

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Contributions from the Discipline of Communication

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Some of the contributions of the discipline of Communication are reviewed with an eye toward their contributions to the larger Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. This scholarship, frequently referred to as the study of Communication in Instruction or Instructional Communication, is distinguished from Communication Education, but the two are seen as highly related. Contributions discussed are the impact of student communication apprehension and willingness to communicate on classroom communication, the roles of teachers' nonverbal immediacy, clarity, and socio-communicative style on students' affective and cognitive learning, and the outcomes of communication designed to exercise power and influence in the classroom. It is argued that the study of subject matter content, pedagogy, and instructional communication are of equal importance in preparing an individual to be an effective educator in any field and at any level of instruction. The discipline of Communication has much to offer to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning across disciplines and instructional levels.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning has only recently been recognized in many higher education institutions on a par with the Scholarship of Research. Today professors in all disciplines are being encouraged to seriously pursue this type of scholarship in addition to their normal research efforts. This emphasis has been a major response to the recognition that many college professors are less than fully competent teachers. With this realization has come a broader understanding of the varied elements that are critical to effective teaching.

Many lay people, including a large portion of state and national legislators, still have only a very limited perspective on what it takes to prepare effective teachers. Most direct their predominant concerns toward insuring that teachers achieve mastery of the knowledge of the content discipline they are employed to teach. This orientation has led to new requirements for teacher trainees such as undergraduate majors in content disciplines. This has been followed by requirements that teachers complete M.A. degrees in these same disciplines for advancement (usually tied to salary increases).

This single-minded orientation has not been accepted by many more knowledgeable individuals, particularly those who are dealing with teacher education on a regular basis. Scholars in Education, for example, caution that content knowledge, although of critical importance, cannot supplant the knowledge of pedagogy. They argue correctly that both subject matter mastery and pedagogical mastery are of critical importance. Mastery of pedagogical knowledge is required for certification in

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most state educational systems for individuals who wish to teach in K-12 classrooms. However, most college and university professors remain almost totally ignorant of pedagogical concerns. Such simple pedagogical matters as domains of learning and the use of learning objectives are new concepts for them. With the advent of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning movement, more people in higher education are becoming aware of the existence and importance of such pedagogical concerns.

It is our position that, even with this significant advancement, both higher education and K-12 education are placing their trust in a "two-legged stool." Effectiveness in instruction is based on a "three-legged stool." The third leg, which is at least as critically important as the other two, is effective communication. In fact, it was noted in the first published book on communication in instruction that "the difference between knowing and teaching is effective communication in the classroom" (Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1978).

Being an effective communicator is not required for certification by any state in the U.S. Nor is instruction in effective communication included in most teacher education programs. When it is included in undergraduate programs it usually is limited to nothing more than an introductory public speaking class. Only in West Virginia is a M.A. in Communication Studies specifically noted by the state school administration as equivalent to a subject-matter M.A. for salary purposes for the state's teachers.

Not surprisingly, it has been the Communication discipline which has brought the importance of communication in instruction to the attention of the academic community. This move, however, has only come in recent (the last 30) years.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Communication Discipline

The communication discipline as we know it today was first recognized by the formation of what is now the Eastern Communication Association in 1909. Soon after, in 1914, this was followed by the formation of what is now the National Communication Association. Its first name was the National Society for Teachers of Public Speaking.

For most of the history of this field, teaching of public speaking has held a central position. The first journal in this field to publish primarily articles on what is now considered the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning was the *Speech Teacher*, now *Communication Education*. The large portion of the articles published in the first half of this journal's existence centered their attention on public speaking. Since the change of name, about 25 years ago, much greater diversity of topic has been the norm in the journal.

Until fairly recently, the face of *Speech Teacher/Communication Education* has been just that, communication education. Not unlike other academic disciplines, our instructional focus has been a focus on teaching speech, and subsequently, communication. As with most academics, our concern was the teaching of our own discipline (Communication), not on the role of communication in the practice of teaching in general (Communication in Instruction). Although it is still a comparatively recently developed field within the communication discipline, the study of communication in instruction began well before the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning movement was begun.

The efforts of Larry Barker and Robert Kibler at Florida State University in the

late 1960s and early 1970s were seminal to the development of the research and teaching related to communication in instruction. Their efforts provided a basis for the first M.A. program and the first D. Ed. program in Communication in Instruction at West Virginia University in 1973. These were the first programs of their type in the field of Communication. While they included some work in Communication Education, their primary emphasis was, and still is, the role of communication in the instructional process.

