AN INSTRUCTIONAL MODULE TEMPLATE FOR ORIENTATION TO THE SITUATED PRACTICE OF ORAL COMMUNICATION ONLINE IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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By

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ABSTRACT

The community college serves a diverse student population with numerous programs and degrees designed to complete general education requirements and prepare students for job placement. As these students enter their anticipated occupation, most are unprepared for the oral skill requirements of their new job. They lack confidence to navigate any number of scenarios demanding interpersonal poise, teamwork, conflict resolution, presentation skills, and other occupation-specific speaking tasks. Since many of these degrees and certificates are offered partially or completely online, this Project presents a practical means of introducing speaking skills into the coursework of the growing online learning environment. The research examined the ethos of the community college and the impact of oral proficiency on the academic, personal, and occupational lives of students. Expanding on the core required speaking course, the study and resultant project informed by a genre study, presented genre-specific oral skill activities in online coursework integrating the application of multimedia tools. Constructivist learning theory was foundational to the experiential and dialogical instructional design. Interviews and ethnographic studies in online and live courses informed the teaching and assessment rubrics integrated into the Project. Reducing perceived transactional distance in online learning is critical to student success and a relational approach to teaching engenders favorable student responses.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Dewey (1938) asserts that an engaging experience is the requisite for genuine learning—a pedagogy of the unbounded human imagination. In the world of increasing ambiguity and uncertainty, imagination needs space to flourish for educators to assist students to live with meaning and purpose. Liu and Brandon (2011) encourage a proactive imagination and suggest a simple response to tired routines, ineffective lessons, and poor outcomes: “What if?” (Liu & Brandon, Why We Fear It, ¶6). “For what separates us from the beasts….is that we humans have a power to bootstrap from What is to What if.” The authors continue by warning that “people understand the power of What If, but so deeply fear its unseen might that they dare not release it”(¶ 7). In the conclusion of her chapter entitled, Communication across the Curriculum Problematics and Possibilities, Dannels (2010) targets this tendency to take well-worn paths and avoid new landscapes. She illustrates with a story about her young daughter. Bored with snow skiing on bunny slopes, she pleads with her mom to let her tackle the more challenging long run, “I want to go on the big hill. This is boring, just the same thing over and over. Let’s do something new, Mommy” (p.74). This project, from its inception until completion, felt original, but always tentative and with a menacing questioning of how it would actually play out. It is offered in the spirit of What if and grounded in the exploration of my knowledge and skills to “best serve society in the most distinctive and constructive ways” (Jesuit, n.d ¶ 4).

Importance of the Study

Education is the major global challenge (Robinson, 2008) and the implementation of oral skills across the curriculum is an essential part of educational reform; communication is, “at the core of pedagogical and educational success” (Dannels & Gaffney, 2009, p.74).
The ancient orator, Isocrates, offers a crucial paradigm for communication education, safeguarding the notion that “a successful person can achieve greater moral wisdom through the careful development of the art of speaking in particular deliberative settings” (Nainby, 2010, p.16). Nainby (2010) discusses the historical struggle between a Platonic view of general communication proficiencies and the Isocratic pedagogy of situational-specific competencies, a struggle that continues today in the CID/CXC dialogue (p. 17). This study seeks to broadcast a vision for CID/CXC and discover ways to implement programs and sustain interest in the face of any number of institutional and pedagogical challenges. Discipline or program-specific oral proficiency needs to be integrated and sustained across the span of the time it takes to complete the program or degree if skills are to be effectively groomed for the workplace. The collaboration and synergy essential for effective implementation will address the silo effect separating departments and disciplines.

**Statement of the Problem**

Rebekah dropped out of high school in her junior year. With an infant in tow, she sought unsuccessfully to make a life for the two of them working minimum-wage jobs and eventually decided to return to school. Her destination was an AA in Hospitality and Tourism (HRTM) and the journey transported her circuitously through graduate equivalency degree (GED) courses, the exam for the GED diploma, placement testing, five developmental courses, and 61 hours of general education and HRTM courses. After graduating, she took a position as an assistant front desk supervisor at a large chain hotel. Because of her training, she was comfortable with most of her duties in the job description, but lacked confidence in applied interpersonal and leadership tasks. She felt ill-equipped to lead training sessions, deal with employee conflict, and converse with clients.
The US Department of Labor (Soft skills, n.d.) cites research indicating a significant absence of applied skills in young people entering the workforce. Of the ten top “soft skills” (¶1), communication is number one; networking, interpersonal skills, and teamwork are included in the list. “Communication skills are ranked first among a job candidate’s “must have” skills and qualities” (Soft, 2012, ¶1). A community college graduate who possesses a facility with communication will position herself for success in both her personal life and in the workplace. Attention to oral proficiencies needed for entry into the workplace is a principal consideration for community colleges.

Definitions of Terms Used

CID

CID is an acronym for Communication in the Disciplines and is an altered model of Communication across the Disciplines (CXC). The difference lies in the consideration of discipline or program-specific oral skills needed in the workplace that inform CID.

Oral Genres

Oral genres are oral activities or experiences that inform students what it means to be a part of a specific discipline or occupation. Many oral genres are deeply a part of the career competencies. These are communicative tasks typically encountered in an occupation.

Situated

The situated model of oral communication instruction locates oral genres in a specific discipline or program (In the case of this project these are certificates and two-year degrees.) Translated
into a specific work environment, participation in the oral practices characteristic of that field offers the possibility of valuable, practical learning and facility.

**Oral or Speaking Intensive Course**

*Oral intensive courses* are core-curriculum courses with oral activities integrated into the coursework. Many institutions require incoming freshman to include at least two or three of these courses in a certificate program or two-year degree track.

**Learning Management System (LMS)**

*LMS is an* acronym for Learning Management System. Blackboard and Moodle are the most used of these learning systems and are the virtual places or platforms where the courses are delivered. Course Management System (CMS) is alternate term.

**Module**

*A module* is a unit of content both in classroom and online courses. It can be compared to a folder or a virtual package of lesson materials.

**PowerPoint (PPT)**

*PowerPoint* is a Microsoft program used for creating simple slide shows or animated complex presentations.

**Synchronous Communication**

*Synchronous* messages occur at the same time or in real-time. An example of synchronous communication is a phone call. A virtual or physical face-to-face conversation is synchronous communication.
Asynchronous Communication

Asynchronous communication is transmitted discontinuously rather than in a steady stream. Examples of asynchronous communication are a letter, an email, an online discussion board (as in Blackboard) or a recording.

Host Course/Instructor

For the purpose of this project, the Host Course or Host Instructor is the course/instructor in which the Project Module is embedded.

Applied Skills

Applied skills (also called soft skills) are personal capabilities that contribute to an individual’s ability to interact, perform their job, and advance in their career. They include the ability to engage effectively with fellow employees and customers.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The Project is organized in five chapters:

Chapter 1 supports proactive, bold employment of imagination in discovering ways to engage the community college student. This is applied specifically to the challenge of introducing and designing curriculum that integrates oral skills in discipline or program-specific ways. The chapter establishes why oral skills are vital to the personal, academic, and career life of the student.

