



Editor's Note to Volume 5 of the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*

The Year 2020: Crisis and Opportunity

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On March 12, 2020, “America shut down” (McCaskill, 2020) in an attempt to reduce the spread of COVID-19. By the end of the month, President Trump had declared a national emergency and issued a travel ban, 32 of the 50 states had locked down, and nearly one million cases of coronavirus had been reported worldwide (Hollingsworth et al., 2020). For faculty, staff, and students in higher education, classes abruptly shifted to remote learning in a matter of days. Teachers that had never taught online were required to do so regardless of their experience or training. Clearly, the COVID-19 pandemic also prompted a crisis in higher education.

On May 25, 2020, a Minneapolis police officer (Derek Chauvin) murdered George Floyd (a 46-year-old Black man) by pinning him to the ground and kneeling on his neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds. Recordings of the murder captured by bystanders went viral on social media and protests promoting “Black Lives Matter” erupted worldwide. The event exposed the ugly reality of ongoing and pervasive racial injustice in the United States.

On July 17, 2020, U.S. Congressman and civil rights activist John Lewis (one of the original 13 Freedom Riders) died. Just before he died, he issued a call to action in a statement he made on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama: “get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and redeem the soul of America” (Ray, 2020, para. 1). These events compelled many instructional communication scholar-teachers to revisit what and how we teach. What can we, should we, and must we do to right the wrongs of systemic racism and social injustice via our places of privilege in the professoriate? Clearly, this series of events signaled another crisis point and opportunity in higher education.

This special issue of the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy* reflects our attempt to turn these crises points into catalysts for positive change. Thus, we open with two sets of invited reflective essays, one on “pandemic pedagogy” and the other on “social justice pedagogy.”

Regarding pandemic pedagogy, for example, Lawless and Chen highlight how the pandemic exposed pervasive inequities as a foundation for pedagogical best practices for addressing social justice issues in our classes. Bosley and Custer focus more specifically on the inequities exposed by the pandemic for community college instructors and students. Next, Schwartzman, creator of the “Pandemic Pedagogy” Facebook mega-group, exposes disparities brought to light during the pandemic and cautions us to learn from the experience and not revert to *business as usual* once the crisis abates. Finally, Tyma pushes this call to action further in his essay aptly titled, “The other side of 2020: Questioning everything—doing something.”

The essays on social justice begin with a thoughtful commentary by Sandoval focused on engaging students across difference and difficulty. Durnell-Uwechue and colleagues follow with their essay exploring humanistic and pragmatic approaches for addressing race and social justice in classroom discussions, and Mussack examines the potential role of yard signs as a form of community engagement during a public health crisis. Finally, May and McDermott highlight institutional inequities force on First Nation Peoples and how we might adjust our curricula and pedagogy to better reflect intercultural communication competence.

In this particular issue, we also offer four thought-provoking original research studies, two best practices essays, and three reflective essays challenging our taken-for-granted assumptions about instructional communication, communication pedagogy, and the realities of students’ lived experiences. The research studies range from exploring instructors’ rhetorical and relational goals during COVID-19 (McDermott et al.) to reflexivity in research methods courses (Spradley et al.) to online course design (Brophy et al.) to academic resilience (Frisby & Vallade). Best practices focus on creating communities of care (Clemens) and encouraging voter mobilization (McGowan-Krisch). We end with three reflective essays that challenge us to consider transforming our teaching philosophies toward invitational andragogy (Tipton), transdisciplinary deliberation (Coleman), and a reflexive examination of a professing parent navigating the pandemic as an academic and a parent (Mathis).

Together, these articles promote a call to be allies for social justice in our roles as communication teachers and instructional communication scholars. In that sense, perhaps this is a small silver lining in the series of crises we will remember forever as “the year of COVID.” As Tyma, professor at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, aptly put it:

We should never tell our students what to think—but we definitely can and should be helping them figure out what to think about, talk about, and do something about . . . [we] damn well better, otherwise what is it all for?

I agree. Because we *can* do something, we *must* do something . . . because doing nothing is simply not an option.

References

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