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Critical Communication Pedagogy

Shifting Paradigms

As scholars, we spend so much of our time thinking about time. . . . How much of it there is until a deadline . . . whether someone is wasting our time . . . how to create and enjoy a spacious sense of time inside a discussion or an activity. . . . Time to regroup, time to change, time's up, a time to every purpose under heaven. Time is always on our minds. But not just time . . . moments. Because the issue is not so much whether there's enough time for a teacher or a writer or a professor, but whether the time was well spent, whether the moment was well-rounded, purposeful, or meaningful to us, our students, our research participants. . . . In teaching, we live life moment by moment, looking for patterns, reliving and loving and dreading "key" moments. There are many such shared moments in our lives. . . .

In thinking about the field—the state of communication education, instructional communication, communication pedagogy—we found that time has different shapes than we expected. As fairly linear thinkers, we expected to conceive of the discipline as we conceive of time itself: a moment to moment, processional process beginning with our foreparents and leading us, in a historical line to the present issue of *Communication Education*. After all, it makes sense to us, as communication scholars, to see the past influence and make possible the conditions of the present. And of course, this is mostly true; however, as we began to encounter the field, we noticed

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that our engagement with it failed to have the expected directionality. Instead of a line, we found the story of the field was told to us in pieces. We read Freire (1970/2003) before we found Dewey (1916/1944, 1938). We learned about the ideology of “blaming the victim” from Kozol (1991, 1995, 2000) long before we read Ryan’s (1976) treatise on the subject. We tried to read the pages of our field’s journals, but often found distraction in the pages of McLaren’s (1999) *Schooling as Ritual Performance* or Fine’s (1991) *Framing Dropouts*. Thus, the story of our field became individualized, personalized; we learned the field in pieces, as a rich collage or mosaic that generated meaning through juxtaposition rather than cause and effect.

Of course, this is often how time works—we piece together enough time here or there to accomplish the doings of our lives. We have written this book in stolen moments found in between the preparation of both memos and courses. We smuggle our time with loved ones, carefully extracted from the tasks and to-do lists of our lives. The fact of these moments’ stolen nature (like the moments we spent swimming in Ira Shor’s, 1980, 1992, 1996 critical pedagogy books) does not mean they are less valuable. Rather, it means that how we make sense of our daily lives is much more like art, like a poem or a mosaic, than like the linear pages of our high school history books. For instance, we learned to drive cars not by the manual, but by the moments stolen from our parents’ schedule or the time occupied in the driver’s education car. Those moments, as a series of lucky juxtapositions, have created the meaning making of driving—it is in the moments stolen from time and knitted together that we have crafted our driving selves. It is, of course, why we drive differently—Deanna, as a Californian, is a much different driver than John, who learned to drive in Indiana.

Thus, the idea of defining a state of the field is troubling—how do we do this in a way that actually represents or mirrors the nature of how we learn, how we make sense of ourselves as communicators and scholars in the field? Certainly, we could provide a linear description—a timeline that locates Sprague’s (1992, 1993) call for critical inquiry or Pelias’s (2000) self-interrogation of the critical life within the timeline of *Communication Education*. We could craft a story of the field in this way, but in doing so, we would rob the story of the field of its lived quality. Rather than try to create some order that somehow preexists us as researchers, in this unconventional review of, this interaction with the literature, we strive to steal away these moments from our sense making, to fashion them into an image for others. We paint here the field as we encountered it, offering, as one must, our own impressionistic understandings of how we have arrived at a point in time where we find a need for this book on critical communication pedagogy. In what follows, we take up our own relationships to the intersections of instructional communication and critical pedagogy, considering what

each provides that the other does not. In drawing together the two perspectives, we suggest a vision for coming together that extends beyond theory and methodology to the creation of community.

You Think You're a Comm Ed Scholar?

It was my first job interview and I was so nervous. In the moment of the interview, I was asked to define myself in the field. This, I had been taught, was tricky business. I remember in graduate school in a meeting, my faculty asked a similar question: Who do you think you are becoming? I responded confidently that I was a performance studies scholar interested in pedagogy and culture; however, I thought I was also a generalist. When they stopped laughing, they informed me that I was no generalist and I had better begin to embrace it. It was then that I began really publishing; with only the perceived luxury of a generalist position to fall back on, I had better make a stand.