Recognition of Communication in Instruction as a legitimate sub-field within Communication was initially secured in the early 1970s by the formation of a Division for Instructional Communication in the International Communication Association. This was one of the first eight Divisions in that association. Other sub-fields similarly recognized were Political Communication, Organizational Communication, Health Communication, and Intercultural Communication. These were looked upon at the time as "applied areas," while the Information Systems, Interpersonal Communication, and Mass Communication Divisions were looked upon as "theoretical areas." These distinctions disappeared after a few years when it became obvious that all of the Divisions dealt with both theory and application. Over the next few years the National Communication Association and the regional communication associations blended Communication Education and Communication in Instruction into joint Interest Groups or Divisions. Today, Communication in Instruction is recognized as one of the sub-fields of Communication by all major organizations in the discipline.

Publication of scholarly research articles relating to Communication in Instruction was greatly facilitated by the inauguration of the *Communication Yearbook* series by the International Communication Association. In the first ten volumes of this publication the top papers reviewed and accepted for presentation at the ICA annual convention by each of the Divisions were published. Also, in the early years of this publication, members of each of the Divisions were charged with preparing chapters which explained their sub-field and/or reviewed research related to it. For this ten-year period, most of the best work in Communication in Instruction was published in this annual. After the tenth volume, the decision was made to no longer publish the top papers of any division. Hence, there no longer was a publication outlet in ICA for research in this Division (or for several other Divisions). Since by that time *Communication Education* had begun publishing such research, most of the researchers in this sub-field directed their manuscripts to that journal (and many moved their primary professional affiliation from ICA to NCA). *Communication Education* continues to be the primary outlet for scholarship in this sub-field. However, the primary journals of the Eastern Communication Association (*Communication Quarterly* and *Communication Research Reports*) now are both important outlets for this work. Occasional articles related to Communication in Instruction are published in the journals of the other regional associations, a small number in other NCA journals (*Communication Monographs* and *Journal of Applied Communication Research*), and (rarely) in one ICA journal (*Journal of Communication*).

Contributions from the Communication Discipline

Research generated within the Communication discipline has now built a substantial base of information related to the role of Communication in Instruction. This can be a major source of information for those both within and outside the discipline who

are interested in pursuing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. One of the earliest, and still continuing, areas of research relating to the role of communication in instruction is that which focuses on traits related to communication which impact student orientations and behaviors in instructional environment. Among these are Willingness to Communicate (including Reticence), Communication Apprehension, Shyness, and Self-Perceived Communication Competence. In addition, several areas which have focused on teacher communication behaviors and orientations provide substantial bases leading to an understanding of what behaviors and orientations lead to effective teaching—and increased student learning. These areas include nonverbal immediacy, socio-communicative style and orientation, clarity, and the use of power and influence in the classroom. These far from exhaust all of the work done in this sub-field, but they are representative of some which have been found to be highly associated with student affective and cognitive learning, student motivation, and student attitudes toward the teacher and class taught. We will consider each of these in turn.

Student Traits

While student intelligence has long been recognized as a trait which has a major impact on student learning, communication traits have also been determined to have a direct association with student learning. Four communication traits have received primary consideration: 1) communication apprehension (CA; “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons;” McCroskey, 1977b), 2) shyness (“the tendency to be timid, reserved, and most specifically, talk less;” McCroskey & Richmond, 1982), willingness to communicate (WTC; “an individual’s predisposition to initiate communication with others;” McCroskey & Richmond, 1987), and 4) self-perceived communication competence (SPCC; “how communicatively competent an individual perceives her-/himself to be;” McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988).

Early research (McCroskey, 1977a; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989) established a strong negative relationship of reduced student communication in the classroom with various measures of academic achievement. Subsequent experimental research determined that this impact was causal in nature (Booth-Butterfield, 1988). Students who do not talk much in the classroom (are apprehensive, shy, less willing to communicate, and/or see themselves as less communicatively competent) are evaluated less positively by their teachers, achieve less on teacher-made and standardized tests, and develop less positive affect toward the content of classes, their teachers (particularly those who demand participation or formal presentations), and school in general. Since approximately 20 percent of the student (and adult) population are apprehensive about communication, the communication demands of school (K-college) tend to inhibit the learning of a large portion of the student population.