Chapter 2 explores a review of literature in several areas germane to the study. It includes the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the study, the ethos of the community
college, the primacy and problems of oral communication, a look at communication across the
curriculum and communication in the disciplines, and oral communication in the virtual learning
environment.

Chapter 3 explains the scope of the Project, highlighting the features of each chapter. It
includes an overview of the methods of study. The final section is an explanation of the ethical
considerations.

Chapter 4 introduces the Project. The chapter also describes the Project format and
function in several models of implementation. Finally, the reader is directed to the actual Project
located as a standalone document in the Appendix.

Chapter 5 identifies the limitations of the study, makes recommendations and suggestions
for further study, and presents concluding statements.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Postman and Weingartner (1969) assert that “by definition, there is no human tradition older than the oral tradition” (p. 161) and they note the changes in communication with the advent of the alphabet, then the printing press, and movies—the progression is obvious. “One of the facts that invariably emerges from any study of human communication is that anxiety, suspicion, and pessimism accompany communication changes” (p. 162). Virtual education is a relatively new way to communicate in academia; it changes the way education works; it opens doors and unveils possibilities, but it is not without challenges. As online learning expands, it invites healthy scrutiny and a readiness to innovate.

Philosophical Assumptions

“All that the best of us can do is to teach boys how to educate themselves between their time of leaving here, and their time of crossing the Rubicon” (Delderfield, 1972, p. 249).

R.F. Delderfield’s (1972) story of life in a private boarding school in England portrays a world foreign to contemporary scenes at the American community college—a different age group and different era—but lessons from his narrative are universal; attention to subverting student drift toward ennui, finding “uncut diamonds” (p.118), and creating a learning atmosphere are cutting-edge practices that characterize good teaching. Paulo Freire (1970) envisions the instructor abandoning the role of the depositor of information to become “one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students…they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (Freire, 1970, p. 80). His dialogical approach encourages students to explore problems with questions, affirming” men and women as beings in the process of becoming” (Freire, 1970, p.84). John Dewey (1938) promotes a theory of experience that “arouses curiosity, strengthens
initiative, and sets up desires and purposes that are sufficiently intense to carry a person over
dead places in the future” (p. 34). These ideas undergird this project and are a function of the
successful facilitation of oral proficiency in the cyber frontier. In a 2013 roundtable with
bloggers and journalists, Bill Gates challenged the traditional ratings that distinguish colleges
attracting the top students. He asserts that recognition is unfairly focused “on schools that attract
the best students rather than schools that take poorly prepared students and help them get ready
for the next stage” (Kroll, 2013, ¶ 2)—this is the work of community colleges. It is a democratic
labor.

**Theoretical Assumptions**

Communication and educational theories informing the research include Michael
Moore’s transactional distance theory that addresses the distance inherent in online learning; he
asserts that the gap is closed with dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy (Kang & Cyorke,
2008). This project seeks to address the distance through helpful instructional design.

Barnett Pearce (1989) goes beyond the view of communication as simply a tool and
reflects on the centrality of communication to the human condition. The theory of coordinated
management of meaning (CMM) emphasizes the supreme and creative value of “persons in
conversation” (Griffin, 2009, p. 72) and affirms the pervasiveness of oral communication.
Students are encouraged to examine the pervasiveness of oral communication and how it impacts
the quality of their lives.

Dannels (2000) discusses the framing of communication in the disciplines (CID) in the
creative application of rhetorical theory in what she terms “a situated communication pedagogy”
( p. 3). It is grounded in the situated learning theory of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991)
and provides an extensive explanation that invites a variety of oral communication pedagogics. CID is central to the creation of research and this project.

Review of the Literature

Several streams of research inform this project. The study focuses on the effective teaching of oral communication across the curriculum in a virtual learning environment in the specific context of the community college. Inquiry into the distinguishing features of these two-year institutions contributes to understanding the context of the research. The pervasive nature of oral communication and the dearth of competency among many students strengthen the case for educational innovation. Discipline or program-specific oral communication activities prepare students to navigate the everyday communication challenges imminent in the target workplace (Dannels, 1999). The community college experience is rife with teaching and learning conundrums and not the least of these is the inclusion of teaching oral skills in the burgeoning virtual learning environment.

The Community College Context

Dannels and Gaffney (2009, p.141) recommend exploration into the “intersections between oral communication and… and distance education” and collaborative investigations of oral communication competencies in community colleges as they relate to immediate skills needed in the workplace as well as transfer into the four-year university.

The 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges is supported by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) as a reply to President Obama’s agenda for education (Kent, 2013). It is funded in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. A collection of eleven working briefs by experts in the field informs the commission in areas such
as technology, student success, assessment, policy, readiness, completion, and institutional transformation. Cynthia Wilson (2010) presents a comprehensive statistical profile of the community college student in, *Coming Through the Open Door: A 21st-Century Community College Student Profile* (Wilson, 2010). Her work supplies data that reinforces the imperative of thorough and innovative research to move this educational sector toward excellence and “begin to scrub out the condescension that too often creeps into discussions of higher learning” (Carey, 2011, p. A76). Wilson (2010) notes that most community colleges are “open access institutions” (p.8) welcoming a diverse student population. Over 45% of all undergraduate students and first-time freshmen attended a community college. The largest group of students are ages 19-23. Though white students comprise almost 60% of the total student population, projections indicate a 45% increase in Hispanic student population by 2019. A two-year degree or certificate is the goal of 84% of students and 75% plan to transfer to a four-year institution. 98% of students have General Education Development certificates or high school diplomas and 42% report enrollment at some time in remedial classes. Graduation rates in for two-year degrees and certificates hover at about 50% nationwide. The state in which this research is conducted, the average is 12-15%.

Research into community college student retention by Wild and Ebbers (2002) reveals nearly half of post-secondary education occurring on the campuses of over 1,100 public, community colleges nationwide. Six out of ten are blazing trails as first-generation college students. 56% have incomes below the federal poverty level. With a swelling focus on fiscal and academic accountability, specific critical skills are finding their way into syllabi addressing skills that employers are demanding in those they hire. Most career categories of community colleges have communication skill sets that only minimally resemble the standard content of typically required public speaking courses (Muchmore & Galvin, 1983).
The ethnographic research of this project is conducted at two community colleges in the Southwestern United States. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce rates the state as a whole on several scales and confers an “F” in the category of student success and a “D” in overall performance (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2009). Remedial education courses are required for as many as 70% of incoming students (Thomas, 2012). The teaching and learning landscape in the community college begs carefully constructed innovation and fearless exploration into practices that engage students with a vision for learning and positive change. Dannels (2005) emphasizes communication is always “at the core of pedagogical and educational success” (p. 149). It is not uncommon for graduates with reasonable academic skills to exhibit poor communication skills. Emanuel (2005) reports that the ideal employee’s skills “will center around how well that candidate will relate to coworkers and clients…teamwork and interpersonal skills top the list of desirable qualities” (Emanuel, 2005, p. 155). Though community colleges acknowledge the shortage of communication skills in graduates, the implementation of oral communication requirements into syllabi or degree plans is not widespread (Emanuel, 2005).

