

ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION IN PRAXIS IN THE LITERATURE CLASSROOM

Carol Hepburn, Grand Canyon University

ABSTRACT

In this article, I suggest that an applied communication approach using Dell Hymes' framework of "ethnography of communication" could serve as an intervention strategy in order to promote a greater sense of shared community within the college literature classroom. I explore this framework with consideration on how this communication approach could be used as a way to help students identify with stories that contain culture-specific language in the form of speech codes. This framework promotes shared knowledge, which is necessary for member identification, and thus is critical to promote greater sensitivity to an author's cultural community. This article offers researchers interested in the intersection between applied communication research and ethnography the opportunity to study the ways mediated communication can create cultural sensitivity through an insider's view of the heritage, the language differences, as well as the patterns of speech often found in ethnically diverse literature.

Keywords: ethnography of communication, applied communication, literature education, speech codes

Ethnography of Communication (EOC) is a communication approach that stresses the need for understanding speech codes in order to create shared understanding and meaning within a cultural community. Speech codes are "a historically enacted socially constructed system of terms, meanings, premises and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (Gudykunst & Mody, 2002, p. 56). Communicative conduct refers to a communal conversation that is culturally distinctive and uses language heuristically (p. 59). EOC, when used alongside mediated communication such as audio, video, and web-based tools can enhance the student learning experience and provide learners with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the cultural significance of the text or work of art. Mediated contexts provide more than an add-on tool to help learners appreciate other cultures when situated within communication. Mediated communication can develop cultural sensitivity and even allow students the opportunity to experience an insider's view of the cultural heritage, the language differences, as well as the patterns of speech often found

in ethnically diverse literature. This article suggests that an applied communication approach using Dell Hymes' framework, Ethnography of Communication, could serve as an intervention strategy to promote a greater sense of shared community by increasing member-shared knowledge based on speech codes, speech acts, and speech events within the college literature curriculum.

The structure of this article includes three parts. First, I will introduce ethnography as a historical qualitative research method and demonstrate the validity of the method in deepening appreciation for the cultural environment. Second, I will present the applied communication framework of Ethnography of Communication and describe how this framework functions to enfold and empower speech acts, speech events, and speech situations within select speech communities. Third, I will use an inventive case study to demonstrate how applied communication in the literature curriculum could serve to increase student interaction, understanding, and identification because of a shared knowledge of speech codes.

HISTORY OF ETHNOGRAPHY

Anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, and other social scientists have used ethnography to study how individuals interact, socialize, and live in a particular culture or community group. Ethnography is a qualitative research method used to understand native or primitive cultures. Classical ethnographers spend weeks, months, or years living in and among cultures in order to resist colonialism and the reach of imperialism (Conquergood, 1994; Patton, 2002; Clair, 2003). More recently, ethnography has been used in applied research to understand societal issues facing minority or ethnic culture groups (Greene & Bloome, 2005). Issues such as poverty, gender, race, war, and isolation have afforded the researcher insight into the development, the management, and the sustainment of cultural identifiers that serve to democratize and legitimize marginalized and disenfranchised peoples. Furthermore, ethnography practice has changed over the course of the last 40 years to encompass a wide variety of styles and approaches to research (LeCompte, 2002; Greene & Bloome, 2005). Consequently, agreement as to the definition of ethnography and culture, and the role of the ethnographer, has come under scrutiny in order to accommodate these societal, cultural, and technological shifts (LeCompte, 2002; Greene & Bloome, 2005). Moreover, discussion of how situated culture develops and enhances communication, and how mediated culture shapes and changes communication, has served to further research efforts that seek to apply ethnography to social justice issues, as well as to consider the broader aspects of anthropological, sociocultural, and socio-psychological inquiry as it intersects with communication study (LeCompte, 2002; Greene & Bloome, 2005).

THE ROLE OF ETHNOGRAPHER

While the role of ethnographer remains the same, to chronicle and record the lived experiences of the culture under study (Van Manen, 1990), ethnographers now take on additional responsibilities than that of the observer or impartial investigator. Ethnographers assume dual roles as participant-observers and even consider their lived experience as valid for self-reflection. Additionally, in recent years, student ethnography has been included in the teaching pedagogy of elementary,

middle and high school classrooms (Flood, Heath, Lapp & International Reading Association, 2005).

