisited," by A. Bandura, 2012, *Journal of Management, 38*(1), p. 12.

One of the underlying constructs of social cognitive theory is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is one's belief in how well one can accomplish something (Bandura, 1994). Schunk (2003) found that "effective learning does not require that efficacy be extremely high" (p. 162). On the same token, Salomon (1984) found that students with high self-efficacy may be overconfident in their abilities and not put out as much effort, which negatively affects them. The difficult part is finding the balance. "Self-efficacy beliefs are strengthened by reducing anxiety and depression, building physical strength and stamina, and correcting the misreading of physical and emotional states" (Bandura, 2012, p. 13). The challenge faculty have is being able to help students reduce anxiety and depression in the classroom.

Schunk (1985) developed the model of motivated learning by merging several theoretical perspectives such as social learning, attribution, and instructional psychology. This model includes four general class variables: student characteristics, expectancies, task engagement variables, and efficacy cues. Students have different approaches to learning tasks due to varying aptitudes and experiences. These aptitudes and experiences can influence students' self-efficacy toward new material, which in turn influences students' motivation to promote task success and skill development. From task success and skill development, efficacy cues transpire. These efficacy cues are essential to how students measure their performance outcomes and have a great deal of influence on a student's self-efficacy. This is a reciprocal process because of the interactive relationship between self-efficacy and learning experiences (Schunk, 1985).

It is imperative that instructors' instructional methods have an effect on both the students' learning and self-efficacy (Schunk, 2004). Even though a teaching method produces learning, it may not affect self-efficacy, which only hinders the students. Instead, in order for performance accomplishments to occur, it is important for the student to display periods of self-directed mastery in order to practice their skills independently. Researchers (Bouffard-Bouchar, Parent, & Larivee, 1991; Schunk, 2004) reported that when students have high self-efficacy, they perform at increased levels due to their persistence, exhibit less anxiety, and possess higher levels of intrinsic interest.

One way to help students with their self-efficacy in speaking and writing is to understand the degree of communication apprehension (CA) or writing apprehension (WA) they possess. CA and WA pertain to ones' fear, anxiety, or avoidance affecting oral or written communications (Daly & Miller, 1975a; McCroskey, 1977). CA is a "cognitive response to communication that arouses one internally" (Richmond, Wrench, & McCroskey, 2013, p. 42). The lower CA one has, the less discomfort one feels. CA pertains to one's ability to orally communicate whether it is one-on-one communication or in front of an audience. Typically, high CA individuals experience discomfort, fright, being unable to cope, and inadequacy (Richmond et al., 2013). Externally, individuals have three behavioral responses: avoidance, withdrawal, and disruption (Bourhis & Allen, 1992; McCroskey, 2011; Richmond et al., 2013). Blume, Baldwin, and Ryan (2013) conducted a study to understand CA and how it affects students' leadership, adaptability, and multicultural appreciation. What stood out most to them from the results was "how detrimental CA can be to the achievement of important educational outcomes, even among otherwise highly capable students" (Blume et al., 2013, p. 165). If one is fearful, typically one will avoid the situation all together; therefore, he or she will choose to not communicate with others when possible and choose to avoid communicative situations (Richmond et al., 2013). If one has a low willingness to communicate and finds himself or herself in a communicative situation, he or she will typically withdraw by either not answering or minimally communicating. When people have disfluencies in verbal speech or nonverbal behaviors they are considered to be disruptive. Examples of a disruptive individual include stuttering, forgetfulness, nail biting, and avoiding eye contact (Richmond et al., 2013).

As discussed earlier, self-efficacy is an important factor to student achievement. Hopf and Colby (1992) found that "CA is more closely related to feelings about one's ability to accomplish goals than it is to feelings of self-worth" (p. 133). Furthermore, Bourhis and Allen (1992) found a negative relationship existed between CA and cognitive performance. Therefore, CA can be tied to social cognitive theory and self-efficacy and how it affects students in the classroom.