So I was standing in front of the search committee when a communication education scholar I admire asked me to define myself; taking a gulp of air, I said: "I'm a performance scholar centrally, but I also see myself as an intercultural scholar. I also see myself as a communication education scholar." The definition was strategic; I wanted this scholar in communication education to see in me, her potential new colleague, an ally. I wanted her to see, in my definition of myself, an image similar to her sense of herself. I wanted to appropriate the image of communication education so it would help me get this job. And while I had very little idea of what made a communication education scholar at the time (except that I had published in *Communication Education* already and felt this helped me qualify), I had found that definitions matter.

"A communication education scholar? You think you're a comm ed scholar?" Puzzled at this response, I noted my recent publication in the journal of that same name, pulling cut pages out of my bag as evidence. She smiled, "Well, publishing in *Communication Education* doesn't make you a comm ed scholar." It was then that I realized the ground of communication and pedagogy was not as stable as I had previously thought.

Box Checked

My first experience with "communication education" was a box I checked on my application to Southern Illinois University for the Ph.D. It was simple enough in my mind: "I like to study communication. . . . I like to study education. . . . If I check this box, I'll get to study both." Little did I know

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there was more to it than that. There is a long and well-documented history (see, for instance, Sprague, 1993) of what constitutes communication education, and how that is and is not the same thing as instructional communication. This is a distinction that matters very much to other people, even if it hasn't been an especially salient distinction for me; Sprague (1993) is very eloquent in her call to "ask the questions that are 'embarrassments to theory,'" to ask the questions that other researchers overlook as too practical, too applied, too pedagogical (p. 106). Every time I think about blending together the two areas into an amorphous "CE/IC," Sprague challenges me to consider the ways in which this blurring of the borders is enabling for some and perhaps harmful for others. Too often I find myself quick to focus on the "scholarly," on writing something I think will be "appropriate" for *Communication Education*, and I fail to answer Sprague's call; often, I overlook how teaching communication studies is a distinct area of study in its own right (and not simply something everyone does . . . so no one has to study it).

This distinction poses something of a dilemma for me: How do I define myself in this field? I suppose you could look to my C.V. (my *curriculum vitae*) to see how I label myself. And I suppose that's a function of two considerations: (1) the effects I think that label will have on the reader, and (2) whether or how I want to foreground certain intellectual and political commitments. For a long time, I labeled myself as part of "pedagogical studies," a suggestion from my advisor. At first, I liked how that sidestepped the question of communication education or instructional communication; I made the case that I was concerned with how scholars, in a variety of disciplines, study pedagogy. But the question of how this was communication nagged at me—why not study pedagogy in an education program?

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I first proudly proclaimed I was an instructional communication scholar.

We'd stopped for a Coke at McDonald's. For those of you who know a little about the Midwest, you know that one way to measure the size and stature of a town is to total up the number of McDonald's restaurants it has; ours was a four-McDonald's town, maybe 40,000 people soaking wet, during the school year when everyone's absorbed in classes, eating cheeseburgers, whatever. It was my happy task, as a first year doctoral student, to give tours of the town to the two candidates for our "comm pedagogy" hire. And I was actually happy to give the tours, as it gave me some insight into the process I'd have to pursue myself in a few years.

I'm chauffeuring my first candidate, West Virginia, today, showing her where the faculty live in town, where the students live, what the rec center is like. Most of the day has been pleasant, and she's warmed up enough to talk with me about my studies. She's surprised I don't yet know what I want to do for my dissertation. And it's true, at the end of my first year, I don't know. I do know I don't want to write about "at-risk students," and at this point in my studies, I'm just beginning to strategize as to how I'll work with critical theory. West Virginia asks me what classes I'm taking—an innocent enough question. "Focus Group Methodology, Ethnomethodology, Special Student Populations, and Contrasting Educational Philosophies." And that's when she asks—judges—challenges—"Philosophy? What's that got to do with instructional comm?"