Student-Led Ethnography. Student-led ethnography assignments have provided opportunity for students to experience ethnographic research as student-in-training ethnographers. This approach has allowed students to explore cultural interests that span the curriculum. Student ethnography practice has been used successfully in math, history, literature, and other disciplines to explore cultural communities, and to develop research skills in narrative note taking, observation, and fieldwork. Typically, student ethnography enables students to explore their cultural heritage from within and serves to confirm a “visible and respected” way of life (Flood et al., 2005, p. 193). As students explore their culture and communities, they develop a sense of shared knowledge and begin to experience a sense of belonging as part of the “in people” (p. 193).

Education teachers at the university level are suggesting that student ethnography can be adapted not only to allow students to understand themselves, but their respective communities as well (Flood et al., 2005, p. 194). Other examples of student-led ethnography include the ethnographic inquiry to frame social and political change, to study academic knowledge, and to learn as participant-observers in the education classroom. Thus, as the boundaries of ethnographic study have broadened to include other styles besides classical ethnography, the definitions of what constitutes accepted ethnographic practice has changed to become less exclusive and more linguistically, socially, psychologically, and politically diverse (Clair, 2003).

DEFINITION OF ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography incorporates many different styles and approaches including classical, critical, organizational, creative, applied, literary, virtual, and auto or reflective (Patton, 2002). The definition of ethnography varies according to style and approach with most scholars agreeing that it is the descriptive account of social life and culture. Classical or anthropological ethnography is the study of humans, their institutions, their customs, and their codes (Malinowski, 2010). Early critics suggested that ethnography included more than the observation and analysis of human groups, but also

included the study of individuals as entities (Lévi-Strauss, Jacobson, & Schoepf, 1963). More recently, scholars have suggested that the many styles of ethnography allow for a multifaceted approach that includes an “interaction” with the subject (Hobbs & Wright, 2006). The goal, regardless, is to provide researchers a suitable method with which to understand a culture and a social setting. Thus, cultural ethnography, according to Vidich and Lyman (2000), considers the objective of ethnography to be the act of describing people on the “cultural basis of their peoplehood” (Vidich & Lyman, 2000, p. 40). Thus, in its purest form, the aim of ethnography is to study human interaction and to record, as accurately as possible, the various attributes that establish a culture and that support cultural identification.

DEFINITION OF CULTURE

If ethnography is the descriptive account of culture, then it is vital to understand what constitutes a culture. Culture, in and of itself, is a difficult term to define, but Useem and Useem (1963) posited a general classification when they stated culture was “the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings” (p. 169). This view is a broad starting point for a definition that suggests culture evolves over time as individuals interact with one another. In recent research, scholars have proposed a more liberal encompassing view of the definition of culture that suggests the nature or essence of culture is to create attributes that support the cultural formation, adaptation, and management of individual identity and social community. Contextually, this comprehensive view allows researchers the opportunity to probe deeper into social constructs to advance theories about the complexities of community development, and to formulate ideas on how humans interact with one another in the community. As such, interest in social reality and personal identity suggest that culture is not simply the mannerisms and behaviors of a people group, but rather the interactions, symbolic, dialogic, and representations that differentiate one group from another (Berger & Luckmann, 2006).

SITUATING CULTURE WITHIN COMMUNICATION

More recently, scholars have situated culture within a complex socio-cultural and psychological realm that emphasizes a collectivistic view grounded in the social formation of reality. Hoffstede (1984)

alludes to this position, asserting that culture is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another” (p. 51). His point is that culture is more than the outward manifestations of a social group; it also includes the mindset shared by members of a cultural community. Other researchers agree and conclude that culture is not the “artifacts, tools, and tangible elements that define a people,” but, rather, the “values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies” (Banks, Banks & McGhee, 2010, p. 8). Social reality, as well as the shared knowledge contained within a particular community, then, serves to co-create understanding and enable culture to form (Berger & Luckmann, 2006). Therefore, culture is the collection of shared knowledge, along with the “schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them” (Lederach, 1995, p. 9).