When a student possesses CA, it can have a negative impact on their learning (McCroskey, 1977; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989). Frymier (1993) found a negative relationship between students' CA and motivation to study – as motivation decreased, CA increased. However, when instructors have high verbal immediacy, regardless of the student's CA level, students' motivation to study was higher (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1993). "Teacher immediacy is nonverbal behavior that reduces physical and/or psychological distances between teacher and students" (Reisbeck, 1982, p. 27). When an instructor exhibits non-verbal immediacy, he or she is likely "to communicate at a close distance, smile, engage in eye contact, use direct body orientation, use overall body movement and gestures, touch others, relax, and be vocally expressive" (Andersen, 1979, p. 548). In addition, Kelsey (2000) found that high CA students were as interested and motivated by course content as low CA students and enjoyed being in the class but did not want to actively participate in the course. Instead, these students would rather vicariously participate.

Like CA, WA can have an impact on a student's ability to learn. "Writing well is a major cognitive challenge, because it is at once a test of memory, language, and thinking ability" (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007). WA is defined as a trait, but the measurement of WA is the reaction to a specific state of encoding of written messages (Daly & Miller, 1975b) and represents a subject-specific disposition (Daly & Wilson, 1983). Daly and Wilson (1983) found WA and general self-esteem, WA and the way people feel about themselves, and WA and feelings of competence to all be significantly and inversely related to each other. Pajares and Johnson (1994) found WA has a strong, negative relationship with writing self-efficacy.

One recommendation of Faigley, Daly, and Witte (1981) was that instructors should use different instructional techniques and materials for high WA students because evaluation can play a major role in WA (Smith, 1984). Instead of merely instructing students, instructors should train them as writers (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007). Training them will help them to effectively utilize their knowledge in order to practice the craft of writing extended texts. Furthermore, students who can practice writing as a professionally relevant task can improve their writing abilities and motivate their learning efforts (Kellogg & Raulerson, 2007). Mascle (2013) also emphasized the importance of student learning. She suggested that instructors foster conversations and activities in class in order for students to become better writers and to reduce their apprehension. Some examples of classroom activities include writing workshops and reflection journals to contribute to students' writing self-efficacy. It is important for people to believe they have the power and capability to act in order for them to be actively engaged in the writing process and not simply going through the motions (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007; Pajares & Valiante, 2008). Writers should also set their own goals in order to ensure progress is the main focus instead of the end product, which will increase their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Students' self-efficacy increases when they perceive their instructor in a positive manner (Crumbo, 1999). One way to help students have a positive perception of their instructor is for the instructor to demonstrate faculty support and mentoring (Martinez, Kock, & Cass, 2011) such as paying attention to students' self-perception of writing competence versus their actual competence of writing (Hackett & Bentz, 1989). Faris, Golen, and Lynch (1999) noted that WA is a significant barrier to the development of written communication skills. Attending to the differences in perception can help reduce apprehension and in turn produce more efficacious students. "If we can nurture the self-beliefs of our student writers and help them overcome this apprehension, then we can move on to the necessary process of attending to their growth and development as writers" (Mascle, 2013, p. 218).

By faculty knowing their students' apprehension toward oral and written communications, they can help their students to become more efficacious in those areas and help them to perfect those skill sets in the classroom. Oral and written communications are two of the most important skill sets employers are looking for; therefore, developing these competencies in students is extremely important for their future career success.

Purpose

Research priority area 4 of the *National Research Agenda* for the American Association for Agricultural Educators addresses the need for meaningful, engaged learning in all environments (Doerfert, 2011). Within this area, "preparing and developing teachers as adaptive experts" (Doerfert, 2011) was identified as one of the challenges to overcome in order to provide 21st century students with ideal learning environments. Understanding the complex phenomenon of CA and WA in agricultural communications students could have implications for both the students and the instructors. In addition, for instructors specifically, results from this study could aid in understanding how to connect to students with different levels of CA and WA through instructional strategies within major courses. CA and WA have been studied in the communication studies, English, and business disciplines. Specifically, no studies have been found that explore CA or WA in agricultural communications students. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore and understand the agricultural communications students' perceptions of CA and WA in the classroom. The objective was to identify characteristics students within agricultural communications possess at high, moderate and low levels of CA and WA.