It's not that I don't understand her question. West Virginia has had a very prestigious preparation for her work in instructional communication, including completing a prescribed series of courses in statistical methods and programmatic research. I was supposed to take Inferential Statistics, but was allowed to substitute with a course of my choosing (I chose Performance as Methodology). What I didn't understand was how I was supposed to turn off the Dewey, and Counts, and Freire, and McLaren, and Apple, and Giroux, and all the other educational philosophers who had already shaped my thinking. What I didn't understand was how philosophy wasn't a foundation for the study of instructional communication . . . or really any kind of communication. . . .

* * *

So, I tried on the mantle of "communication education."

"But you're not just comm. ed.—you do other things too!" My performance studies colleagues, all well-meaning, are quick to convince me that I am a performance studies scholar too; their comments suggest that if I would only stop dragging my feet and play along, I would be one of them. Perhaps that's true; perhaps I spend far too much time thinking about what I don't know, what I can't do, what I'd still need to read, say, publish in order to fit in with them. But they're my friends, and it's nice to be wanted . . . and I'd like to believe that if I were to publish in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, they would take it as an opportunity to say "See? We told you so!"

"But you're not just comm. ed.—you do other things too?" Prospective tenure track hires in my department always seem to come to a crux in our conversations: Either they grant that I'm the "comm ed" person—that one member of the faculty who supervises TAs and asks questions about

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assessment and publishes exclusively about those endeavors—or they probe for my “real” interest, the motivation that moves me to write while I’m working at my day job of preparing future teachers, bidding my time as a “basic course director” until I can have the luxury of tenure and (relatively) uninterrupted time to pursue other, certainly grander questions (perhaps about Buber or Butler or de Certeau or Foucault . . .).

It’s the “just” that interests me, a just that implies “those that can, do [certain kinds of research] and those that can’t, teach [and teach and teach].” A just that suggests one cannot specialize in pedagogy, that a scholar concerned with pedagogy is, by nature, a generalist (and that being a generalist is somehow less scholarly). A just that suggests pedagogy is not, in itself, research, but rather a synthesis of research, a sharing of what others have done. As someone who refuses to accept that a classroom is “just” a classroom, that what we do there as teachers and students has little to do with the “real world,” I cannot accept that pedagogy is “just” conveyance, transmission. If pedagogy is, in the Freirean sense, a process of knowledge construction (or, as Lather, 1991, suggests, a process of working together to create generative, transformative spaces), then the classroom is a site of theorizing, of (re)constituting social, cultural and economic relationships. Pedagogy is research.

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Frustrated, I turned away from labels that didn’t quite fit. To call myself instructional communication meant that I would be othered or marginalized by my peers who do similarly termed research. To call myself communication education would mean I would be perceived by my colleagues in other areas of the discipline as having no research focus, as having nothing other than the classroom, as though that weren’t a rich enough area of study, replete with cultures, identities, politics, power, pain, and pleasure.

This is to say that the policing of the boundaries between paradigmatic perspectives isn’t obvious, isn’t a matter of barbwire and unambiguous signs. It’s the reactions of a more senior scholar at dinner, or over Cokes at the local McDonald’s, or in a letter regarding your latest submission. As Kuhn (1996) taught us, the nature of a discipline is to evolve slowly and socially, not in terms of radical, earth-shattering breakthroughs. Our field grows in terms of who speaks with whom, who can say what and when, and what sense people make of transgressions. And so, policing the boundaries is equally subtle, a matter of asking the well-placed question, of justifying the grade just so, or of whom the editor chooses to review a given manuscript.

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The field came together for me in an instant, sitting with my cat in the midst of stacks and stacks of paper in my cluttered “office,” late in the process of writing my dissertation. I could only draw from critical pedagogy work in as much as I could justify it as communication studies scholarship (and not some other field, say, educational foundations). I was writing a dissertation I’d avoided, a dissertation I didn’t especially want to write. Early on in my graduate coursework, I took a class on the communication needs of students at risk, a class that exposed me to the vein of scholarship that purports to address these needs, scholarship that casts students as deeply flawed (and, at times, as cancerous or as educational Typhoid Marys). I felt very passionately about challenging this work, making it the focus of a number of conference papers, classroom presentations, and the like, and it wasn’t long before my peers started asking me questions like “So, are you writing an at-risk dissertation?” Already interested in language, and especially metaphor, I bristled at the idea of writing a dissertation that would continue to uphold, however well-intentioned or unreflectively, a deficit or “at-risk” model of student failure.