Teachers (K-college) who are not prepared to deal with these students are most likely to engage in behaviors which have been found to increase the problems these students face. The lay orientation of most people who have not studied the impact of these communication traits is to try to help the student by either encouraging or requiring increased student participation or giving presentations in the classroom. These are precisely the worst things which can be done, because these teacher behaviors directly lead to increased, rather than decreased, problems for their

students. Oddly enough, college mass lecture classes may be the best instructional system for these students because it is in these classes where student communication demands are lowest.

In the early research in this area it was believed that these student traits were primarily learned. Hence, approaches toward modifying them focused on social learning models. These approaches yielded only modest success. Since we now understand that all of these traits have a strong genetic base (Beatty & McCroskey, 2001; McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond, 2001), it is clear why these well-intentioned but ill-founded efforts to get students to be more communicative are ineffective, at best. Unfortunately, an extremely small proportion of the teaching population (K-college) has any awareness of these problems and are most likely to engage in teaching behaviors which are far less than optimal as a result. Clearly, some of the effort in Scholarship of Teaching and Learning needs to be devoted to preparing current and future teachers and professors to deal with the communication inhibitions of their students if teaching of quiet students is to be enhanced (L. McCroskey & J. McCroskey, 2002; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991).

Teacher Communication Behaviors

Most of the research regarding the relationships of teacher communication behaviors with learning outcomes has followed the "process/product" research model. That is, elements in the communication behavior of teachers are identified and measured and these are related to various outcomes of instruction. While most of this research has been correlational in nature, the relatively few experimental studies which have been reported have produced results consistent with the assumed causal direction of relationships observed in the correlational studies. Some of the most common outcomes studied have been cognitive learning, affective learning, and affect for the teacher (teacher evaluation). The most studied teacher behaviors have been nonverbal immediacy, clarity, socio-communicative style, and use of power and influence in the classroom. The vast majority of this research has focused on traditional classroom instruction. Instruction in both middle school/high school and college contexts has been studied. Only very small effects have been attributable to sex of student, sex of teacher, or level of instruction. Therefore, they will not be considered here. However, substantial effects for national origin (domestic/foreign) of teacher have been noted and will be considered later.

Nonverbal Immediacy. One of the earliest areas of study in research on the role of communication in instruction was teacher nonverbal immediacy. The first study in this area was conducted by Andersen (1979) as part of her doctoral dissertation. Her review of many individual studies in the educational literature pointed to the possibility that nonverbal immediacy as conceptualized by Mehrabian (1971) might be a critical factor in effective classroom teaching, although none of the studies reviewed had been conducted employing this conceptualization. Her research, and the many studies which have followed it, confirmed the importance of this communication behavior (Christophel, 1990; McCroskey & Richmond, 1992; Richmond, 2002a).

The results of this large body of research indicate that teachers who are more nonverbally immediate are seen by their students as more caring, clearer, and overall better teachers than less immediate teachers. Similarly, students who have more immediate teachers are more motivated and develop more positive affect for

both the content taught and the teacher than do students with less immediate students. Students of immediate teachers also achieve more cognitive learning of the course content than students of less immediate teachers. While the latter relationship is a strong one, it appears that it may only be linear up to moderately high levels of nonverbal immediacy. There is some indication in the research that very high teacher nonverbal immediacy generates no more cognitive learning than moderately high nonverbal immediacy. The overall picture, however, is very clear: nonverbally immediate teachers are far more effective teachers than their less immediate colleagues. These results are consistent across levels of instruction in the U.S. and are replicated in research in a wide variety of other cultures-both those that are more immediate cultures and those that are less immediate cultures.

Teacher Clarity. Clarity, in part, is a function of immediacy. More immediate teachers are seen as more clear. However, clarity is more than just immediacy. Clear teaching is fluent, in a language understandable to the students, and adapted to the comprehension level of the students (Chesebro, 1999). Students who have teachers who communicate clearly are more motivated, pay more attention to the teacher, report more positive affect for the subject matter, are less apprehensive about receiving instruction, and see the teacher as more credible and a better teacher (Chesebro & McCroskey, 1998; Sidelinger & McCroskey, 1997). They also learn more cognitive material in the course (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001).