Methods

A qualitative research design was used for this study in order to gain student perspectives about CA and WA. Stratified purposeful sampling was used to identify participants. Stratified purposeful sampling includes utilizing subjects at specific designated points of variation allowing the researcher to develop a better understanding of the characteristics present at each point (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). This study set the designated points as those with high, moderate, and low scores from the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24) and Writing Apprehension Test-20 (WAT-20). Eleven participants were identified and agreed to participate in the study based off previously collected data from Texas Tech University students who indicated they were willing to participate in a one-on-one interview following a questionnaire.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were used with pre-established questions, but allowed the freedom to ask questions as they emerged during the course of the interview (Glesne, 2011). This type of interviewing also allows questions to be asked out-of-order, ask for clarification, and to ask new questions as deemed appropriate and necessary throughout the course of the interview. A panel of experts reviewed the moderator's guide with minor revisions made due to their feedback. Interviews were used instead of focus groups because students who have high CA typically do not participate well in small group settings. Thus, one-on-one interviews provided a more comfortable environment for the more apprehensive individuals.

Interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed and each interviewee was assigned a pseudonym. Transcripts were coded and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in NVivo 10.0 for Windows. The constant comparative method allows the researcher "to look for instances that represent the category and to continue looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained does not provide further insight into the category" (Creswell, 2009, p. 195). To find these categories, we used the method of coding, more specifically open and axial coding. From these codes, we were able to identify themes. Themes "consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). The themes were analyzed to explore what perceptions agricultural communications students have about CA and WA in the classroom.

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were the four criterion used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was achieved through thick, rich description and purposeful sampling. Credibility was ensured through two strategies: triangulation and member checks. Triangulation was established through the maintenance of a researcher's journal, field notes and interview transcriptions. Next, member checking was used to ensure themes were accurately

portrayed. Creswell (2009) does not provide participants with transcripts of the interview. Instead, he recommends providing participants with analyses of descriptions or themes from the interviews. Thus, once the data were analyzed, a visual diagram of our interpretations of the findings was created and emailed to participants that asked them to assess the accuracy and credibility of our interpretations. All responses from participants were positive and agreed with our interpretations of the findings and did not indicate anything was missing.

To ensure dependability, we provided an audit trail. Our audit trail consisted of raw data (audio-recordings of interviews and field notes), data reduction and analysis products (summaries of field notes in a researcher's journal), data reconstruction and synthesis products (structure of categories, findings and conclusions that make connections with existing literature), process notes (notes about methodology in the researcher's journal), materials relating to intentions and dispositions (researcher's journal), and instrument development information (questioning guide) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability, an audit trail, similar to the dependability audit trail, was used. Furthermore, we used two other techniques Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed to ensure confirmability: triangulation and keeping a reflexive journal (researcher's journal).

Qualitative researchers should acknowledge their reflexivity and be cognizant of biases they bring to the study (Creswell, 2013). It is possible that observer bias exists due to our subconscious and personal characteristics. This bias was minimized by preserving a positive attitude toward the research and the participants. She recorded notes during and immediately following the interviews in order to assure memory and judgment were not clouded. We avoided procedural bias by allotting plenty of time for each interview and that the interview took place in an environment most comfortable for the interviewee and interviewer. We also sent follow-up emails to interview participants in order to guarantee correct interpretations from the interviews.

Findings

After analyzing the interview transcripts, five major themes emerged (see Figure 2). Two themes were in vivo coded, which means the codes are "names that are the exact words used by participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 185).