MEDIATED CULTURE AS COMMUNICATION

It is vital to understand what constitutes culture in order to explore any cultural studies, whether in classical ethnography or through one of the many applied styles of ethnography. The landscape of culture has changed and now includes the development of community that moves from the exotic location of the field to incorporate local communities such as the workplace, the college classroom, or social forums found on the worldwide web. As a result, the nature of community and its development, including the cultural understanding, and the communication modes used, intersect to create viable areas of research. Moreover, the immediacy of technology has opened new frontiers for cultural study and has afforded opportunities for researchers to study mediated cultures through digital ethnography; thereby, creating and situating cultures in virtual worlds designed using modern technology (Underberg & Zorn, 2013).

ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION

Mediated culture, according to Hymes, (1962) views “speaking” as a system of communication. This system of communication relies on several factors, namely a shared understanding of the values and beliefs of a particular community or social group, but also presumes an insider’s knowledge of shared codes or words, symbols,

and other artifacts that communicate meaning within the speech community. As scholars broach the cross-disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and communication, researchers seeking to understand the design of social reality, and the influence it has on shared community, theorize the ways “cultural groups create meaning, values, and practices” through mediated communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 385). This intersection between social construct and communication led sociologists (Mead, 1962; Blumer, 1969) to suggest that human interaction was a byproduct of societal formation. Sociocultural communication theories posit that, because social identities are formed and maintained through interaction (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), cultural and community groups develop ways to maintain patterns of interaction that are specific to the individuals that make up that group. Language consisting of more than merely signs and symbols, but intention and meaning, play a dominant role in both the interactional patterns of communication and in the symbolic and dialogic response to communication. Linguistics study previously isolated the forms of communication when it focused research on the symbols and signs used to communicate. Some linguists thought a relationship existed between social constructs, language, and patterns of interaction and, therefore, desired to understand how communication forms within a group, as well as how the meaning and practices used by the group members serve to create a community (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 386). Many researchers, including ethnographers, seek to observe, describe, and record interactional patterns within a community because they comprehend the idea that “all communities communicate differently” (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 386). Consequently, these social scientists study the speech codes or words that enable individuals within communities to share knowledge and meaning as well as serve to form a shared sense of community identification.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Sociolinguist, Dell Hymes (1964), conceived the framework he termed, *Ethnography of Communication* (EOC) because he believed there was more to understanding everyday communication than a strict linguistic analysis affords. Hymes (1964) thought researchers,

specifically anthropologists, needed a new way of studying the complexities of language, and, as such, sought to create a framework to study analytically “the problems of language which engage anthropologists” (p. 1). Countering the work of other linguists, such as Chomsky, Hymes asserted that linguistics did not adequately convey the nature of group communication patterns because, in his view, speaking informs cultural practices. Hymes (1964) believed that linguistics played an important role in ethnographic research, but asserted that it was “communication which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be described” (p. 3). Thus, Hymes’ framework, *Ethnography of Communication*, seeks to bridge the gap between ethnographic research and communication study. More explicitly, EOC offers researchers a framework through which to study how language works in culture and community. Some researchers cite EOC as a “situated communication” practice (Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013, p. 391), since the emphasis is on communication within cultural communities. Consequently, ethnographers of communication seek to interpret and make sense of communication forms used by the members of a specific culture or community. According to Johnstone and Marcellini (2010), EOC is not only a “method but a coherent theoretical approach to language” study (p. 8).

THE ROLE OF SPEECH IN COMMUNITY

The role of speech in community forms a significant portion of Hymes’ (1964) framework and provides the grounding to understand how speech codes, ways of speaking, and speech events contribute to shared knowledge within shared speech communities. Hymes identified what he termed his “etic grid” when he described the function of cultural communication (p. 22-23). These functions are as follows:

- Focus on the addresser
- Focus on the addressee
- Focus on channels
- Focus on codes
- Focus on settings
- Focus on message form
- Focus on topic
- Focus on event

