Communication Education 1

An Association of Radicals

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As is true of many communities, we share a lore about who we are and what we do. This lore is carried in stories that virtually all the community members know because the stories are told and retold at moments calling for ritualistic declarations of community identity. For the community of communication education scholars, the story commonly begins with the often related moment when the 17 then members of the National Council of Teachers of English finally became sufficiently dismayed at the lack of scholarly attention to teaching public speaking that they convened a special meeting of the Public Speaking Section to debate a motion on establishing the first National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking, today's National Communication Association (Jeffrey, 1964). This story has been told countless times at meetings of the National Communication Association, in books about the history of our discipline (e.g., Benson, 1985), in essays contextualizing the history or charge of our field (e.g., Craig, 1989), in special issues of our national journal *Communication Education*, and even in this volume (see Nainby, Chapter 2; McGarrity, Chapter 6).

Given the constant telling of this story with emphasis on the end result (i.e., the establishment of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking), curiosity about the sentiments and events that led to this outcome has been limited. There were actually 34 people at the meeting when the motion was originally debated; the debate was anything but one-sided, and it actually took two meetings to get the job done. At the end of the initial meeting, the vote was 18 to 16 to table the motion, hardly a resounding statement of intent. It wasn't until the next morning that the group of 17 people resumed the debate and voted to break away from the National Council of Teachers of English. So what motivated the initial motion, and why was the debate protracted? Answers to this question are difficult to pin down, but rich accounts provided by Jeffrey (1964),

Wallace (1954), Weaver (1959), Gray (1964), and Reid (2002) lead us to believe that the motion was the result of the extensive frustration felt by teachers of public speaking, who believed that they were being held to elocutionist principles for teaching public speaking and not given the support or resources to pursue a research agenda related to teaching public speaking (Jeffrey, 1964). The debate was likely about resources. Given the paucity of resources for public higher education, these 17 scholar-teachers probably had concerns about the wisdom of establishing a new professional organization and about the academic viability of a new field of study. In the end, evidently, their frustrations about being unable to approach the teaching of public speaking from a base of research were more compelling than fears about fiscal or political vulnerability. Told this way, the story suggests that our founding fathers were brave radicals determined to make a difference; they intended to change the way we teach and study speech in American public universities and were willing to make sacrifices to accomplish their goal.

Given our radical beginnings and the efforts of those brave founders, we might rightly ask ourselves, what have we done lately to acknowledge and celebrate their accomplishment? What have we done lately to ensure that the study and teaching of communication as a discipline remains vibrant and vital and whole? In what ways do we remain radical in our work? Those founding members were determined to and did establish an association with each other; the seeds of our community were built in their talk and in their commitment to support and guide each other in the pursuit of scholarly and pedagogical excellence in communication education research and teaching. As someone who began her career in communication education almost 30 years ago, it has been my experience that, while the discipline of communication has blossomed (some might argue exploded), the field of communication education—the field charged with ensuring a vibrant, vital, radical, and scholarly conversation about the pedagogy of the discipline—has fractured into a million little pieces of devoted, exciting, passionate but disparate and separated communities of scholars and teachers. Until now.

With this, the first comprehensive handbook of research in communication and instruction, Deanna Fassett and John Warren have done us the great service of creating a context to begin our collective commitments anew. They have invited us, in each section of this *Handbook*, to highlight and celebrate the best and the freshest essays on topics that are germane to three general fields of inquiry: (1) communication education, (2) instructional communication, and (3) critical communication pedagogy. Remembering the community lore, that we are all academic descendants of teachers of public speaking, they rightfully placed the communication education section first.

Those 17 colleagues of long ago were interested in advancing scholarship in the teaching of public speaking.[1] Since this auspicious beginning, we have been passionately engaged in developing pedagogy for and a pedagogical scholarship about communication. As several of my teachers,

mentors, and friends have reported elsewhere (Book, 1989; Friedrich, 1987; Sprague, 1993; Staton, 1989), since the very beginning of our association, we have been asking questions not only about teaching public speaking but also about how to employ a variety of instructional methods in the service of teaching communication. This section of the *Handbook* provides evidence that we are still fulfilling the promise of our founders; we are radically committed to advancing scholarship on teaching communication.