Teacher Socio-Communicative Style. Socio-communicative style is composed of two primary components: assertiveness and responsiveness (Richmond & McCroskey, 1990; Richmond & Martin, 1998). These are also the two primary components of communication competence. Assertiveness is "the capacity to make requests, actively disagree, express positive or negative personal rights and feelings, initiate, maintain, or disengage from conversations, and stand up for oneself without attacking another" (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996, p. 92). Responsiveness is "the capacity to be sensitive to the communication of others, to be a good listener, to make others comfortable in communicating, and to recognize the needs and desires of others" (McCroskey & Richmond, 1996, p. 93).

The association between socio-communicative style and nonverbal immediacy is substantial (Thomas, Richmond, & McCroskey, 1994). Hence, it is not surprising that both assertiveness and responsiveness (both positively correlated with nonverbal immediacy) are positively associated with teaching effectiveness. Generally, however, student perceptions of teacher assertiveness have been found to be associated mostly with their perceptions of teacher competence and cognitive learning. In contrast, responsiveness has generally been found to be more associated with affective learning and trust in and positive affect toward the instructor (Richmond, 2002b; Wooten & McCroskey, 1996). Overall, research in this area suggests that assertive and responsive teachers produce more positive educational outcomes than those that are less assertive and less responsive.

A third component of socio-communicative style has been variously referred to as versatility or flexibility. Teachers high in versatility would be expected to be able to adapt to different students' communication more quickly and appropriately. However, at this point there is too little research available to make an appropriate conclusion. However, an examination of the research related to teacher nonverbal immediacy, teacher clarity, and teacher socio-communicative style suggests that all of these variables work together to produce an effective teacher.

Teacher Power and Influence. An extensive series of studies on “power in the classroom” has indicated that all of the variables discussed above have influence on the ability of teachers to influence, positively or negatively, the outcomes of instruction in the traditional classroom (Richmond, 1990). This body of research has generated a typology of 22 different message strategies which teachers can use to influence students’ behavior, the effectiveness of which depend in varying degrees on the variables discussed above. Teachers who do not have moderately high to high levels of nonverbal immediacy, clarity, assertiveness, and responsiveness are less able to use pro-social modes of influence and often must depend on anti-social influence strategies which are likely to have very negative outcomes (Richmond & McCroskey, 1992).

Domestic and Foreign Teachers. Many studies have observed that U. S. students report dissatisfaction with foreign teachers, particularly those for whom English is a second language. Recent research has indicated that the presumed ineffectiveness of foreign teachers is real, but is not just based on the ethnocentric biases of the students, although that does make some contribution (L. McCroskey, 1998). More recent research (L. McCroskey, 2002) has determined that the range of effectiveness of domestic teachers is large, and that so is the range of effectiveness of foreign teachers. However the means for domestic teachers are substantially higher than those for foreign teachers. More importantly, it has been observed that the variables discussed here—nonverbal immediacy, clarity, socio-communicative style—are able to account for most of these differences. That is, foreign teachers are ineffective because of mostly the same negative communication behaviors as those for domestic ineffective teachers. This research indicates that lack of nonverbal immediacy, lack of clarity, lack of assertiveness, and lack of responsiveness leads to ineffective teaching on the part of both teachers who speak English as a first language and those who speak it as a second language. Presumably, this would also be true of other first and second language speakers regardless of the language spoken. While not clearly speaking the language of the students would reduce overall clarity, it is not the only factor involved in the ineffectiveness of some second language teachers.

Conclusion

The research discussed above primarily is that which has been conducted by one or more of the coauthors and their students. It was chosen as a representative sample of the kinds of work that are continuing in efforts in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning within the Communication discipline. Areas covered, therefore, are far from an exhaustive report on all of the related research within this discipline.

Other current efforts within the study of student communication traits include such diverse areas as argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, motives for communication, listening ability, listening apprehension, receiver apprehension, and ethnocentrism, just to mention a few. Similarly, current efforts relating to teacher communication behaviors include use of humor, communicating content relevance, teacher misbehaviors, teacher responses to student misbehaviors, teacher credibility, teacher communication and student motivation, affinity seeking techniques, communication style, and communication responses to student resistance to influence. This certainly is not a list of all current research. However, hopefully it does suggest the breadth of the current efforts toward the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the Communication discipline.

Research within the Communication discipline has generated considerable information on the roles of communication in instruction which apply across disciplines. This contribution is broadly understood within the discipline but far less awareness of it exists in other disciplines. The challenge to communication professionals in the future is to continue generating knowledge via the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, but also to discover means to disseminate that knowledge to people in other disciplines who are most likely to benefit from it.

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