Muchmore and Galvin (1983) identify basic competencies needed by the community college graduate as “critical entry skills” (Muchmore & Galvin, 1983, p. 212). Included are job-specific communication requirements: “communicate in pressure situations; identify important points when giving instructions; ask questions in a manner that results in cooperation; be able to resolve conflict in a productive manner; work cooperatively in groups; use chronological order to explain complex procedures” (p. 215). This is a random sampling of possible tasks and all tasks vary widely in different job sites.

Community college students account for over fifty percent of the total online learning population and more than two million students between the ages of 13 and 22 take only online
courses (Johnson & Berge, 2012; Wang, 2011). The move into the virtual learning environment in community colleges is continually expanding with no evidence of a plateau. High non-completion or attrition is epidemic nationwide (Tirrell, 2012). The failure and dropout rate in online classes is higher in community colleges by an average of eight percent over the same courses taken campus-based (Brown, 2011). Online learning demands self-direction on the part of the learner. Garrison (2003) clarifies that self-directed learning implies the student has “a disposition and ability to learn (i.e., the student has learned to learn)” (p. 162). The attrition problem in online classes merits ongoing investigation into educational paradigms—online learning requires “a different approach to learning and an instructional design that actively engages the student and calls for greater communication and collaboration than on-campus courses do” (Tirrell, 2012, p. 581).

**Primacy and Problems of Oral Communication Education**

“Communication is a learned process” (Caputo, Hazel, McMahon, & Dannels, 2002, p.xiii) and begins with our first social encounters. The infant-parent bonding is “our first course in interpersonal communication” (Caputo et al. 2002, p.8) and language learning. Young children describe formidable encounters with peers on the playground—their nascent oral skills in field training. It would be helpful if they could process these live lessons with an objective mom and dad in discourse at the dinner table, but this is not likely if mom and dad exhibit a difficulty because of their own crippled interpersonal skills. A dinnertime story of an encounter with a fellow employee that nearly came to blows, teaches a vivid lesson. This same boy goes to the soccer field and witnesses the verbal tirade of two coaches modeling conflict resolution. McCloskey (1994) foresees “the field of the future is communication” (p.13), predicting that one-fourth of the labor force will need to know how to be persuasive to succeed in their
employment. He advises educators of the dynamic role of talking “In an age of increasing talk, it’s the wiser talk we need most” (p.16).

The race will go to the strong. Caputo, et al. (2002) assure that “Communication is worth working on, because it can be improved” (p.xiii). Those who invest in gaining facility in written, oral, and computer mediated communication (CMC) have a distinct advantage. Parents who nurture their progeny in these skills, contribute to valued early interpersonal and team proficiencies. Wilmot (2006) discusses the ubiquitous nature of communication spirals and conundrums and the agency of participants to alter them positively. “In spite of this world-wide system of linkages, there is, at this moment, a general feeling that communication is breaking down everywhere, on an unparalleled scale” (Bohm, 1996, p. 1). Mehren (1999) cites the prevalence of “mallspeak” as “only one symptom” (Mehren, 1999, para. 10) of a deterioration of the structure of oral communication.

Naimby (2010) tracks historical progressions of teaching oral communication that inform a case for the integration of oral skills into all higher education courses. Ancient Greek orators cite the connection between widespread oral communication skills and maintenance of political freedoms. One of the fundamental philosophical assumptions of communication education is that “communication acts shape both people and the human world” (Nainby, 2010, p. 14). Vygotsky (1978) discusses the positive contribution of dialogue and the aural presentation of knowledge as essential to effective instruction and cognitive growth. Limited oral language skills impact self-esteem, relationships, learning, and livelihood (Wolsch & Wolsch, 2001).

Barnett Pearce (1989) presents a view of communication as a “primary social process” (p.11) that engages a paradigm of humanity in an all-embracing and ongoing pattern of
conversations and relationships; we construct reality through a web of daily mundane communication events (Miller, 2006). This diverges from the traditional view of communication as an objective, intangible process illustrated by the “post office” (Pearce, 1989, p. 19) model that reduces oral communication to a package of words sent to another. In contrast, the constructivist view of communication fosters the centrality of communication to the human condition and a clear sense of agency. Pearce proposes “we view all forms of human activity from a ‘communication perspective’” (Pearce, 1989, p. 23). In her article Communication as Relationship, Celeste Condit (2006) examines the relational and process nature of communication in contrast to the Western focus on the individual. She recognizes the universal human as one in “incessant communication” (p. 11). Bohm (1996) underscores the difficult task of successfully handling these pervasive engagements.

Sir Ken Robinson (2011) cites the global demand for sophisticated talent that includes the ability to “communicate well” and “work in teams” (p.69). He notes that employers see few of these skills in graduates. Emanuel (2005) reviews numerous studies that affirm oral proficiency as more of a contributor success in an occupation than actual job skills and emphasizes the significant place of speaking skills to “fuel self-confidence and enable people to exert more control over their lives”(p.153). He cites the direct influence of oral competency on the ability to think critically and present arguments. Dannels and Darling’s (2003) research among engineering students affirms that speaking skills are the “lifeblood” (p.15) of a practicing engineer. The ability to speak persuasively has economic implications and “persuasion is vital for the exchange of goods, services, and monies” (McCloskey, 1994, p.15). In the light of the power and necessity of oral proficiency, how do educators help students use words to work for
them across the spectrum of their lives? Opportunities to practice oral skills abound in educational settings beyond the single required communications course (Garside, 2002).

**Finding a Place for Oral Communication in Education: Communication Across the Curriculum and Communication in the Disciplines**

“The struggle between a pedagogy of general communication competencies (Platonic) and a pedagogy of particular communication competencies (Isocratic) persists today in the communication across the disciplines (CID)/communication across the curriculum (CXC) dialogue” (Naimby, 2010, p. 17)

The Boyer Report on the *Reinvention of Undergraduate Education* recommends ten ways to bring helpful change to undergraduate education; linking communication skills to coursework is in the top five (Kenny, 1998). The report advises that “Instructors throughout the curriculum need to build opportunities for written and oral presentations into their course outlines, so that experience and confidence can grow continuously” (p. 24).

The typical oral communication class is a face-to-face skills course that implements a critical but standard fare of particular techniques and speeches. Usually this is a required general education core class that may be substituted with a more general Human Communication or Interpersonal Communication course. Muchmore and Galvin’s (1983) investigation into the “nature of communicative activities in which the newly hired worker will participate” reveals “absolutely essential” or “very necessary” (p. 216) skills that are career-specific and most only minimally resemble the standard content of required public speaking courses. (Muchmore & Galvin, 1983).

