



The Evolution of Communication Pedagogy

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Abstract: This article is an overview of the major developments in the field of communication in education. From the history of the national association over 100 plus years, specific attention is paid to changes leading to the advent of this publication. Changes in nomenclature, conferences, publications, research, and educational trends are discussed. The essay is intended to provide a view of history as setting for inauguration of the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*. It also is intended to invite and stimulate other scholars' reflections on the nature and evolution of the field.

Perhaps it is presumptive to title this article “the” evolution of the field or discipline. Rather, this article is one person’s view of how a major subject area of research and teaching has changed over a century. This article is a chronicle of events and developments that have impacted a field of study, not through revolution but more as an evolutionary change. One could say that communication pedagogy (or the various names and labels used over the years) has gone through reductions, expansions, contractions, phases, and foci that represent the process of growth and maturity. So, this chronicle is done through my lens with the hope that anyone who is newer to work in communication pedagogy will have a sense of our history. Perhaps this article will encourage others who have a different perspective, or a different set of lenses, to add to this overview.

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The field of Communication study and its teaching can be traced back centuries to Greek scholars Isocrates, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as well as Roman scholars Cicero and Quintilian, among others. However, I restrict this article to the American developments of professional and scholarly work for a little more than 100 years. The prominence of the National Communication Association (NCA) that many of us call “home” began early in the 20th century and evolved from another broad-based professional association, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Seventeen members left NCTE in 1914 to form the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking. At the time, these teachers were designated as oral English teachers and relegated to lower status than the composition and literature teachers. This origin, and the developments in our national “home-base” from 1914–1945 is explored by Cohen (1994). Among other things, Cohen noted that these early leaders were primarily teachers and needed to establish themselves as researchers as well. Other aspects of our disciplinary history (e.g., emergence of departments) are reviewed by Friedrich and Boileau (1999). Past NCA executive secretary William Work also reviews the growth in members, journals added, and changes in names and services up to the NCA name change and relocation to D.C. (Work & Gratton, 2002).

This history brings us almost within a decade of the 100th Anniversary NCA Conference in 2014. (A longer, more detailed association history can be found on the NCA website.) Shifts in the nomenclature over those years reflected the changing perspective that as scholars we were interested in the total process of communication, not just the one element of public speaking. The regional associations existed independently, but affiliated with the national organization throughout those years and underwent similar changes in names.

Now, let us examine more closely the events and some changes that occurred since 1945. Sometime in the early 1960s, Ron Allen at the University of Wisconsin used the term “speech pedagogy” as an alternative label for the work being conducted in speech education. I don’t recall the use of the term “pedagogy” being common at that time, although I had been teaching high school Speech and English and readying myself for graduate study at the University of Wisconsin. It was circa 1965 when I met Ron in my graduate program and became his doctoral advisee. Thus, I was an academic grandchild of Gladys Borchers (one of the first women in speech education) who directed Ron Allen’s dissertation. Dr. Borchers was a three-time Wisconsin alum who intended to teach elementary school. However, she was persuaded to join the Wisconsin faculty until retiring. With much of early speech education focusing on elocution (i.e., voice and diction), she was known for using a pig’s throat to blow through, demonstrating sound made by the larynx.

For decades, the teaching of speech was heavily rhetoric based, deriving from the ancient Greeks and Romans, and many other scholars down through the ages. Then in the late 1960s, the area of interpersonal communication became prominent. Focusing upon dyadic and small group relationships and interaction, much of interpersonal communication research built upon social psychology research. Then early textbooks for teaching interpersonal communication emerged from speech communication people, most notably by John Keltner, Kim Giffin, and Bobby Patton. Shortly thereafter in the mid-1970s, textbooks were authored by John Stewart, Gary D’Angelo, and Joe DeVito that still exist in multiple editions today. Many prominent researchers also began to develop research programs in interpersonal communication. Thus, speech education included training not just in public speaking, debate, and discussion, but also one-to-one, small group, verbal and nonverbal communication, with relationship building.

A next major development was the convening of a national meeting of those educators who were researching and preparing teachers of speech communication for colleges, elementary schools, and secondary schools. The Speech Communication Association (SCA; this was the name of the NCA at the time) invited people to gather August 27–30, 1973, in Memphis, Tennessee, for a special conference of teacher educators in speech communication. The 30 conferees who accepted SCA's invitation then discussed, debated, and passed various resolutions regarding the future directions of speech communication education. This conference was considered a landmark advancement in the study and development of teacher education. The NCA's Instructional Development Division (IDD) had just been established in 1971; the Memphis Conference was used to forward IDD's agenda. Some of the items on the agenda included attaining professional identity, applying prior research to teaching, and using instructional domains, systems approaches, and behavioral objectives in the classroom. The proceedings of the Memphis conference is detailed in Newcombe and Allen (1974).