But our founders were interested in two things: enhancing research on teaching speech *and* establishing a community of individuals who could support each other in producing and promoting that research. In fact, as Jeffrey (1964) notes, concerns about protecting the strength of the community as a group of scholars supporting each other was evident in discussions on the first constitution of the fledgling organization and decades later as various regional associations began to form. This *Handbook*, because of its commitment to present a comprehensive account of scholarship at the intersection of communication and instruction, creates an opportunity to renew a sense of community in our association with one another.

In working with the authors who have contributed to this section, I invited them to approach their chapters with special attention to the "new" and "fresh" and "important" scholarship that they were doing and in which they wanted others to engage. Each of these essays is devoted to acknowledging the charge of our fore-creators in demanding a rigorous scholarship about teaching communication. Each essay also reflects the radical commitment of those 17 fore-creators by pushing us to ask questions that expand contemporary understandings of communication and that address the vexing problems teachers and students face each time they enter a classroom.

Keith Nainby provides a historical account of the philosophical and methodological underpinnings of communication education scholarship. In Chapter 2, he reminds us of our rhetorical roots and demonstrates how ancient debates continue to foster growth in our contemporary scholarship. Nainby provides a particularly careful account of our evolution from a field strongly influenced by social scientific research agendas into one embracing interpretive and critical scholarship. His invitation to widen our investment in critical and interpretive scholarship is striking in the context of his historical analysis; it seems that cycles do indeed repeat themselves.

Deanna Sellnow and Jason Martin (Chapter 3) report on research about the introductory course in communication. Reading their account, we are reminded that the introductory, or basic, course serves important functions for the department because it often brings in a steady stream of revenue, for the discipline because it provides a wide base of exposure to individuals (students, faculty, and administrators) who might not otherwise come into contact with communication as a discipline of study, and for students because it is commonly the only arena in which they can develop communication skills that will be vital to their personal and professional success beyond college. Sellnow and Martin discuss the fresh and important research being conducted on the basic course, particularly

with regard to problem-based learning, online delivery systems, and questions about how best to incorporate research from critical whiteness studies into the curriculum. These authors invite, with some urgency, communication education scholars to conduct experimental or quasi-experimental studies that document the efficacy of our basic course teacher training programs and the success of basic course instruction in relation to specific and communally ratified outcome measures.

Deanna Dannels (Chapter 4) reports on a close neighbor to research on the introductory course: communication across the curriculum (CXC) research. This research also explores questions about teaching communication to noncommunication majors, but in this case, the instruction occurs within other disciplinary curricula. Dannels describes the rich body of work that has emerged over the past 30 years and then uses that foundational work to invite us to take on important challenges. Her invitation is one that would have us engage in communication education that even more broadly connects us with publics not directly involved with university instruction, with spaces beyond the brick-and-mortar classroom, and with media other than textbooks and scholarly articles.

Katherine Hendrix's chapter (Chapter 5) draws our attention to research about communication education and the preparation of future faculty. Placing her review in the context of contemporary conditions in which faculty should be prepared to teach, she asks, How can we help junior faculty approach and manage the many incoherencies they face? These incoherencies include having to work with an undergraduate population that is increasingly overcommitted to a multitude of activities and obligations other than education and that may have developed a healthy (or unhealthy) cynicism about authority in general and educational authority in particular. At the same time, resources for faculty are dwindling, and expectations for incorporating a wide range of technological approaches are increasing. This creates a dynamic context in which new faculty must work and thrive. Hendrix's chapter invites us to explore research about how to bring these complex incoherencies into some kind of balance.