These functions are helpful when comparing communication from different cultures (p. 23). Knowledge of speech codes can help ethnographers understand the shared meaning associated with a particular set of codes, as well as how and when the codes are communicated and the guidelines for judging the communication and behavior (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Hymes thought “cultures communicate in different ways” and, to enable shared understanding, “all forms of communication required a shared code” (as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 386). This shared code or speech code was needed for the transmission and reception of a message. Hymes was not particular as to what he considered “qualified communication,” so long as those who communicated within the group understood the code used in the transmission of the message (as cited in Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 386). Traditional speech codes included dialect, as well as specific words, known only to the members of the particular group. However, in current communication study, speech codes can refer to any item, personal or impersonal (i.e., descriptive art such as tattoos or clothing style), and even span to comprehensive analysis of literary texts or other textual forms. For Hymes, these speech codes were necessary to develop communication within what he termed, “speech communities” (the group and its members).

Other communication researchers contributed to Hymes’ original work, hoping to elaborate on what they felt constituted communication and what added to the forming of communication within the cultural community. Philipsen (1997) defined speech codes as “a system of socially-constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct” (p. 126). Moreover, it was the power of speech codes, their distinctive character, and their value subconsciously that influenced communicative conduct (Philipsen, Coutu, Covarrubias, 2005, p. 57). In essence, speech codes “are used in humans’ efforts to shape the communicative conduct of themselves and of others” (p. 63) and function to help to describe, interpret, and explain social behavior.

Carbaugh (1996) contributed to the framework by determining a set of qualities members of a community would share. Carbaugh suggested that shared communities encounter problems surrounding shared identity, shared meanings,

and contradictions, or paradoxes, when one attempts to situate identity. Carbaugh’s research observing Native American culture indicated that ethnography was well-suited to the exploration of community, whether that community comprised a native or ethnic group, workers in a business, a sports team, and even societal issues. In short, Carbaugh believed in the multiplicity of identity, of both the individual and the community. The social identity or cultural identity, therefore, is developed through cultural premises of a person, of action, and of nature (p. 30). Hymes (1964) believed that the use of ethnography could benefit many disciplines including the humanities. He writes,

“There is perhaps a convergence between the professional field of speech and linguistics in the increased interest of the former in behavioral approaches, and of the latter in poetics and logic. It ought to be the part of anthropology to contribute to a truly comparative poetics, logic, and rhetoric, and what perhaps distinguishes the ethnography of communication as a perspective from sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, as commonly conceived, is its inclusion of such humanistic subjects. If it can encourage the trend in folklore to the joint study of the structures of codes, messages, and performances, there will be mutual benefit” (p. 27).

As such, ethnography and ethnography of communication can be used to explore a wide range of cultural communication acts outside of anthropology and linguistics. One possible use for ethnography of communication is in applied communication research in the college Literature classroom.

APPLIED COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN THE CLASSROOM

In applied communication, research grounds theory with practice in order to develop strategies that help individuals inform and encourage understanding and meaning as they share knowledge within the community. Researchers seek “intervention” strategies to “make a difference through, rather than just from, their research” (Hartwig, 2013, p. 61). In large measure, applied communication scholars use ethnography to encourage a “deep understanding of natural groups, organizations, and other populations and sites” and to establish “techniques [that] can help groups to

manage their communication challenges as they attempt to accomplish their goals” (p. 61). One of the goals of applied communication is to introduce strategies that will create positive outcomes in a situational context, such as the workplace or a classroom. For example, researchers seeking to improve the effectiveness of teaching strategies within the classroom may suggest alternative ways to approach a particular pedagogy, they may design classes differently to facilitate learning, or they may create new ways to deliver instruction. Applied communication, when coupled with ethnography, has the potential to increase student interest in the curriculum, to promote a sense of inclusivity and understanding of complex cultural themes, and to develop a shared sense of knowledge that will deepen student involvement and serve to form identification within the cultural community of the classroom. Shared knowledge; therefore, is created within the community and the community supports and cultivates that knowledge. Members of the community know and understand one another and use speech codes to communicate meaning, and to encourage a shared sense of identity with one another. Communities form in many different ways but, most often, are created through a shared sense of cultural identification. The classroom is one example of a shared community and, as such, students share knowledge about classroom practices, and they develop codes to help them understand and communicate with one another.