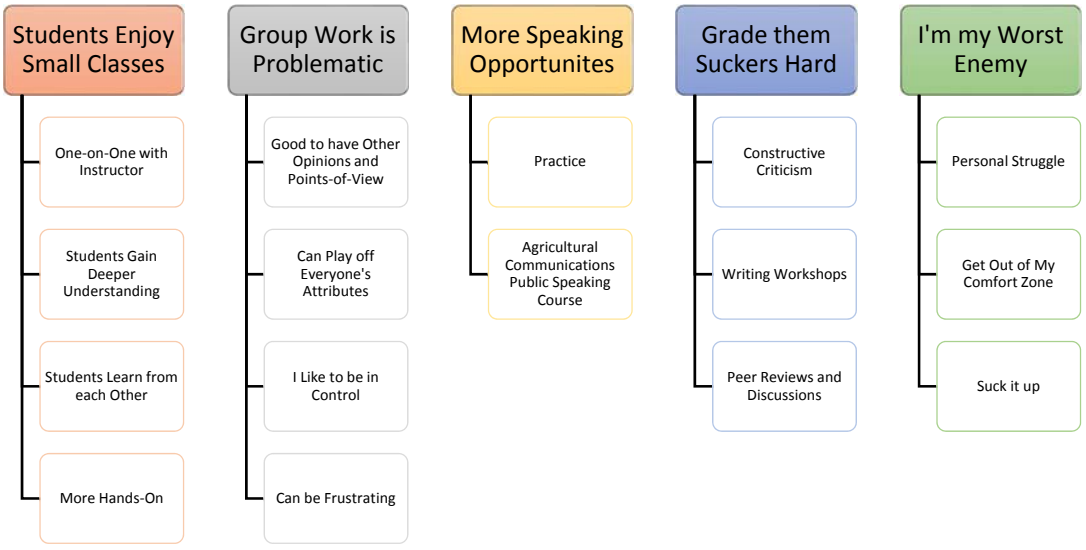

Figure 2. The major themes and subthemes identified in the study of agricultural communications students' perceptions of communication apprehension and writing apprehension.

Students Enjoy Small Classes

Small classes are important to participants regardless of their apprehension level. Small classes are more hands-on and allow for more one-on-one interaction with the instructor. Students can gain a deeper understanding of the material and learn from others. Katrina said:

> It's really just more of a chance for me to grow as a student and in my education whenever the classroom size is smaller. Also, I learn more from the other students in my class versus classes that I've had that aren't in this college that have lots of people. You don't really have a chance to hear what the other students have to say.

Similarly, Beth said: "I feel like I get more out of the class. If it's bigger, then they don't really care if you're there or not. It doesn't seem very important." Juliette said, "The smaller ones are more intimate and the professor seems to have a better relationship with the students." Also, Maggie said: "I prefer small lecture courses so we can do more hands-on things. It's not just a monotony of them talking; it's a little bit of everything."

Group Work is Problematic

There are good and bad things when it comes to group work, and it really depends as to whether students like group work or not, hence why group work is problematic. Group work can be good because other opinions and points-of-view can be showcased. Abbie said:

> It's good to have other opinions or other points-of-view. You might do something that you like a certain way and then that way might not always be right for a certain project and so it's good to have another viewpoint or another aspect to take on something.

On the opposite side, students like to be in control when it comes to their grade. Abbie said:

> I am the type of person that will get it done the week it's assigned and then do nothing for the whole rest of the semester. Just to make sure I've got it done and out of the way and to make sure that instead of having to make sure that everyone's on the same wavelength you can just know that this is the train of thought I'm thinking. You can just follow it and be done and not have to make sure that everyone's together.

Group work can be frustrating too. Emily said:

> I think it's just one of those things that depends. If you have a good group team and you feel like you can get something done, but a lot of times when it's in school, kids rely on each other and that's frustrating.

More Speaking Opportunities

Students realized that in the agricultural communications degree program at Texas Tech University, they get a lot of practice writing but not a lot of practice speaking. Thus, offering more speaking opportunities emerged as a theme. Practice and agricultural communications public speaking course emerged as subthemes, and within the practice subtheme, several other subthemes emerged: confidence boosters, conversational, and smaller groups (see Figure 3). Furthermore, students recommended that an agricultural communications specific public speaking course be offered and that they can learn from others to become better speakers.

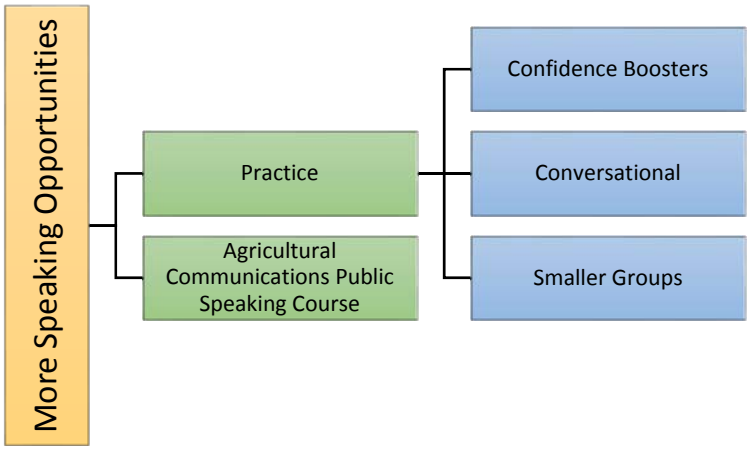

Figure 3. Visual depiction of the More Speaking Opportunities theme.