I poured over issue after issue of *Communication Education* (before the dawn of sophisticated Internet search engines and our national organization’s electronic archive), looking for anything that might help me—pieces on power, which would turn out to be elaborate considerations of behavioral alteration techniques and methods (BATs and BAMs), pieces on culture, which would reveal whether communication apprehension transcended cultural and/or national boundaries—anything that would officially sanction my interest in critical pedagogy so I could keep broad swathes of my idea. Jo Sprague’s (1992) essay “Expanding the Research Agenda for Instructional Communication: Raising Some Unasked Questions” appeared to me, as if in a vision, from the unlikeliest of places: a pile of articles in the corner of my then still-prelim-ravaged office. Maybe a year before, one of my professors had passed along a copy to me, saying that Sprague’s work would be key; at the time, I couldn’t believe that would be so. Nothing in my field looked like anything I wanted to do; remember, I was reading Dewey and Freire, metaphorically resting my feet on the stacks of *Communication Education* I didn’t think had anything to offer me. It’s worth noting that there’s so much to be found between the covers of that journal, if only you know how to look, how to recognize what you’re seeing.

Sprague’s work—I quickly read every article I could find—brought our discipline’s efforts at understanding communication in the classroom into sharp focus for me. Today, when I teach graduate students how to understand the paradigmatic strands of communication education and instructional communication research, I ask them to read Sprague (first 2002, and then 1993 and 1992). And, when I want to help them understand the roots

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of critical communication pedagogy—where outside scholarship infiltrates and is made meaningful in communication scholarship—I still ask them to read Sprague (1992, 1994). In her work in the early 1990s, Sprague offers us a useful distinction for understanding classroom-oriented work in communication studies: (1) Communication education explores how best to teach communication by considering questions like what is disciplinarily specific about communication instruction that, by necessity, sets it apart from science instruction or art instruction. (2) Instructional communication is the study of communication as it plays out in a variety of instructional contexts, from the one-to-one tutoring session to the training and development seminar to the kindergarten classroom, and it considers the question of how instructors of any subject or student population might best engage communication to educate. Sprague's writings reveal both areas of study to be impoverished, to be overly beholden to particular paradigmatic perspectives that fail to capture the richness of the phenomena we study or to genuinely engage communication scholars in careful consideration of defining foundational epistemological and ontological questions.

Sprague's work helped me understand what constitutes instructional communication, how it is informed by educational psychology work, and how that paradigmatic (theoretical, methodological) influence makes instructional communication ideally suited to answering some questions and neglecting others. Indeed, Sprague's 1992 essay, "Expanding the Research Agenda," does just that: defines the field of study, and then challenges scholars in this area of study to ask heretofore "unasked" questions about the purpose and function of schools and teachers, about the role of language and power in knowledge. In short, she asks the very sorts of questions scholars in other fields have asked, the sorts of questions that have relevance and bearing for our study of communication in classrooms, and to which communication scholars are ideally poised to speak if they would only recognize the questions.

In my dissertation, I could use Sprague's work to support an important claim: Language matters. Descriptions like "at-risk" or "behaviorally disordered" or even "BATs and BAMs," already define what we can see and learn and what we can't. For example, "at-risk," already enveloped in medical discourse, could only illuminate ways to diagnose students' problems and prescribe for them remedies; the first wave of research in instructional communication that aimed to treat "at-risk students" locates students' likelihood of failure in aspects of their identities that are beyond their control (i.e., race/ethnicity, economic class, etc.), in deficits they must look to researchers to fill (Fassett & Warren, 2005). Another perspective on educational failure (Johnson, 1994; Johnson, Staton, & Jorgenson-Earp, 1995; Rosenfeld & Richman, 1999; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 1998), an ecological or