Matt McGarrity (Chapter 6) begins his chapter with an observation that scholarly discussions of the textbook are as old as the discipline itself. In fact, McGarrity asserts that textbooks could be viewed as "the trilobites of the disciplinary fossil record." His chapter presents a model for organizing and conducting research on communication textbooks; that model, a life-cycle approach, begins with questions about the production of textbooks and moves through research about the content, the use, and, finally, the history of communication textbooks. McGarrity points out the relative paucity of methodological pluralism in communication textbook research and laments that several rich questions remain unasked as a result.

Jami Warren and Timothy Sellnow (Chapter 7) report on the status of research about service learning in communication pedagogy. Service learning has expanded on college and university campuses in the past 20 years, and the discipline of communication has played an important

role in its growth. As these authors report, research about how and to what end to incorporate service learning in communication courses is both rich and diverse. Courses in communication research methods, in organizational communication, and, especially relevant for this section of the *Handbook*, in communication education have integrated service learning, explored the effects of that integration, and published studies for others to review and share. Warren and Sellnow end their chapter with an invitation to communication education scholars to ask how communication pedagogy is essential to any application of service learning, regardless of disciplinary affiliation. Research exploring this question would make an important contribution to theorizing about communication pedagogy.

My *Oxford American Dictionary* (Ehrlich, Flexner, Carruth, & Hawkins, 1980) provides some interesting fodder for thinking about the term *radical.* The first definition listed is as follows: "going to the root or foundation of something fundamental." The second offers a contrasting interpretation: "drastic, thorough, changes or reforms" (p. 739). Looking at these descriptions together, I understand that *radical* means a change of or at the core of something. Reflecting on common usage of the term, I understand that radicals are often given that name or assume that name because they are unsettled with the way things are. They are restless and seem to be driven by a need to change the status quo. Like our 17 fore-creators, the work of these eight authors can also be seen as restless and unsettled. We can read these as inciting change to the ways we conceptualize, enact, and research communication pedagogy.

As a whole, the essays in this section address common themes/issues about disciplinary pedagogy, and they call for a radical commitment to fundamental growth and change. Both Book (1989) and Sprague (1993) have asked that we invest scholarly interest in the development of a discipline-specific pedagogy. Such a pedagogy would answer questions about how best to teach communication and would acknowledge the unique and defining features of communication; namely, it is social, complex/ongoing, embodied, unconscious/automatic, tied to personal/cultural identity, and embedded with/connected to power (Sprague, 1993). Developing a robust and comprehensive disciplinary pedagogy requires the concerted, devoted, and radical efforts of a wide range of communication education scholars like the original 17 and these eight here.

Focusing attention on the problems with a decontextualized, ahistorical, self-reported, and singularly cognitive assessment of learning outcomes (as Dannels, Chapter 4; Hendrix, Chapter 5; Sellnow & Martin, Chapter 3; and Warren & Sellnow, Chapter 7, do here) is a perfectly radical move. This is especially true at a time when state and national funding sources are increasingly tied to high-stakes testing, and administrative calls for accountability are associated with "objective" standards of assessment. The tendency to surrender to these pressures will be great, but we must resist. Instead, as the authors in this *Handbook* demonstrate, we can and should continue to develop assessment measures that are sensitive to the complex/ongoing,

unconscious/automatic, and social dimensions of communication skill development. Sellnow and Martin (Chapter 3), Dannels (Chapter 4), Warren and Sellnow (Chapter 7), and Hendrix (Chapter 5) provide important insights into how the discipline can develop meaningful forms of assessment and how their use can further understanding of discipline-specific pedagogical practices. As Dannels and Housley-Gaffney (2009) report elsewhere, much of the CXC work is built on the development of localized outcome measures, and while there are some issues associated with this inclination, it is still an inclination in keeping with the accepted theoretical tenets and empirical findings of our disciplinary knowledge. These authors are quite astute, insistent, and radical in articulating the problems with current approaches to assessing learning outcomes in communication.

