Appendix F: Communication Styles vs. Communication Skills developed by M. Tanti

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) shows that participating in class increases student learning (Rocca, 2010). This extends to community engaged contexts as well. However, being able to participate requires more than willingness. Students must have sufficient experience developing their perspectives, feel sufficiently respected by their peers and instructor, and otherwise be prepared with relevant material (Howard et al., 1996; McDuff 2012; White,2011). Small interactions (i.e., small talk) are largely shaped by cultural capital, which varies by social class background and other characteristics (Khan, 2011; White, 2011). Furthermore, socialization and structural oppression provide differential access to the skills needed to engage (Gillis, 2018, 12). This is particularly so when considering the unquestioned eurocentrism and sexism often shaping dominant forms of communication -- the communication styles that tend to be most recognized and rewarded. Tania Mitchell et al. observe that within institutions that are aligned with whiteness, merit is largely based upon one's ability to understand and navigate intricate cultural systems rather than on a student's intrinsic ability or aptitude (Mitchell et al., 2012, 615). Furthermore, there is a growing literature examining the ways that the most idealized communication styles align with White supremacy culture (Alderwick and Tanti 2019; see Appendix G: Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture and Antidotes). Critical examination is needed to interrupt systems of oppression embedded in the ways students are taught or encouraged to communicate. While participation skills can be learned, there is also a need to recognize differing communication styles as part of a communication skillset. Narratives that support the idea that shyness and other personal features are inherent and unchangeable and more so those that pose these traits as reasons to bypass students who are not outspoken, disempower students and offload a responsibility for all students to develop their communication styles (Gillis, 2018). Mary Reda notes that we also need to be open to the possibility that the decision to be silent can be a legitimate, reasoned one (Reda, 2009). These oversights miss the opportunity for students to develop an understanding of diverse forms and styles of communication within their peers and community partnerships.

Notable communication differences exist between westernized cultures and those with oral traditions such as Indigenous and African cultures whose epistemologies and ways of making sense of the world are "connected to the land and its people's spiritual practices" (Boveda, 2019, 107). Mildred Boveda argues that these epistemologies tend to be "explicitly devalued or erased in the westernized university" (2019, 107). She explains a further disconnection between the "straightforward, sincere and upfront conversational style that is highly valued in the transnational and urban communities [she] comes from" (Boveda, 2019, 110) that was often perceived to be confrontational or aggressive and the "indirect communication style that would be considered scheming and inauthentic in [her] neighbourhood" (Boveda, 2019, 111) but was taken to be polite and civil in academic circles. Similarly, people of colour and especially women are often scrutinized more intensely in terms of normative "bodily

performances," which are institutional or departmental expectations for how an individual should behave or act in the given workplace (Ford, 2011). Thus, body language constitutes another important area for developing a communication skillset, which should be as much focused on listening and interpreting as on speaking or expressing oneself. [1] Anne Mamary posits that, in its most ideal sense "communication involves not only the transmission of information but also the creation of community" (2003, 454). To the contrary, academic conversation and writing along with other conventional modes of expression tend to be "gendered, cultured, classed, and barrier-ridden" (Mamary, 2003, 455). An anti-oppression framing for communication skills would value "kinesthetic learning and expression in addition to oral performance and written expression" (Mamary, 2003, 457). It would enable a space where many different language uses are welcome, silence is understood and valued, and assumptions about the purpose of speaking are explored (Mamary, 2003, 457). Such training would be an innovative and essential contribution to community engaged curriculum. The following, "Think. Pair. Share" exercise begins to build capacity for developing self-reflexivity around one's own communication style and habits, while learning to make space for and attuning oneself to the habits and styles of others.

 Adapted from Cathy Davidson and Christina Katopodis

Think-Pair-Share: *Hearing one's own voice and witnessing being heard can have a powerful effect* —it structures equality*.

1. Hand out index cards and pencils (optional)

2. Set a timer for 90 seconds

3. Pose a question i.e. What does a land acknowledgement mean to you?

4. **Think**. Ask everyone to take 90 seconds to jot down three things they think about land acknowledgements. (question can be course related or general: three responses to something important)

5. **Pair.** When the timer sounds, students work in pairs for another 90 seconds in a very specific, ritualized way:

a) Their objective in this 90 seconds is to, together, come up with one thing to share with the whole group. It can be a synthesis of various comments on both cards, but one agreed upon thing to share.

b) BUT before that each person has to *hear* the other. First, one person reads out loud while the other listens without interrupting. Then the second person reads three things while the first listens without interrupting. It is important that while one member of the pair reads their three things, the other is silent; then they switch and the second person reads to a silent listener. This may be the only time a person ever hears their own voice – it is a crucial step. After they hear one another, have them think about the six things on their cards, see where

there is overlap, where there is difference, discuss and, together, decide on what is the single most important thing to share with the whole group. It may well be a mix of things on each card. This is not just modeling a classroom practice but a social ideal. There is also something about the ritual of writing down, then reading to someone else, that allows the introvert to speak up in a way that avoids the panic of being called on and having to speak impromptu before a group.

c) **Share.** The final 90 seconds involves going rapidly around the room and having one person in each pair read their contribution. You might have a Google Doc ready and "share" is everyone writing their one thing on the Doc. This can be made into a public contribution as an open Google Doc or posted to the website.

In this activity, everyone gets time for speaking and being heard as well as time to practice good listening skills. This activity demands 100% participation from everyone in the room and it also bolsters trust and a sense of community. Listening Dyads increase one's sense of how much time one takes up while speaking, they require you to *value* the time others give you, and they give everyone a chance to practice the fundamental skills needed for a healthy dialogue.

Recommended activity for participation marks rather than a graded exercise.

[1] Middleton et al define communication as the capacity to hear verbal messages (cognitive and affective content), correctly perceive nonverbal messages (affective and behavioural content), and respond verbally and nonverbally to both kinds with the goal being to respond versus react – a skill that requires continual practice (2000, 233).