systems theory-informed understanding of failure as interactional (as located in the goodness of fit between a student and the social systems in which s/he plays a part—the family, the classroom, the school, the neighborhood, the culture, the society), makes an important shift away from deficit understandings, understandings that blame the victim (Ryan, 1976). A critical pedagogical perspective suggests yet another understanding of educational failure—failure occurs when a student is unwilling or unable to reproduce a given ideology. In other words, the student isn't inherently "at risk" of anything exactly; s/he is placed at risk by (often) well-intentioned participants in the educational system (from teachers to test designers, from scholarly researchers to voters who fail to question and revise property tax allocations to schools).

Such a small change in terms—from *risk* to *ecology* to *resistance*—why give it a second thought? Aren't these "just" words? Communication scholars, of all people, shouldn't write off words as "just words."

Reading Freire for the First Time

I remember my first encounter with him—it was in an undergraduate women's studies class. His famous Chapter 2, the concrete image of banking vs. problem posing became a clear image for me of how and why education was flawed. All my life, I'd been searching for a way to conceptualize my own dis/comfort in education. Time and again, I'd find myself within or outside various educational experiences and this book, Freire's words, gave me a way to see myself in education.

In high school I took Precalculus with the new football coach—a young, built blond man who had much energy and tried to make math visual. When we, as a class, couldn't grasp the mathematical concept he had traced, again and again, on the blackboard, he moved the desks to the side of the room and created a massive graph on the floor of the room, using the natural lines created by the institutional tiles as markers and points. With tape, he made axis lines that began to chart out the abstract numbers. Each of the students had a problem and, when it was a student's turn, s/he entered the graph—walked into the math problem, sketched out on the floor, and had to be the numbers, to embody the formula and literally walk the numbers into existence. While I don't remember the math of that occasion, I remember the feeling of entering pedagogical problems with my body—to make ideas flesh. Compared with the blackboard, this pedagogical moment embraced me and brought abstract ideas to flesh; that moment of walking the graph taught me what it means to create a problem-posing pedagogy.

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It was this moment, the enfleshed moment of taking pedagogy into the body, that stood out to me as I read, for the first time, Freire's (2003) conceptualization of power in/through pedagogy. It was in the memory of that math class and in the reading of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that I began to understand that learning did not have to consist of exercises in constraint and rote memory. Learning could, instead, mean entering into the problem, feeling the moment of possibility, walking the lines of abstraction in my tennis shoes, rubber soles on masking tape, on dusty institutional tile.

* * *

There's a lot to resist in critical pedagogy, which is part of what makes that area of study so fascinating. I love the moment of introducing students to critical pedagogy, the moment where they furrow their brows and whisper, with no small amount of irritation, "What's pedagogy?" And, if I'm lucky, we have a conversation about how "critical" does not simply mean locating and naming the bad, the incomplete, the oppressive in a given instance, but also means considering the possibilities, hoping for and imagining something better. Students are very astute in their frustrations; as Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) noted many years ago, much to the dismay of many famous critical educators (most notably McLaren, 1994), critical pedagogy—at its deepest linguistic roots—is too modernist, abstract, and utopian for concrete situations, fleshed individuals, palpable conflicts. Sure, we all want democracy, we all want to believe we are rational individuals capable of acting in our own and others' best interests. But Ellsworth is right; situated at the juncture of modernism and postmodernism—of grand and vague ambitions regarding the purpose and value of an education and efforts to unravel grand narratives about progress and one's ability to succeed in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds—critical pedagogy is a deeply flawed and yet profoundly moving way of seeing.

But what is critical pedagogy? Wink (2005) spends her entire book teasing apart and weaving together different definitions of critical pedagogy, in many ways working toward the creation of generative spaces (Lather, 1991), places where the reader might build her/his own definitions, own meanings. In this book, we take critical pedagogy to mean efforts by people concerned with education to embrace profound ideological difference and socioeconomic context as constitutive of what happens in schools and classrooms. Critical pedagogy, at its best, is inherently Freirean: efforts to reflect and act upon the world in order to transform it, to make it a more just place for more people, to respond to our own collective pains and needs and desires (Freire, 1970/2003). Critical educators appraise education for pain, for

inequity, and seek to act accordingly, which is to say with each other, not *on, for, or to* each other. Quite simply, critical pedagogy is a journey, not a destination.