Katrina said:

> I feel with ag comm there hasn't been a whole lot of opportunities to talk and give presentations. I can think of my communication, speech class, and technical writing we had to give a presentation in and a few other classes, and in campaigns, we had to give presentations. But, if more of them had more where we got up and explained ourselves would help. Just more practice.

Scarlett, Maggie, Juliette, and Beth all said it is important for instructors to give confidence boosters to help students feel empowered before students are required to give a speech. Juliette said:

> I never felt like my [speech] professor was listening or that he thought the message was very important. So, I would say that definitely give the students an emotional boost rather just follow these guidelines. In high school, I had a teacher, and I would definitely give this advice to any professor if they had a student that was anxious about it [giving a speech]. He would tell me this quote. And it's more, you know, sentimental to me, but it is "Our greatest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our greatest fear is that we are powerful beyond our measure." And that has been something that when you make a student feel powerful, feel motivational like they hold the power, I think it really helps.

Students' believed that learning from others could be another way to gain confidence. Emily and Emma talked about different techniques of learning from others. Emily said:

> I love watching videos. I think videos are just more and more popular and we get into that and we relate more with videos or seeing other people get up and speak or even to make it funny. When people look stupid up there you're like, "Oh my gosh, I don't want to look like that," so then I think you try harder. Like, I just need to relax.

Emma said:

> I think it's important you just go and listen to other speakers. Once you hear them and you can see the kinds of techniques they use. They might use something like humor to overcome why they're scared. You just got to find where you're little bubble is. I think it's important that you just go watch other people.

Likewise, another way professors could help give confidence boosts while practicing speaking is to have students be silly. Maggie talked about a previous speech class she was in:

> You had to come up with this speech based on some stuff you pulled out of a box, and I think something like that would be really beneficial for someone like in an intro to speaking class, intro to public speaking. I mean just to be able to be kind of silly with it and come up with something off the top of your head cause I feel like a lot of people's fear of public speaking comes from like I'm not going to remember what I'm going to have to say or they're going to think that something that I prepared sounds dumb, whereas if you're having to come up with what you want to say off the top of your head very quickly you're not thinking about being scared necessarily. You're thinking about what you have to say.

Furthermore, Claire and Maggie said there should be more conversational types of speaking available. Because eventually students will be in interviews and even in the jobs they have, being able to have a conversation with someone will be important. Claire said:

> You're going to have to do interviews. That's one thing that I've struggled with is not saying "um" every two seconds or "like" every two seconds. Being able to talk about myself and know exactly what to say which sounds weird, but at the same time your nerves get to you.

Maggie said:

> In high school we did these, like it was just a conversation. You'd have a contest where somebody would sit down and you would have to start the conversation. They would give you a topic you kind of had to follow, but the conversation could branch off from that. I feel like that's mostly the kind of stuff I'm going to have to know in a future career. Not necessarily giving a formal speech over something because that's not what I'm really interested in. But, you have to be able to go with the flow and hold a conversation and hold the attention of someone.

Lastly, small groups are another idea to help students get practice giving speeches. Abbie talked about a class she was enrolled in:

> Doing it, like if you have a large group of like maybe 25 or 30, if you do it in cycles. Have like one person do their presentation in front of a group of five and then add another person from another group and not having the whole audience and then gradually maybe making it bigger throughout the semester isn't quite as bad.

Claire and Daryl both mentioned the idea of having a public speaking course offered in agricultural communications in order to get more public speaking opportunities. Claire said:

> Part of the public speaking class should be learning how to advocate for agriculture. I definitely feel like part of learning how to communicate is learning how to exactly know what to say to people in certain situations. So, we're taught to write about agriculture, we're taught to design for agriculture and all this stuff, but we're not taught to speak for agriculture.

Grade Them Suckers Hard

When analyzing the transcripts, grade them suckers hard emerged as an in vivo coded theme. This theme name was selected from something Daryl said when talking about what professors could do to help him overcome any apprehension he had about writing. He said: "Honestly, some of the best advice I've gotten is very critical advice. Be very critical of writings. Grade them suckers hard. That's going to sound bad, but just something like that. Just be very critical of the writings."