CLASSROOM AS COMMUNITY OR CULTURE

Applied communication scholars; therefore, are positioned well to use this combined approach for promoting inclusivity or an “emic” understanding of the cultural practices found in the intercultural curriculum. Thus, since culture can represent any type of group we belong to where we share common values and experiences that inform the way we view the world, the college classroom fits within these parameters of identification since students share common values and experiences over the course of a semester or throughout their college years. The classroom has a cultural language based on learning; speech codes are used within the classroom and are shared by instructor and student. Quality community building is predicated on this shared knowledge, that students understand classroom expectations, assignments, and deadlines

are critical to ensure a smooth running, and well-managed classroom environment. Students are part of the in-group of people (Flood, Heath, & Lapp, 2005) and can understand their community culture because of their ‘emic,’ or insider point of view.

ETIC VERSUS EMIC

Cross-cultural management (CCM) learning and education informs much of intercultural communication research (Zhu & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2013). Recent efforts in CCM research seek to create student depth of learning through exposure to culturally mediated communication forms such as video, audio, and web-based tools. Most CCM literature suggests a cultural view that is polarized between individualistic and collectivistic cultures and stereotypes (Hofstede, 2001). This view creates a tension that suggests that cultural understanding is learned through an analytical or ‘etic’ approach. Etic and emic are approaches found in anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, and are used to provide a direction for understanding cultural constructs. Etic represents an outsider’s view of culture, whereas, emic views culture from the inside (Lett, 1990). Etic relies on analysis and assessments “expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the community of scientific observers” (p. 130). Conversely, emic relies on analysis and assessments considered as important from within the cultural community. While it is impossible to be purely emic in observing cultural context, due to the subjective nature of personal bias, researchers seeking to employ an emic approach to cultural ethnography will allow the “data to speak for itself.” Similarly, in the literature classroom, the same method can be used to allow the “text to speak for itself.” The emic view enables student learners to situate themselves as participant-observers within a communicative speech act, such as when analyzing a culturally dependent text. Culturally dependent texts are those that share an assumed knowledge of particular speech codes, like culturally specific words or phrases, as well as an insider’s understanding of the codes and their associated meanings. These language constructs require knowledge of the cultural community and, without such shared knowledge, students can find it challenging to process language, understand the story, or even grasp concepts and themes.

LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTS

In the college Literature classroom, students often report that they are unable to understand the significance of the language and the symbolic forms, such as dialect, tone, and style, because they lack shared knowledge of the author's cultural community. Furthermore, they state that they often struggle to process the complexities of the language without a thorough understanding of the communication speech event (the history or background framing the story). Thus, literature students struggle with understanding culturally significant texts that assume a shared understanding of the contextualization that results from the symbolic and dialogic representation within the text. Consequently, as a means to understand students' perspectives, the following inventive case study suggests a way to introduce ethnography of communication into the literature lesson. The following case study is suggestive and can offer instructors of literature a direction to enhance and incorporate student ethnography as a technique to develop greater cultural understanding of a particular work of art.

AN INVENTIVE CASE STUDY

Traditional literature students are immersed in culturally sensitive literature programs that rely on 'etic' rather than 'emic' structures of identification. Normally, students are asked to read, analyze, and interpret critically key texts written by multicultural authors in the hope that their 'etic' or outsider's exposure to the language, style and represented cultural community would be transferred "symbolically" through analytical and rhetorical means. Despite the intention of curriculum designers to include multicultural texts into the curricula of traditional literature programs, students report that their perspective as "outside the culture" serves to distance their appreciation of the author and the situational construct of the text rather than enhance their understanding of the critical elements and aspects of the story. This problem is especially true for stories that include language signifying a particular ethnicity, such as Black or Asian. Culturally robust language systems typical of African-American or Asian communities pose challenges for students unaccustomed to the speech codes, speech acts, and speech events associated with these cultural communities. As a

result, students find less enjoyment when reading these texts, and they struggle to assess critically and to analyze these stories without significant help from the instructor who must find ways to share the nuances of these culturally dependent language systems. Subsequently, without instructor intervention, students report they feel the emphasis on multicultural readings loses its effectiveness when they are required to read one multicultural text after another without any contextual structure to help them understand why the text is culturally significant. Moreover, students need more than an analytical approach to cultural learning, as demonstrated by many curricula that attempt to highlight too many authors, at too shallow a depth of impression (Jones, Chang, Heritage & Tobiasson, 2014).