In 1985, Patricia Palmerton (1991) came to Hamline University as the director of Oral Communication. She describes her bafflement when asked to direct the Speaking across the
Disciplines (SAC) program. “It’s kind of like Writing across the Curriculum” did little to clarify her task. Palmerton distinguishes between the speech course and the broader application of oral skills in SAC and cautions of the necessity for oversight across the curriculum by communication professionals. She is confident that the benefit of an SAC program addressing this concern outweighs any threat to the integrity of the field (p.1). Palmerton (1991) describes the characteristics of the SAC program that includes instruction by non-speech faculty and courses designated as “Speaking Intensive” (SI) or “Oral Intensive” (OI) (Palmerton, 1991, p. 1) and expresses uneasiness with the assumption that a public speaking course assures students are equipped for the task. She illustrates how SAC looks in the non-communication course:

Oral communication ability is not taken for granted. Rather, faculty actively work with students to enable them to publically speak, undertake interviews, work in groups, participate in learning discussions, ask the questions which will illuminate texts, speak up in class, or undertake any of a host of different oral communication activities. (p. 4)

In 1989 The Center for Excellence in Oral Communication at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, funded by a federal Strengthening Institutions grant, initiated a communication across the curriculum program staffed with Communication Department instructors (Morreale, Shockley-Zalabak, & Whitney, 1993). Other programs began appearing on campuses all across the country. A decade later, in response to the increase in support and broad and successful implementation of SAC, (a new name) Communication across the Curriculum (CXC) emerged as a familiar topic at conventions, in journals, and in college curriculum planning.
Dannels (2001b) addresses the renewed concerns about communication across the curriculum from a “theoretically driven perspective” (p. 146). She proposes a modified CXC model couched in Jean Lave’s (2009) situated learning theory of “disciplinary knowledge construction, and the social construction of speaking” (Dannels, 2001b, p. 146)—a model that is discipline or (in the case of the community college) program-specific. Translated into a specific work environment, participation in the oral practices characteristic of that field offers the possibility of profound learning and facility (Lave, 2009).

Communication in the Disciplines (CID) echoes the pattern of the successful Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs and, in the way that WAC transformed positively into Writing In the Disciplines, the effectiveness of CXC is equally enhanced as oral skills are customized in the disciplines (or programs). Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) programs find their roots in the early 1960’s and are considered “one of the most innovative, collaborative, and interdisciplinary curricular reforms in the history of higher education” (Bridwell-Bowles, Powell, & Choplin, n.d). WAC success provides a model for CID programs and demonstrates how educators are able to transcend disciplinary boundaries and introduce new forms of exchange that help to lessen “the ‘silo’ isolation of disciplines on college campuses” (para.2). Kinneavy (1983) cites a helpful correlation to writing, noting that there is a deterioration in writing skills across the college career if writing is absent from coursework. Communication across the curriculum (CXC) brings oral communication elements into all courses; communication in the disciplines (CID) seeks to bring discipline-specific oral skill elements into all classrooms. As with WID, CID assumes the foundational significance of basic oral skills courses and builds on the specific content and skills objectives of those courses.
Dannels (2001a) names the discipline specific oral activities, “genres,” describing them “as sites for students to learn what it means to be part of a particular discipline” (p. 149). She likens them to written genres as “rhetorical contexts in which they are interacting” (p. 147). In the context of the community college, a genre for a hospitality and tourism program might be a brief video presentation for a chamber of commerce. In a nursing program, a genre might be role-playing discourse with a doctor on patient care. In a capstone course for a two-year studio arts degree, the genre is an audio critique of a notable painting. The audio file is added to the artist’s portfolio. These oral activities address the question: What are the oral practices salient to the particular program or discipline? In a hands-on fashion they help the learner understand and become comfortable with what it is like to navigate the situations they will soon encounter in the workplace. The oral genres are places for students to understand and express the culture of the discipline or program. The critical foundation of the oral skills course is enhanced by the ongoing inclusion of program and discipline specific genres, ideally included in all courses. Are students being prepared for communication competence “that is relevant to and socially negotiated within their chosen disciplines” (Dannels, 2001a, p.150) or program of training? Research in the field of engineering, design, and dietetics (Darling & Dannels, 2003; Vrchota, 2011; Dannels, Gaffney & Martin, 2008) concludes that “many oral genres were inextricable from the discipline itself” (Dannels, 2001a, p.149) and far too often observed “communication skills are not good, they’re less than not good, they’re really bad” (Dannels & Darling, 2003, p.2). Exploration into the possible genres for particular disciplines is foundational to successful implementation. Dannels (2002) offers guidelines for CID program implementation in a 2002 paper for the National Communication Association. She cites consideration of: (1) institutional
structure and mission, (2) possible partnerships, (3) public relations, (3) institution-wide involvement, (4) scholarship, and (5) assessment (Dannels, 2002).

Integrating discipline-specific oral skills is not without concern or controversy; Anthony Fleury (2005) warns of the isolating effect and danger to liberal education posed by CID; he advocates the strength of the objectives inherent in public speaking courses and the “playful approach to utility of the core styles” (p.77). Palmerton (2005) argues that the discovery of discipline specific genres identifies irrelevant oral dynamics and that learning the specific conventions promotes the objectives of liberal education. A general ignorance of the CAC/CID programs among non-communication faculty and the absence of oral skills inclusion in institutional objectives is still widespread. Concerns regarding funding, disciplinary integrity, training non-communication faculty, assessment of proficiency, and vitalizing cooperation are all critical to successful program development.

Though implementation of CID/CXC programs is increasing, community colleges appear to lag behind. Walla Walla Community College (WWCC) is a 2012 Aspen Prize (Excellence, 2013) winner for excellence among community colleges. Walla Walla does not have a CAC or CID program in place, though communication is a core skill in syllabi. Valencia College in Florida is the 2011 Aspen Prize winner. This two-year institution incorporates oral skills as core competencies in the syllabi but has no CXC/CID provisions.

Research into CID in online learning is scant and application to the community college more so. Dannels suggests a shortage of research literature for “online CID issues” (personal communication on January 30, 2013) and Darling (personal communication on January 7, 2013) agrees that not much at all is done for online learning. A meta-analysis in Communication
Education produced material for oral communication online, technologies for oral communication online, comparison of traditional and online formats, but nothing specifically addressing CID online.