But, if many prominent critical educators, including Ellsworth (1989) and Lather (1991), are suspicious of critical pedagogy, concerned with whether critical pedagogy's "very efforts to liberate perpetuate the relations of dominance" (Lather, 1991, p. 16), then why do they draw it into the field of communication studies? Because

where instructional communication scholars see "at-risk" students, critical educators see students who resist educational contexts that place them at risk.

where instructional communication scholars work to control isolable variables, critical educators work to situate the classroom in relation to a larger socio-cultural context.

where instructional communication scholars understand identities as amalgams of traits (of race/ethnicity, of gender, of class, of sexuality), critical educators understand identities as multifaceted and fluid, relational selves that emerge in communication (Fassett & Warren, 2004; Hendrix, Jackson, & Warren, 2003).

where instructional communication scholars see "power in the classroom" as a series of compliance-gaining and resisting moves and countermoves, critical educators understand power as distributed, fluid, and complex (Sprague, 1994; Wood & Fassett, 2003).

where instructional communication scholars deploy primarily self-report, statistical research methods to understand educational contexts, critical educators engage a broad range of research methods, including ethnography (in its interpretive, critical and performative iterations), interviewing, and discourse analysis.

In effect, a critical pedagogical perspective invites instructional communication scholars to situate their inquiry in relation to larger, macro socio-cultural, socioeconomic structures, to explore the ways in which racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression permeate classrooms and research on classrooms, teachers, and students.

Communication Intention, in Tension

My friends think I'm a little bit strange (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say quixotic) for using Freire's (1970/2003) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in my department. That may be true; as they're quick to remind me, GTAs need to understand how to fill out a gradebook, need to understand what a B means and how

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to justify it consistently and clearly with their students, before they question the purpose and value of grading. My response—that even the seemingly apolitical concern of awarding an A or a B is ideological, is a question of power and judgment and reproduction of certain values and not others—is always that the two are mutually informing.

Freire helps me broach the subject of power with GTAs in a nuanced way; together, we consider how best to pose problems for our collective work with students (rather than craft seamless lessons on “good introductions” or “effective transitions”). In reading his work, we grapple with what he might mean by praxis (reflection and action? reflection and action on the world? reflection and action on the world in order to transform it?) and whether such an effort is amenable to our university’s general education learning outcome objectives. In his discussion of false generosity, Freire gives us some pause: He suggests that oppressors cannot simply take action on behalf of the oppressed because to do so further disenfranchises them, renders them perpetually dependent on their oppressors.

Situating his work in the context of TA training is exciting precisely because it does not speak fully to this particular, local context. GTAs often ask: Is lecture always part of a banking or “transmission” (Wink, 2005) pedagogy? If we show how we’re working with students to create knowledge—if we even broach the possibility that knowledge is socially constructed and subject to change—how do we prove ourselves to be credible, trustworthy, capable of giving a fair grade or offering good advice? As students and teachers both, are we really oppressors? When a student follows me back to the office late at night is he really the oppressed?

This notion of “oppressor” and “oppressed” is a seductive binary, an enabling fiction. For Freire, it is a choice of terms that helps to illuminate something important: that this is our collective project, that, in hooks’s (1994) words, “education can only be liberatory when everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor” (p. 14). But this is a language choice that shapes our understandings, shapes our realities. As the GTAs’ questions suggest, we are always already both oppressor and oppressed (though to greater and lesser degrees and with greater and lesser consequences, depending on the context, to be sure). At least in U.S. higher education, we all participate in white, supremacist, capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1994), but we occupy any number of conflicted and contradictory subject positions. GTAs, in general, and GTAs of color, of transgressive genders or sexualities or classes, in particular, are very well suited to exploring these tensions as they live them every day. And, as we come to know our students’ lives more fully, we find they are not immune to these tensions themselves, even if we do not explicitly call those tensions into question in the classroom.