Even if instructors grade papers hard, it is important for them to give constructive criticism in order for the student to learn and grow. Jess suggested constructive criticism should be given with everything that is turned in. Beth said constructive criticism is important because it is not tearing the student down. Emma said it was important to give reinforcement whether it is positive or negative.

Several mentioned that writing workshops should be offered, especially for grammar, spelling, and punctuation to help with their writing. Jess said: "The biggest thing for my writing is commas and grammar. Worse thing ever. And it's always been a problem." On the same token, students who are not as apprehensive about writing also thought workshops could be helpful. Emily said:

> I'm sure a workshop day to make writing easier [could be beneficial]. Writing, it's not hard for me, but I don't enjoy it cause it takes me forever to do. So, I think little workshops to say don't stress about writing and break it down so it makes it easier for you to write your piece [could help].

Students in agricultural communications are also required to use Associated Press (AP) Style. Daryl said: "I know AP Style comes out with new updates every year. I mean, I don't know if maybe a workshop for that, like what's new to AP [could be beneficial]."

Also, several mentioned the importance of peer reviews and discussions. Emma said:

> I think it's important that someone looks over it [paper]. Cause you might read something 50 times and someone might read something once and find five mistakes you didn't see. I just think it's important that somebody goes over what you were writing.

Abbie said:

> Peer reviews and peer discussions are helpful because then you're not quite as freaking out as when you hand it straight in to a professor. If you have someone else look over it first and maybe get their thoughts and processes maybe it'll be easier to write on your own and then turn it in to a higher person.

I'm my Worst Enemy

When asked what professors could do to help them overcome their apprehension of speaking and/or writing, several mentioned that it was not necessarily something their professors could help them overcome, but something they had to overcome themselves. Once again, I'm my worst enemy was an in vivo coded theme that emerged from something Daryl said. He said, "With my anxiety of writing, I think I'm my worst enemy because I'm so critical of my writing. I don't know if my professors could [help]; it's more of an internal [struggle]. I have to be more confident in myself."

Scarlett was the one student who had high CA. She labeled herself as shy. She said: "Even though I'm shy, I know that's something I can work on. I can get over it. I will get over it someday." She too felt that overcoming her apprehension was something she just had to do on her own. She said, "I feel like that's just something I have to get over. I feel like I have gotten better over the years, but I think it's more a personal thing." She also mentioned that "getting out of your comfort zone definitely helps a lot."

Maggie reiterated this concept and said, "I think at some point you just kind of like suck it up [and give a speech] and your professor has to tell you, 'it's OK, you're fine, but you still have to perform.'" She also said:

> You just have to push yourself. I know it's uncomfortable to speak sometimes and it's uncomfortable for somebody to critique your writing, but you're not going to become a better speaker or a better writer unless you have somebody that knows what they're doing show you how to become better. If that makes sense, and it may be scary and it may be uncomfortable, but you can't expect to get any better at what you want to do in life if you're not taking the advice of people that have been there, done that already.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Understanding CA and WA in agricultural communications students is important for faculty so they can tailor instructional techniques to help students grow in their oral and written communications skill sets while also providing an ideal learning environment. Overall, agricultural communications students recognize the importance of developing verbal and written communication skills, which have been found important for graduates to possess (Crawford et al., 2011; Irlbeck & Akers, 2009; Morgan 2010; Morgan, 2012; Terry et al., 1994). Five themes arose from this study: students enjoy small classes, group work is problematic, more speaking opportunities, grade them suckers hard, and I'm my worst enemy. When classes are smaller, instructors can give students more one-on-one attention. Because of this attention, students are also able to gain a deeper understanding of the course material and feel more comfortable asking questions. This directly relates to instructors needing to possess high teacher immediacy for students to be more motivated to learn (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1993; Messman & Jones-Corley, 2001). The more non-verbal immediacy an instructor exhibits, the more likely the instructor is to provide a more conducive, one-on-one learning environment.

CA can also apply to group settings. Everyone has different strengths and weakness and group work allows for everyone's strengths to shine. These attributes allow for the group to divide and conquer the assignment or project, which may result in a better grade in the end. Regardless, students prefer to be in control of their grades and not rely on other people to earn or help earn a grade for them. Furthermore, the way in which the assignment or project gets done (method, date, and content) is also something most do not want to give up controlling. Finally, because people may not put forth their best effort, be available to meet, or have the work ethic that others do, group work can be very frustrating.