USING THE LITERATURE LESSON

One way to overcome this problem is to incorporate strategies into the lesson that allow for the shared knowledge necessary to foster an inclusion common among shared cultures. A literature lesson is a valuable tool that can be used as an intervention strategy in applied communication. For the most part, the literature lesson is self-contained, includes a beginning, middle and an end, and generally requires two specific components: a literary text and supplemental contextual information to provide the reader with history, cultural context, and details related to language use (Jones, Chang, Heritage & Tobiasson, 2014). In many cases; however, students in the college literature classroom are presented with the literature text only, and they are asked to read and interpret the text without any contextual help. This approach to reading and analyzing literature rests solely on semiotics (signs and symbols) rather than phenomenology (active interpretation of direct experience). Even when cultural information is presented alongside the literature text, students are asked to read and interpret what is read based solely on the signs and symbols. Thus, when the emphasis is placed on the signs and symbols only, students struggle to make a "symbolic" connection to the relationship between the words and the author's meaning. From a cultural standpoint, grasping a story that is deeply connected to its cultural community, that includes shared knowledge based on speech codes, and that presumes a shared

understanding without providing any opportunity for developing this type of “lived experience” leaves the student learner with a less than satisfactory appreciation of the cultural and symbolic meaning of the event. Therefore, introducing ethnographic inquiry into the literature lesson provides a way for students to connect culturally with a text or a work of art. Students can learn strategies that will help them conduct research, develop critical analysis and thinking skills, and can sharpen and enhance their perception of the cultural community represented in the text. By applying a simple strategy drawn from Hymes’ framework of ethnography of communication, students can glean more information, share knowledge, and can come to participate in the cultural community of the author’s inventive world.

The following demonstrated readings could be used in the classroom as a means to introduce ethnography of communication to student readers. Toni Cade Bambara’s short story, “The Lesson” is easily accessible to most readers, yet because of her use of speech codes to place it situationally within African-American culture, some students struggle to grasp the author’s theme and context. Bambara’s story, along with a video of a dramatic reading, could bridge the gap between cultural understanding and identification.

SUGGESTED CONTEXT FOR BAMBARA’S “THE LESSON”

Toni Cade Bambara (1939-1995) is an African-American novelist, a short story writer, a documentary filmmaker, and an activist. She is known as a working class, feminist writer. Bambara’s themes focus on the struggles of everyday people who are determined to overcome the obstacles and limitations of their working class roots. Her characters are drawn rich in detail and depth, but firmly rooted in their culture as they struggle to survive in a capitalistic society. Born in Harlem, Bambara writes from a unique cultural perspective that frames her stories, and creates realistic portraits of African-Americans, particularly women, who face not only class struggles but gender inequality as well (Charters, 2011).

In her short story, “The Lesson,” first published in 1972, Bambara writes from a first-person narrative and tells the story of a young, poor black

girl named, Sylvia, who is growing up in Harlem in the 1970s. The story provides interest to the reader in that it demonstrates what life was like for young, poor, black girls in Harlem, and it cleverly shows the differences between the “white folks” of the capitalistic society of Manhattan and the educated “black folks” struggling to overcome poverty and race, subjugated and marginalized in the all-black neighborhoods of Harlem. Themes significant in this story include race and gender inequality, personal identity, and community identification (See Appendix A for a link to an online version of this story).

SUGGESTED CONTEXT FOR THE DRAMATIC READING BY PAULETTE HERRING

The story, “The Lesson,” provides rich dialog and descriptive behaviors of young, poor black girls and boys living in Harlem. The language, tone, and style of the dialog add to the understanding and meaning inherent in the story’s main thematic elements. The reader loses the efficacy of the language, the dialect, and the nuances that contribute to cultural understanding and meaning in the story when it is not read aloud. Paulette Herring, an African-American actor, reads the story using the same tonality and style of language found in Harlem. Her approach to sharing the everyday speech that would be spoken by the characters in the story provides a powerful and dramatic representation of what Hymes (1962) called shared knowledge. The speech codes and acts contained within this story are exemplified by this dramatic reading (See Appendix B for a link to the YouTube video).