But if instructional communication scholars tend to decontextualize and parse classrooms into smaller, discernable, controllable elements, if instructional communication scholars fail to engage in larger, macroscopic analysis of socioeconomic context, then why embrace their work as part of a critical communication pedagogy? Because

where critical educators wax philosophic about whether someone has false consciousness or participates in her or his own domination, instructional communication scholars look to concrete instances, to how communication functions to create, shape, support, sustain, or challenge existing social structures and oppressions.

where critical educators address the importance of communication, of language choices and instances of talk, instructional communication scholars are ideally poised to analyze those choices, those instances, through careful and sophisticated methods ranging from experimental methods to ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.

where critical educators tend toward, as Ellsworth (1989) noted, highly abstract and utopian language, accessible and deemed valuable by only a small segment of the academic community, communication scholars are, through recent innovations in autoethnographic and performative writing as well as a long-standing tradition of audience analysis, well suited to lucid, provocative explorations of communication as constitutive of identity, culture, and power.

In effect, an instructional communication perspective invites critical pedagogy scholars to situate their inquiry in micro, local, discursive instances, to illuminate and explore how larger sociocultural and socioeconomic structures come to permeate, move in and through, individuals through their concrete, mundane communicative practices.

Desire and Critique in Communication Education

Searching, searching, searching for something to help me understand how I'm supposed to react when one of my friendliest students blows up at me during a class. Will "An Attributional Analysis of College Students' Resistance Decisions" (Kearney, Plax & Burroughs, 1991), "Compliance-Resistance in the College Classroom" (Burroughs, Kearney, & Plax, 1989), or "Resisting Compliance in the Multicultural Classroom" (Lee, Levine & Cambra, 1997) increase my understanding? In class we were talking about whiteness studies research, and I'd supported an article with statistics from the Department of Justice; you know, the ones that show people of color are punished more than white people for similar crimes? Chris turned a plum color and stormed out of the class. I followed—was I supposed to follow?

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"I just won't listen to this any more. . . . You always do this; you find your little moments, you drop something that makes me so angry, and then we don't have time to talk about it!"

Uh. . . . "Chris, why don't you calm down? Of course we can talk about this; I'll give you my sources, you can take a look at them—we can meet and—"

"But that's not true—it's just not true that white people get away with crime!"

Huh? Of all people . . . Chris's brothers are cops, but he's an out gay man—doesn't he know about social oppression? "What do you make of these statist—"

Chris is actually shaking; I'm sure students in the classroom can hear us, we're just outside. Could I have kept this moment in the classroom? Is this a teachable moment?

"This isn't true—my fathers' friends are attorneys and they say to even get out on bail you have to be Mexican or black. You don't even know how it is. . . ."

And I snap. "Are you calling me a liar?"

It's a night class, I'm tired, and I don't know why my statistics aren't good enough. Upon reflection, I understood that we were using different kinds of sources to support our claims, that neither of us was calm enough to reflect upon the strengths and limitations of his sources, and later, when we debriefed this moment, we both apologized for allowing the anger to escalate. In that later, we agreed that even when there are statistical trends, there are always exceptions, but that the statistical trends still matter, but that the exceptions still count, but. . . .

* * *

Searching, searching, searching for anything that will help me make sense of this feeling, that I know I'm going to burst, with pride, with sadness, with. . . . I'm at home now, after a long convocation ceremony. All the students had a minute to speak to the crowd of family and well-wishers:

"Gracias mama, y Isabel, y Yazmín."

"I guess I just want to thank God because, with Him (and my mom and dad's help), all things are possible."

"I'd like to thank all the professors behind me here tonight, but especially Dr. Fassett. She was the first person I met when I came to San José State, and I wasn't sure I could do it. But she said. . . ."

They went on and on, thanking family and friends, thanking different members of the faculty, thanking people they've lost over the years for all their support. And I didn't know what to do. I'm not religious, but I felt

blessed. For every faculty meeting I've bitched about, for every quarrel I've had with a colleague, for every time I felt like I was getting screwed by the state on salary or workload, at that moment I felt blessed. I wouldn't choose another career.