**Oral Communication in the Virtual Learning Environment**

“Technology’s dull blade is even more apparent the moment interactive orality is required” (Robin, 2007, p. 109)

Two decades ago, McCloskey (1994) predicted the centrality of communication studies in 21st century higher education stating, “It is a growing and neglected sector of the economy, and electronics will transform communication as we know it” (p.15). Oral communication proficiency is a common-core skill undergirding personal, academic, and career success and is challenged by the predominantly asynchronous nature of online learning. With online courses gaining momentum, excellence in instructional design, engagement, and knowledge assessment is imperative (Quality Matters, 2013). The goals and objectives of educational institutions cannot be slighted in the online learning venue. With entire degrees offered online, there must be reliable ways to assure that critical skills are addressed in purposeful and helpful ways.

Distance is the defining norm of the virtual learning environment (VLE). Moore (1991) discusses three interactions in this cyber-place: learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content. Caspi and Gorsky (2006) consider these relationships dialogic and the quality of each is directly related to learning outcomes. The separation between each element is a “space of potential misunderstanding” (Moore, 1991, p. 3). Moore’s transactional distance (TD) theory explains the degree of distance as a function of dialogue, structure, and student autonomy. Dialogue can be synchronous or asynchronous, text-driven, or voice and video. Transactional
distance is reduced in a high dialogue environment. Learning objectives, teaching strategies, and assessment methods are elements of course design that constitute the structure. Elements are mostly asynchronous, though synchronous capabilities are available. A flexible structure that is able to respond to individual needs minimizes distance. Transactional distance increases with structure rigidity. Rheingold’s (2000) discussion of the “broadcast paradigm” (ch. 9) clarifies structural rigidity as the one-way transfer of information from teacher to learner (Schwartzman, 2007). Freire’s (1970) “banking model” (p. 72) describes this kind of structure occurring when the student is simply a receptacle for “preserving that knowledge intact. As a result, the knowledge is enshrined rather than engaged” (Schwartzman, 2007, p. 43). With high transactional distance, greater student autonomy is required (Kang & Gyorke, 2008). Building on this foundation, online instructional design and implementation can be optimized to reduce transactional distance by devoting effort to “determine both the structure of the program and the nature of the dialogue that is sufficient and appropriate for each set of particular learners” (Moore, 1991, p. 5). A needs assessment of basic literacy skills in reading, writing, and CMC as well as different learning styles will contribute significantly to an effective online presence in the community college.

Kang and Gyorke (2008) expand on the ideas of TD as it relates to the social characteristics in the virtual learning environment amidst the contemporary proliferation of communication technologies. Speaking from the paradigm of the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), the authors emphasize the impact of social engagement on human development and the “interplay between the learner and learning context” (p. 204). Dialogue allows exchange and facilitates the interpersonal construction of meaningful understanding that transcends the banking mode discussed earlier. CHAT theory suggests that internalization of learning happens
when students are participants in the creation of knowledge. When exploring a place and means for oral communication online, in addition to construction of meaning, dialogue factors into a sense of community that facilitates a friendly environment. Bohm (Bohm, 1996) clarifies the inclusive nature of dialogue originating from the Greek dialogos. Logos translates as the “word” and dia as “through”—it doesn’t mean ‘two.’ A dialogue can be among any number of people”(pp.6-7).

Commenting on the weakness of asynchronous discussion and the need for tolerance, Latham (2013) comments “As you might already know, the (asynchronous) discussion forum does not allow for full two-way communication. Nor does it allow you to hear the non-verbal communication which is often more powerful and more telling than the actual words that are said”(para.5).

The distance in distance education is not incidental to communication, but a highly relevant consideration in both education and in the larger world of business and industry. The distance elephant in the virtual milieu affords a immediate opportunity to engage a teaching strategy of “meta-communication” or “communicating about communicating”(p. 49) suggested by Crandall, Hazel, and Caputo (2012).

Historically, the experience of interpersonal connection manifested as “immediate presence”… “body to body” (Goffman, 1982, p.2). The social engagement characteristic of a physical place faces challenges with the fast-evolving computer-mediated communication (CMC) venues; the virtual world presents new and hopeful means of connection. Howard Rheingold (2000), author of The Virtual Community, comments, “Those who critique CMC because some people use it obsessively hit an important target, but miss a great deal more when they don't take into consideration people who use the medium for genuine human interaction” (Rheingold, 1993, para. 25). An essential substitute for the physical presence of others in a
campus classroom environment is a “psychological sense of community considered by some to be the distinguishing characteristic of community in the cyber-world characterized by a feeling of membership…a feeling of influence…a feeling of being supported…and a shared emotional connection and history” (Blanchard, 2011, para. 12). A remark from a participant in an online forum supports this, stating, “I know this probably won't make sense, but I can walk into (log onto) my site and have a sense of surroundings that almost translates to a visual…warm and personal” (Jones, 2011, 629/644). These environments can be fostered in educational online settings as virtual learning communities or communities of practice. A sense of community is a function of effective virtual dialogue.

Etienne Wenger (2011) reflects on his work with anthropologist Jean Lave among African tailors and their apprentices. They observed most of the learning taking place between the apprentices in dialogue. “We needed a name for the community providing a living curriculum for the apprentice. This is how we came up with the concept of communities of practice” (p.97). The concept functions well in the virtual world. Kuskis (2006) discusses his work developing virtual learning communities. He emphasizes the multiple advantages emerging from mutual support, “peer-assisted learning” and “interdependence” (n.a). With the increase of class caps for online courses “students working together in smaller units likely facilitate community formation” (n/a). These notions inform effective design and instruction of online courses. Caverly and MacDonald (2002) present their research and practice with online communities designed for developmental students. They note the value of smaller groups with assigned roles and the important work of assuring “comfort with technology and the task demands” (p.37) peculiar to online learning. Brown (2001) notes three stages of development: “community building”, “community acceptance”, and “camaraderie”(p.24). Caverly and
MacDonald (2002) stress that the last stage usually emerges after “long-term, intense association between group members.” (p. 36). Virtual learning communities at this final stage may not apply to the community college, but much of the discussion is valuable to inform instructional design and facilitation.

Other considerations in this project are the technologies, practices, and methods of incorporating oral communication into the virtual learning environment. Oral communication requires technology with at least audio capabilities and online places for collaboration and presentation. Ideally, these will be synchronous tools with video capability, though asynchronous presentations provide similar exercise of oral skills. Godwin-Jones (2012) discusses the variety of “interactive, collaborative, and synchronous functions” (p. 5) created for online learning. Though budget constraints might prevent their integration into the online campus, when they are available, much of the time instructors default to the basic functions and avoid the variety of tools that would enhance student interest and learning (p. 4). These media tools are available inside the principal learning management systems (LMS) and some institutions provide course designers with a selection of engagement and collaborative features (Feature Showcase, 2013). Instructor awareness of the “constraints and possibilities in terms of online modes and meaning making can potentially increase learner autonomy” (Fuchs, Hauck, & Mueller-Hartmann, 2007, p. 84). A symptom of failure in online instruction and design is student attrition. Scrambling for solutions, the fix is often sought on the student side of the LMS with a new rule or penalty. Crandall et al. (2012) make a case for watchfulness on the instructor side of the equation especially in light of increasing feelings of academic entitlement. The authors describe the academically entitled student as one who has “expectations of high grades for modest effort and a demanding attitude towards teachers… hostility or impatience…
exploitive attitudes toward others… and narcissism” (p. 45). The authors provide a type of rubric for teacher behavior in light of student expectations. Addressing teacher misbehavior for the purpose of repairing “indolence, offensiveness, and incompetence” will keep the instructor side of the road clean and promote learning. Some of the suggestions in the article that serve to reduce uncertainty in online courses include:

1. Clear syllabus, goals, objectives, competencies
2. Expectations of students and faculty
3. Stable syllabus with clear deadlines
4. Online office hours
5. Prompt replies
6. Establish the time between assignment submission and expected feedback
7. Rubrics for discussion boards
8. Build community creatively
9. Clear expectation of responsive communication
10. Define excuses for late work
11. Alternate with synchronous communication (Caputo et al., 2002)

Martinez (2002) acknowledges many students “lack the self-motivation, intentions, independence, learning efficacy, or learning management skills to stay online learning continually and successfully” (Martinez, 2002, p.3). Effective course design and instruction comprises the ways and means of encouraging self-direction and autonomy. Dewey’s (1938) prescription to connect the subject-matter to the “actual conditions of life” (p.48) reinforces the significance of oral communication activities that replicate real-life workplace scenarios and deliver “genuine preparation” (p. 48). The educator has the “duty of determining that
environment which will interact with the existing capacities and needs of those taught to create a worthwhile experience” (p. 45). She is responsible to use the virtual environment in optimal ways to engage the learner in developing oral skills and use a “wide range of technological prowess” (Robin, 2007, p. 113). David Sibbert’s (Sibbert, 2008) work with the grammar of visuals to facilitate communication offers insight into ways to engage students. “Because viewing requires little mental processing …pictures are fascinating, easily understood” (Lester, 2006, para. 7).

**Rationale**

In sum, research into the ethos of the community college suggests that the typical student has barriers to learning requiring special attention in the classroom and in the online learning environment. The widespread primacy of oral skills, the dearth in oral competency, and the workplace demand for oral proficiency entreat the integration of oral skills in imaginative and salient ways. Expanding on the basic skills course, oral communication needs widespread inclusion into the individual programs and disciplines as a flourishing and anticipated part of all course syllabi and schedules engaging activities that are relevant to application in the workplace. With the burgeoning virtual college, these oral skills must inevitably find a place in course design for greater inclusion of innovative and discipline specific oral skills enhancement. This project addresses these concerns in a practical manner.

**Project Design Objectives**

The development and implementation of a CID program is a task beyond the scope of this project, but facilitating awareness and modeling how it might look is a small step toward marshaling the support needed to bring CID on board the online community college campus. The
project takes the form of a presentation package for faculty and administration that is deliverable in text form or as an actual presentation; it shares the results of the genre study, the student needs assessment, sample assessment rubrics, and the model Oral Communication Module Template.

The Project draws from an exemplary review of pertinent literature and the ethnographic studies in the community college; these studies examine the discipline-specific genres, faculty willingness, and possible methods of engaging students in oral proficiency and involve instructors and students in interviews and questionnaires “digging into the mysteries of disciplinary life” (Dannels, 2005, p. 3) and the virtual learning experience in the community college. The design questions for the module template project are:

(1) What are the discipline and program-specific oral genres in selected community college courses most relevant to the target workplace?

(2) What are the barriers to implementation of oral practices into community college online courses?

(3) What are some general best practices and designs to sustain the engagement of the online community college student and facilitate oral communication skills?

(4) How are the oral activities assessed?
CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHOD.

Excellent education embraces excellence in oral proficiency. A community college graduate who exhibits confidence and clarity in a wide range of oral communication scenarios possesses advantages in the complex and competitive economic and academic worlds. Initiatives that advance the educational significance of oral communication skills by creating awareness, identifying institutional partnerships, developing scholarship, and engaging student interest will prepare the way for widespread inclusion of oral communication activity into the disciplines and programs of the community college (Dannels, 2002). This project promotes a vision for oral proficiency and animates possibilities for educators bringing oral skills to a central place in the curriculum. If the product of this research stirs the imaginations of educators and students it can be reckoned successful. Ethnographic research reinforces the literature study. Dannels (2005) paints an appealing picture of CID investigation where the researcher is:

- entering the cross-curricular space with wide eyes and open ears—about being intrigued enough to want to scratch beneath the surface to try to find out more about what is going on in the communicative lives of the disciplines. It’s about digging…into the mysteries of disciplinary life. (3).

Scope of the Project

The project is organized in five chapters; the Module and resources are found in the Appendix and are designed to be used as a standalone resource. The application of the project is in a virtual learning environment.

Chapter 1 has five subareas: The first explains the importance of situated oral communication activities in online courses in the community college. The second section describes the project goal of the Oral Communication Module. The third section explains why
this project is significant to higher education and online learning. The fourth section defines important terms used in the study. The final section of the chapter explains the organization of the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2 is an exemplary literature review comprised of books, peer-reviewed journal articles, a convention paper, websites, reports, news articles, and an interactive graph. Several areas of exploration were included: the cultural landscape of the community college, the primacy of oral communication, the significance of implementing oral communication practices into all courses utilizing genres that are discipline or program-specific, and teaching and learning in a virtual environment. All the research literature contributed to the development of the Project. The chapter is divided into five sections: Introduction, Philosophical Assumptions, Theoretical Basis, Review of the Literature, Rationale, and Project Design Questions. The Review of the Literature section is divided into the four topics of research mentioned at the beginning of this chapter description.

This chapter (Chapter 3) explains the scope of the project and, the methods of study.

Chapter 4 will present the Project and guidelines for implementation...

Chapter 5 summarizes the project, presents limitations and benefits as well as considerations for future study and investigation.

Methodology of the Project

Several methods of research inform the project. Ethnographic studies were conducted as part of an internship at two community colleges in the Southwestern United States in both online and face-to-face communication and Freshman Seminar courses.
The “descriptive data” (Bernard, 2013, p. 310) in the ethnographic fieldnotes are foundational to the development of the project goals. Rubin (2010) describes this ethnographic “participant observation” (p. 223) as one that gives an “insider perspective” (p. 223). Immersion in these classes afforded insight into the behaviors and special considerations of teaching and learning in the community college. The internship provided vibrant connection to students along with a hands-on engagement with a plethora of learning conundrums: late work; apathy and weak excuses; carelessness; mental, physical and online truancy; communication apprehension; cursory discussion posts and poor writing skills. The disconnect observed in messages and “content of people’s conversations” (Rubin, 2010, p. 216) in the online learning environment was of particular concern and informed instructional design of the project. Reading over the fieldnotes and re-experiencing the observations generated connections and ideas (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 144) and enlivened the direction of the project.