SUGGESTED ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNICATION ELEMENTS

As an applied communication study, ethnography of communication could be used in the literature classroom to help students read culturally sensitive texts, such as Bambara’s short story. In this way, ethnography can serve to create an environment whereby shared knowledge of a cultural text becomes part of a shared community. To further this lesson, students could be encouraged to take on the role of ethnographer so that they can spend time immersed in Harlem culture, thus encouraging and fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the cultural context of this story. Listening to the language of Harlem will help

students understand why this story is important. Moreover, as students spend time learning about cultural differences such as the challenges of living in a “white versus black” capitalistic society, they will come to understand the tenuous nature of race relations in the 1970s. Without this shared knowledge, stories such as Bambara’s, “The Lesson,” fall short of impressing upon students the author’s intention and meaning. Students may glean some information from the story, but they will fail to understand the significance of the text, story, themes, and character issues because they lack a shared identification with the author’s cultural community. Thus, to create a shared identification with the author, students must be able to spend time immersed in the cultural framework of the story. Since most modern college classrooms are connected to the Internet, students have a ready supply of cultural avenues to help them develop deeper connections to a specific period in history in order to develop sensitivity to the language and the other ethnic nuances inherent within the text. Mediated communication in the form of digital media and culture can serve as a bridge between cultures, and can enable students to share in the nuances of a specific language, history, and people group.

Mediated Communication. Digital media and digital culture projects serve as just one way students can experience a culture other than their own (Underberg & Zorn, 2013). Digital media and creative exploration using web-based tools can create collaborative experiences for students as they learn more about a particular culture and share in that culture’s speech community. Investigation can help students move from an outsider’s view to an insider’s view of culture, and can help them understand the cultural themes and meaning represented in culturally significant and language-dependent texts.

Mediated communication, including digital media and media projects, are excellent ways to increase student appreciation of culturally sensitive texts. Students are encouraged to participate in collaborative learning projects that feature presentations to demonstrate learning and knowledge. Students can develop skills that will help them perform better, inside and outside the classroom, by incorporating mediated communication such as audio, video, and web-based tools into the

literature lesson. Applied communication research offers a wide opportunity for scholars to consider ways to support student-learning initiatives within the college classroom. To bridge the gap between student learning and cultural diversity, the literature curriculum, in particular, is in need of adaptation. Studies that seek to evaluate the efficacy of emic approaches to literary understanding could prove valuable, and may serve as ways to develop a more progressive pedagogy centered on mediated communication, alongside the traditional literary study.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Along with applied communication practice, Ethnography of Communication can enhance cultural understanding and meaning within cultural communities, such as the literature classroom. To provide a deeper and richer learning experience for the student, instructors can incorporate this framework, along with audio or video, into the literature lesson so students can hear the speech codes native speakers and writers’ use in shared speech communities. Ethnography of Communication, when used alongside mediated communication, such as audio, video and other web-based tools, can enhance the student learning experience and provide learners with the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the cultural significance of the text or work of art. These mediated contexts provide more than an add-on tool to help learners appreciate other cultures when situated within communication. Mediated communication can develop cultural sensitivity and even allow students the opportunity to experience a culture from an insider’s view of the heritage, the language differences, and the patterns of speech often found in ethnically diverse literature.

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Author Biography

Carol Hepburn joined Grand Canyon University in 2013 as an adjunct in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Carol currently teaches English composition, literature, and communication courses at Grand Canyon University, Arizona Christian University, Ohio Christian University, and Regent University. She is a PhD candidate in Strategic Communication at Regent University where she is researching organizational identity within the American megachurch. Carol earned her MA in English Literature from Mercy College and her BA in Humanities from San Jose State University.

Appendix A

“The Lesson” by Toni Cade Bambara

An online version of this story can be found by accessing this link:

<http://cai.ucdavis.edu/gender/thelesson.html>

Appendix B

“The Lesson” by Toni Cade Bambara as read by Paulette Herring

A dramatic reading of this story can be found by accessing this link:

<https://youtu.be/V3dofZA4Z-M>