Placing embodied relationships in the center rather than on the periphery of our vision is also a perfectly radical position that these authors take. Exploring communication instruction that is deeply embedded in community settings encourages theorizing beyond individual-level outcomes to those that are essentially embodied, relational, and communal. Such explorations allow us to imagine discipline-specific pedagogical practices that seek the development of relationship and community communicative competence, and they rob us of the limiting focus on the individual so prevalent in our theorizing. Teaching situated within community contexts, and research on that teaching, necessarily reveals how particular bodies come into contact, develop understanding (or not), accomplish goals (or not), and commit to ongoing relationships (or not). So when Sellnow and Martin (Chapter 3), Warren and Sellnow (Chapter 7), and Hendrix (Chapter 5) insist that we expand our commitment to service learning and civically engaged curricula and when Dannels (Chapter 4) imagines using university extension services as a model for communication pedagogy, they are being radical in helping build discipline-specific pedagogical practices that are embodied, contextual, and relational.

Hendrix (Chapter 5) is especially radical in her contribution to the understanding of embodied practice in communication pedagogy. She reminds us that physical and spiritual well-being are also appropriate foci for our work. Too often, scholarship about preparing future faculty is silent on issues of how to care for our teaching bodies and our teaching souls, yet we can't teach without them. Her essay, then, is a unique gift to an otherwise antiseptic literature. Within this frame of embodiment, her reminder of the particular challenges to identity faced by faculty and graduate teaching assistants of color is, above all, radical.

Examining the ways in which communication education structures power and how pedagogy constitutes culture and identity is radical. In fact, questions about how communication in classrooms produces and reproduces social inequity are foundational to radical research about pedagogy (Freire, 1990; Giroux, 1988; Sprague, 1992). As Nainby (Chapter 2) notes, there are many important questions to ask about communication pedagogy and power, and several of those are advanced in this *Handbook*.

McGarrity (Chapter 6), for instance, observes the relatively unchallenged power that textbook publishers and publishing organizations have over the content and design of many textbooks. He invites communication education scholars to use critical organizational communication theories and methods to help explore how the discourses of the publisher and publishing company assert influence over the content and design of textbooks. Sellnow and Martin (Chapter 3) invite reflection on how the results of critical whiteness studies can be integrated into the basic course. They note that one obvious place in which to explore the integration of critical whiteness into the basic course is the typically unchallenged assumption that Westernized conceptions of communication skills are used to structure the curriculum of the basic course. Given the disciplinary commitment to critical scholarship, to exploring the many and insidious ways in which communication is complicit with the power that structures inequity, it is disappointing that more communication education scholarship has not incorporated a critical perspective. Given the initial investments articulated by these eight authors, we can certainly hope for more.

Maybe the next edition of this *Handbook* will, like the last section of this edition of the *Handbook*, have more to say about how communication pedagogy intersects with the communicative creation and sustenance of power and identity. I can imagine, for example, explorations of communicative practices that allow the enactment of critical communication pedagogy, just as I can imagine philosophical discussions of the hoped-for outcomes of communication education that have emancipatory goals. I can also imagine studies that reveal the ways in which constructions of race, gender, class, heteronormativity, and ableism are communicatively not only accomplished but encouraged *inside of* communication pedagogy. In other words, while this is painful to assert, we may have the opportunity to explore the ways in which our very curriculum is structured on the foundations of whiteness. Radical work indeed!

I am proud to have had the opportunity to add another line to the story of how communication education scholarship came to be. With these eight authors, we continue the tradition of being restless and unsettled with the way things are and hopeful that we can make a difference. Questions about how best to teach and learn communication may be foundational to the whole enterprise of being an educated person. They are certainly radical elements of an academic conversation about communication.

Note

1. Attention quickly turned to the broader concept of "speech" rather than "public speaking." In fact, by the time of the first actual convention, in 1915, the name of the association had changed to the "National Association of Teachers of Speech" (Jeffrey, 1964; Philipsen, 2007).

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