The concept for the project emerged in reflections on the semester invested in these courses as well as additional studies in faculty meetings. Across the fall term of 2012 research extended into seven faculty workshops in two community colleges. The general subject of the meetings was the role of assessment in student success. The content of these meetings spoke loudly to this project. Reviewing degree plans, rewriting course objectives and course descriptions, defining program outcomes, and mapping course objectives to outcomes all fed into the construction of a viable product that addresses the needs of students, concerns of faculty, and institutional goals.

Knowledge and experience were mined in “informal conversational interviews” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 176), with faculty and administration. After an explanation of the terms used in the study, faculty informants were engaged in response to talk points:
What online courses do you teach?
What is the name of the certificate or AA degree associated with the online courses you teach?
What are the occupational possibilities with this degree/certificate?
What are the oral communication sites (genres) in this occupation?
Who are the audiences for these genres?
What are the best practices and designs for sustained engagement of the online community college student?

The interviews with instructors inform a “Genre Study” that serves as a model for discovering the oral sites in a program or discipline. The interviews incidentally pointed to a need for resources that develop an understanding of the concerns that the project addresses. Consequently, in addition to the project, clarity dictated research and creation of:

1. A modeled integration into an online course
2. A Free-Standing Module
3. A Follow-Up Module
4. Content of the Module lessons
5. A Tested Taxonomy of Digital Tools
6. Resources for Students
7. Resources for Instructors
8. A map for implementing CID into the community college

Readings in a variety of source material establish a foundation for the value of oral communication and its place in the growing online learning environment. The emphasis on discipline or program-specific oral skills is a response the body of writing and research in communication in the disciplines as well as the evident demand in the workplace for oral skills and the increasing inclusion of critical oral skills in syllabi in the community college.
Ethical Considerations

When conducting ethnographic research and building communication curriculum, several ethical concerns and issues arise regarding honesty, trust, and building useful curriculum. On the methodological research side of this equation, ethnographic observations during internships at two community colleges produced detailed records of student and instructor behaviors. Participation in the grading process as well as personal conversations with students and various faculty in their classrooms, on the phone, in offices, or over lunches, provided pictures full of meanings and understanding that deserve careful interpretation. Unanticipated warm relationships developed with numerous individuals and frequently confidential information was shared that was not intended to be used in a way that would reflect negatively on the institutions, students, or faculty. Prior to subsequent project research, meetings with administration determined that if the research remained anonymous, there would be no need to go before the institutional review board for permission to talk with students and faculty. Care was taken to provide an honest and objective study without compromising this agreement. Student surveys were placed in several online courses by their instructors. Only students over the age of 18 took the survey and the surveys were not compulsory.

On the curriculum-building side of the work, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce rates the state as a whole on several scales and confers an “F” in the category of student success and a “D” in overall performance (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2009). Remedial education courses are required for as many as 70% of incoming students (Thomas, 2012). The teaching and learning landscape in the community college begs carefully constructed innovation and fearless exploration into practices that engage students with a vision for learning and positive change.
The Ignatian pedagogical paradigm emphasizes education of the whole person—spirit, mind, and body—with a view to service; this principle inconspicuously, but profoundly, informs the project in several ways and provides an ethical context. The project intent is to deliver engaging, achievable, and measurable instructional design that heightens likelihood for student success. “Cura personalis—personal care and concern for the individual—is a hallmark of Jesuit education and requires that teachers become as conversant as possible with the context or life experience of the learner” (Kolvenbach, 2005, n/a). Parker Palmer (1998) emphasizes the critical role of relational trust in the learning environment; the project takes responsibility for advancement of significant human connection in the virtual learning environment. Finally, the project focuses attention on oral skill development that is mostly ignored in the growing virtual college; it provides awareness, working models, opportunities to develop digital literacy, and resources that serve student growth in their chosen career path; it supports faculty and institutional objectives.

The product of this research is a practical prototype module entitled, *An Instructional Module Template for Orientation to the Situated Practice of Oral Communication Online in the Community College*. The Project introduction and description are in Chapter 4. The Project can be found in the Appendix and is intended for use as a standalone document.
CHAPTER 4: THE PROJECT

Introduction

“Speech is a form of sound that shares this common power. Like other sounds, it comes from within a living organism. A text can be ignored; it is just writing on paper. But to ignore speech can be unwise; our basic instincts compel us to pay attention.” (Ong, Orality & Literacy, 1982, p. 32)

The spoken word is ordinarily interactive and in real-time; it involves both verbal and nonverbal language and presupposes a relationship between the contributors. This Project is concerned with the salient nature of oral communication and the possibility of improving proficiency through instruction, practice, and assessment. Dannels (2001) proposes a model for oral communication instruction in general education courses that is situated in those practices relevant to a program or discipline. The communication in the disciplines model (CID) informs this Project, examining program-specific practices and oral activities to help students hone specific skills through social learning online using a variety of virtual communication tools. Effective learning design considerations embrace the importance of a sense of presence, connection, and clarity as well as comfort with the technology utilized in the assignments. Brazilian educator and theorist, Paulo Friere (1970) rejects the educator’s role as a depositor of information and one who is distant from the student and advocates the significance of dialogue as a critical place for “authentic thinking”(p.76). New technologies and media-rich learning design combine to offer students and teachers places for engagement that foster critical thinking and mutual growth.

The continuing evolution of virtual learning alters the landscape of academia; it changes the way education works, it opens doors, and unveils possibilities, but it is not without challenges. As online course offerings increase, openness to healthy scrutiny, readiness to innovate, and technological savvy will be strategic to fruitful teaching and learning. This project
advocates a proactive approach to assure that all administrative-determined critical skills are addressed in the online venue.

**Project Description**

The Project, entitled *An Instructional Module Template for Orientation to the Situated Practice of Oral Communication Online in the Community College*, is a virtual package of content placed at the beginning of an oral intensive general education course. The syllabus and lesson plans as well as related resources are in a text format in this Project. The Module has four lessons, each with a multi-media presentation, activities, and rubrics that serve to teach and assess. Students utilize synchronous and asynchronous technologies to prepare the assignments and participate in discussions. The template feature of the Module is in the fourth lesson where discipline or program-specific oral communication events are examined and practiced, preparing students for the oral activities integrated into the lessons throughout the rest of the semester in the host course.

The Project also presents the Module in the context of an online course and as a Standalone Module. A prototype of Follow-Up Modules proposes a means of ongoing oral instruction and practice with technology. A Resource section is included in the final pages of the Project.