A second landmark conference was held in 1988 in Flagstaff, Arizona, with the proceedings published a year later (Cooper & Galvin, 1999). Although copies seem to be no longer available, the work of this gathering of 33 high school and college educators has been explored in other publications (see Feezel, 1992). Issues emerging from this conference included engaging in student-centered teaching, attending to student diversity, developing communication in children, teaching intercultural communication, and integrating all language arts. Another issue recommended holding a national conference on assessment, which SCA did convene in 1990 (Christ, 1998). Out of that issue, a major line of research on communication assessment instruments and practices was borne (see Christ, 1994).

Certification of teachers of speech, mostly at the secondary school level, had been the primary activity of speech educators for decades. With shifts in state certification, this activity changed over the years. Although varying from state to state, periods of time saw movements to a broad-based Communication certification and then more recently to Whole Language or Integrated Language Arts licensure. These movements involved combining English Education with Speech Education and other areas that had previously separated from English Education (i.e., Reading, Theater, and Radio-TV). Unfortunately, in my view, these movements eventuated in the decline of prominence and depth in our oral/aural emphasis on speech communication. Although a sensible and practical holistic approach to teaching all modes of communication together emerged, it did reduce the attention to, and the centrality of, speaking and listening. Thus, we have seen a kind of returning to the fold that we left in 1914, but with a broader function and greater respect.

Rather than mourning this development, however, let us note the simultaneous expansion of what teachers and scholars in speech communication education were doing. Though teacher certification had been the core of communication pedagogy over the decades, with the influences of two landmark conferences, other aspects of the field gained attention. In 1985, Rebecca Rubin and I were conducting research together and discussed the various divisions of the traditional communication education study (c.f., Rubin & Feezel, 1986). An acronym that I toyed with then, but did not include, was DICE to suggest that speech communication education had morphed into Developmental & Instructional Communication Education (DICE). That is, DICE represents a broad scope of instructional development: the development of communication in children and adults, communication education as the training of communication teachers, and instructional communication as the role communication plays across all acts and fields of teaching. All three areas were noted and discussed at both the 1973 Memphis and

the 1988 Flagstaff landmark conferences. Many researchers focused on instructional communication as integral to instruction in all subject areas, giving rise to a greater breadth of research and teaching.

A major shift in the speech communication field began in the late 1960s and carried through the decades. For example, in Waldo Braden's 1961 high school methods textbook, course chapters addressed public speaking, discussion and debate, interpretation, drama, radio and television, and voice and diction, plus two chapters on speech and hearing disorders. Ron Allen's, Clay Willmington's, and Jo Sprague's (1991) methods textbook reflected changes in the subject areas to be taught in high schools. Today, we would include methods for teaching intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, mass communication, business communication, health communication, and crisis communication, among others. This switch reflects what we teach at the college level.

Equally important was the shift from just teaching our classes to conducting research that examined communication across all types of classrooms, with this movement initially led by the work of James McCroskey and his colleagues at West Virginia University. The work of Jody Nyquist, Jo Sprague, Donald Wulff, Ann Darling, and others such as myself in teaching basic pedagogical skills for graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) fostered a national movement recognizing the importance of communication in teaching all subject areas (see Nyquist & Wulff, 1992). Several textbooks (e.g., Bassett & Smythe, 1979; Civikly, 1992; Hurt, Scott, & McCroskey, 1978; Galvin & Book, 1972; Seiler, Schuelke, & Lieb-Brilhart, 1984) that focused on the role that communication plays in the classroom management and student learning process began to be published, with more contemporary work taking its place today (Bolkan, 2017; Dannels, 2015; Simonds & Cooper, 2010).

Whither the directions of communication pedagogy today? Some directions in teaching and research already underway include distributed learning, online education, computer-mediated communication, critical pedagogy, intercultural education, teaching Hispanic/Latina learners, and cross-national communication education. What topics will be added by the next generation is yet to be identified. Recall that this article is my retrospective, not a crystal ball. Looking at change, Bertelsen and Goodboy (2009) studied course offerings at four-year colleges and universities. They compared course listings for increases and decreases in offerings over a decade. Declines in offerings were found for Teaching Methods, Public Address History, Voice/Diction, and Coaching Forensics; all have declined in frequency and ranked in the lowest 1/3 of 30 courses since 1999. In contrast, Interpersonal, Organizational, Persuasion, Intercultural, Gender, Nonverbal, and Conflict Communication offerings increased, ranking in the top 1/3 of courses offered in higher education. Their study may reflect some changes in topic areas of focus in research and teaching.

Although teaching was the focus from the beginning in 1914, the first serial publication with that focus was *The Speech Teacher* (launched in 1952). As Loren Reid and others who started *The Speech Teacher* have indicated, its purpose was to contain articles on the field of speech education. It continues today as a major journal under the name *Communication Education*. As this outlet increasingly provided for researchers, SCA saw a need for an outlet on pedagogical work in the classrooms; thus, joining *Communication Education* in 1986 was *Speech Communication Teacher* (now *Communication Teacher*) with an aim of publishing K-12 and college teaching practices and assessment. Until today, these

two journals were the only focused outlets for scholarship and practice related to teaching of communication. Now, the newest publication outlet is the *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, which will provide the best research on the art and science of teaching communication courses.

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