Students in agricultural communications at Texas Tech University are only required to take one speaking course; however, they are required to take several writing-intensive courses. Because of this, students do not believe they get enough practice giving speeches and several proposed the idea of having an agricultural communications public speaking course. This course could not only give students the opportunity to practice more oral communications, but also could give them practice to verbally communicate about agriculture. Building confidence and empowering students to give a speech is important in their development of communication skills. One way to help students build confidence is by learning from others, whether it be through videos or simply listening to others give speeches. This concept of learning from others relates to self-efficacy, which states efficacy expectations can be reached through various forms of modeling (Bandura, 1977). By seeing others, students are gaining insight into how they could perform and give a speech; therefore, modeling the behavior they witnessed. Typically, outside influences will affect behavior through cognitive processes. Cognitive processes allow human behavior to be developed and regulated. The cognitive processes will play a major role in the attainment and retention of behavior (Bandura, 1977).

It is important that students learn from their mistakes instead of an instructor simply telling them they are right or wrong (Mascle, 2013). "Social cognitive theorists argue that one important source of students' self-confidence lies in the feedback that students receive from their teachers" (Pajares & Johnson, 1994, p. 327). One major finding that could help increase students' self-efficacy is to grade students' work rigorously while also providing constructive criticism. It is one thing to grade a paper and mark it up without leaving comments, but another to mark it up and explain why it is marked up. Feedback allows for students to become more efficacious (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, having in-class peer reviews and discussions is a way for another set of eyes to see a student's paper before it gets submitted to the instructor. Peers can also be a springboard to bounce ideas and concepts off of to help with conceptualization. Regardless, having others read over papers is helpful because they may find mistakes the writer did not find even if it was self-proofread several times.

Rather than viewing apprehension as something someone can help them overcome, participants said they viewed apprehension as something they had to overcome themselves. The participants believed

it was a personal, internal struggle and in order to overcome apprehension they had to "suck it up" and get out of their comfort zone. Thus, the classroom could provide a safe environment for the student(s) to work on overcoming their apprehension. Most people must deal with some nervousness in order to get through their apprehension. As students take more control over their life, they are able to shape their environment through cognitive processes (Bandura, 2012). Behavior can be shaped by environmental influences (Bandura, 2012); therefore, it is important that students are in an environment that can help shape their behavior, ultimately helping to reduce their apprehension. Participants said agricultural communications instructors set up an environment that is conducive to changing behavior especially due to the small class size, one-on-one instructor/student relationships, and hands-on activities in the classroom.

These findings provide many recommendations for future practice. Programs should evaluate the courses they offer. Participants in this study said they get a lot of practice writing but not speaking. If a public speaking course is not being offered, it should be considered or at least incorporate more oral communications practice into existing courses. It is imperative agricultural communications students be well-rounded and possess both oral and written communication skills, especially since they are important soft skills for graduates to possess (Crawford et al., 2011). When talking about writing assignments, instructors should spend time explaining why students were correct or incorrect in their work. Furthermore, the instructors should encourage peer review and discussion as another way for students to receive feedback before turning in a final version to the instructor.

Small classes are imperative to agricultural communications students' success because they allow for more one-on-one conversations with the instructor and hands-on activities. Students can also gain a deeper understanding of the material and learn from each other. Students in smaller classes also feel more comfortable asking questions and speaking up during class. Finally, it is vital that instructors give positive reinforcements, especially when they are grading. Students are their own worst enemy and often struggle internally with the apprehension they have toward speaking and/or writing. When instructors provide positive reinforcement, students believe they can communicate well and will perform better, in turn, submitting higher quality work.

CA and WA are nascent areas of research in the field of agricultural communications. More research should be conducted to better understand CA and WA in agricultural communications students. Studies should compare CA and WA in different class sizes and before and after certain interventions are implemented. Studies could most certainly only focus on CA or WA in order to better understand that one particular phenomenon. Additionally, studies should be conducted throughout the discipline of agriculture to understand students' CA and WA levels in other agricultural disciplines such as agricultural education, agricultural leadership, animal science, plant science, agricultural economics, and others.

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