**Project**

The Project may be found in the Appendix as a standalone document. Actual integration of the Module is in the LMS, Blackboard 9. Privacy agreements with the university offering this course limit the viewing to the review board of this Project.
Chapter 5: Summaries and Conclusions, is divided into three parts. Limitations of the Study gives the reader a better sense of the study by explaining the conditions and factors that were out of the control of the researcher. Further Recommendations highlights some important considerations and possible avenues of research to enhance the current study. The Conclusion recaps the study and explores how the Project is informed by the theoretical foundations and relevant literature.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

The Project is intended for use in community college courses and programs where frequent challenges to reading, writing, critical thinking, and autonomy are factored into the design and instruction. The discipline-specific genres found in four-year institutions are not readily applicable in this context, so certificates and two-year programs are the primary focus. The research is for online courses, though application may transfer readily to the campus-based classroom. Ethnographic research is limited to four disciplines or programs and only one is developed as a complete learning module and integrated into a course. Technological contingencies present a challenge to the success of student activities. Instructors must be fluent in these technologies and some ongoing provision for training is essential. Scheduling workable times for synchronous activities may require that small groups in proximate time zones work together. Many of the Project activities are carried on outside the learning management system for more effective tools, though the cost of some of these tools could hinder implementation. Student access to appropriate equipment and internet bandwidth could be occasionally compromised and needs consideration by the institution to assure success.

Further Recommendations

One of the purposes of the Project is to bring awareness of the gap between oral critical skill requirements and actual implementation of oral skills into course schedules. In cases where oral critical skills are not included in syllabi, attention needs to be directed to the research and then proposals made for the inclusion of these skills.

Students frequently lack a working knowledge of the learning management system; this hampers success, especially in the beginning of a semester. Student facility with the LMS
cannot be assumed and a means of discovering or training for facility is critical for student success and even more so when new technologies for oral activities are introduced.

A course with no prerequisites opens the door to students who have limited reading, writing, and study skills; this can severely compromise completion of online courses that are largely self-directed. This problem is exacerbated with the introduction of oral activities that require written preparation and ability to comprehend directions.

Instructor facility is critical for the success of oral activities online. Research interviews with faculty indicated that oral work is not part of a typical online course. Though the Project concept was mostly well-received, instructors were not prepared to bring the oral activities on board. In a recent faculty meeting, a foreign language instructor had concerns about teaching online because of her lack of experience with the technology needed for synchronous engagement. Annual training sessions providing assistance with the most up-to-date technology will give instructors skills and confidence to utilize digital tools in their courses.

In the Project, rubrics are utilized as tools for teaching oral skills in non-communication courses. Clearly articulated expectations offer guidance for assignments and a clear plan for assessment. Collaboration with communication staff in the creation of rubrics is essential to align with programmatic goals. The general critical skills required by the institution need specific articulation of expectations that would inform the overall scope of integration into the curriculum. Determination of the programmatic or discipline-specific skill proficiencies would enhance planning and assessment.
CONCLUSIONS

Communication proficiency is a paramount workplace skill. Many community college graduates enter their new occupations lacking confidence to successfully navigate interpersonal and group engagements and occupation-specific speaking tasks. A principal charge of the community college is to prepare the unprepared (Kroll, 2013). Though critical oral skills are frequently included in syllabi, the implementation of those skills is commonly ignored in the face-to-face courses, and more so online. The core public speaking courses supply valuable exercise, but if oral practice is absent from ongoing coursework, there is deterioration in any skill gained in these brief experiences. Additionally, when the specific speaking skills required in the occupations related to the degree or program are overlooked, students are unequipped to meet the demands of their new careers.

Upon entering the community college, students are mostly unprepared for what they are going to encounter. Frequently, these are first-generation college students who will take several remedial courses and struggle with more advanced ones. When these students enroll in online courses, the transactional distance encountered results in high attrition. The hopeful end-product for the student who completes this academic chapter is a job candidate with a grasp of the skills needed for his target career: he has learned how to think and access information; he can manage his time; he is adept at relating to others both professionally and personally. More often, this is not the happy scenario.

This study and the resultant online oral communication module attempt to address matters characteristic of many community college student populations. Research indicates that weak oral skills impact self-worth, relationships, employment, and learning. These skills can be improved through designed and intentional practice. It is the intent of the Project to improve oral
proficiency, to aid facility in the use of online technology, and to advance the overall educational experience. Introducing oral proficiency activities into the online learning courses serves several purposes and nurtures the “product” in broad ways.

A distinctive feature of the Project is the discipline or program-specific nature of the oral assignments based on Communication in the Disciplines (CID) and Communication across the Curriculum (CXC) research. These activities are framed in response to the questions: Are students offered opportunities to prepare them for oral competence that is relevant to their target occupation? How are these skills taught and assessed? Challenges to CID/CXC implementation include a general unfamiliarity with the research and concepts among both communication and non-communication faculty and a resistance to the teaching of oral skills in the online environment. Additionally, the absence of oral skills in institutional objectives is still widespread. Online learning is burgeoning and in the community college whole degrees or certificates are offered entirely online. Addressing the concerns and arguments is paramount. Credible implementation of pilot projects and well-presented orientation to faculty and administration are proposed in the Project. It is the hope that departmental isolation will be reduced when instructors, administration, and department heads appreciate collaboration as the expedient path to the fruitful implementation of oral communication in the disciplines. The success of writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs provides a model for implementation of speaking skills into the programs in the community college.

Attrition in virtual courses entreats evaluation of the online instructional design. The structure of courses and the speaking that is applicable to the curriculum warrant examination in a collaborative effort with program instructors and communication faculty. The Project module design reflects Moore’s transactional distance theory and addresses the concerns of student
dissuasion. The autonomy necessary in high transactional distance is a major barrier to most community college students. A high-dialogue environment reduces perceived distance. In the Project module, the oral activities and instructor engagement, combined with multimedia discussion boards, increase the opportunity for discourse and cultivate helpful patterns of exchange and relationships. Dialogue promotes a sense of community and friendly presence when students join together in the creation of knowledge and apply oral skills practically. These experiences direct students to the significance of oral proficiency in relation to the quality of their lives.

The academic challenges in the community college are fertile soil for innovative teaching practices and instructional design that produce an atmosphere for learning and engage the disinterested or discouraged student. Emphasis on meaningful dialogue fosters mutual trust and shared learning. Engaging educational experience is the fundamental locus for exploration and critical thinking, affirming that knowledge is constructed rather than acquired; it encourages curiosity, self-direction, and collaboration. Activities employing multimedia tools engender confidence to navigate the digital environment. The community college is a vital educational environment for preparing the unprepared and affirming students as “beings in the process of becoming” (Freire, 1970, p.84). Barnett Pearce (2010) reflects on the centrality of communication to the human condition. Persons in conversation—child and parent, friend and lover, student and teacher, supervisor and employee—the scope of communication that comprises life demands competence and lucidity to lessen misunderstanding—the parent of conflict, division, and reduced productivity. This Project seeks to engage the community college student in the skills that will augment meaning and proficiency to effectively navigate the
multifaceted dilemmas in their personal lives and careers. The cyber frontier is fertile territory to take “poorly prepared students and help them get ready for the next stage” (Kroll, 2013).
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APPENDIX