This wasn't even my first graduation. Those were easier; I didn't know anyone very well then, and though I'm a crier, I could sit through those hours dry-eyed. But now I know people, I've seen frosh graduate with master's degrees, I've seen people lose family or give birth—both to children and theses; I've not made friends exactly, but I've found community and made connections, however brief.

How do I get at this experience of pride, of pain, of love, of hope? Will "The Effects of Student Verbal and Nonverbal Responsiveness on Teacher Self-Efficacy and Job Satisfaction" (Mottet, Beebe, Raffeld, & Medlock, 2004) get at this sense of how it feels to know I've made a difference? Will "Immediacy in the Classroom: Student Immediacy" (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000) account for why I wish our community could continue, deepen, grow even when it most likely won't? Will "The Relationship of Perceived Teacher Caring With Student Learning and Teacher Evaluation" (Teven & McCroskey, 1997) help me understand what it is about me that makes for that lasting, enduring connection beyond the class or the semester?

* * *

Searching, searching, searching for examples of interdisciplinary work, work that draws together critical theory and instructional communication. I'm serving two masters, neither of whom I know very well. Each wants something from me; each is dissatisfied. If I challenge racism or sexism or homophobia, I risk being too critical, too biased for the interpretive scholars, and if I fail to call out these injustices, then I'm not critical enough for critical scholars. On my left are researchers who remind me that it is important to remain objective, to pursue scientific inquiry in a dispassionate way, to break a complex phenomenon into its component parts so that we might understand precisely how it works. On my right are researchers who challenge me to take a stand, to see that I'm making a choice, to know that objectivity is an enabling fiction, but one that enables some and disables others; they suggest that complexity is inevitable, that rendering something simple might render it simply dead. I am caught between "scholarship" and "commitment," as though these must, by necessity, be two different goals.

I want to be a good researcher. I want to be a good teacher. But I feel cut off, isolated, incommunicado, spread thin by workload algorithms that treat my writing as a hobby, as something I can do in between my four classes and committee work and service to department and university. Those same

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algorithms will figure my tenure in numbers, numbers of articles published, numbers on my teaching evaluations. Where should I look, from whom should I seek counsel to not simply survive, but thrive in the next twenty or thirty years of my career? I search for articles and find “Models of Mentoring in Communication” (Buell, 2004), “An Examination of Academic Mentoring Behaviors and New Faculty Members Satisfaction With Socialization and Tenure and Promotion Processes” (Schrodt, Cawyer, & Sanders, 2003), and “The Impact of Mentoring and Collegial Support on Faculty Success: An Analysis of Support Behavior, Information Adequacy, and Communication Apprehension” (Hill, Bahniuk, & Dobos, 1989). I need to learn to be a critical (appraising, unflinching, hopeful, creative, resourceful) advocate for myself and others. At the risk of seeming immature or unprofessional, I refuse to be compartmentalized. We all exist in this tension, whether or not we pretend otherwise. We all define “scholarly” and “commitment,” but for some of us, these are inextricably intertwined. Advocacy is scholarship. Pedagogy is scholarship. Advocacy is pedagogy. Pedagogy is advocacy.

But, we aren’t born to mentors, we don’t find them lurking about, we make them. We author them, in the collusion between our needs and theirs, in ourselves and with one another.

Mentoring—Getting It, Right? Getting It Right

“Wait—what’s the difference between comm ed and instructional comm again?”

“Uhh . . . the first is what we do and the second is . . . what we study?”

These are my students, graduate students in a seminar on communication pedagogy; we’ve just read Jo Sprague’s work (1992, 1993)—her introduction of critical theory and critical pedagogy to the study of communication and instruction—and these students are grappling with the central idea of one of the writings.

Admittedly, I’ve set them to a difficult task: having read these pieces, they’re to embody the central figures in the debate on critical vs. logical-positivistic study of instructional communication. Each student has a name tag: The usual suspects, like Jo Sprague, James McCroskey, and Patricia Kearney, but also bell hooks, Michel Foucault, Peter McLaren, and “community college debate coach,” “high school teacher of speech and English,” and “parent of an English-language-learning child” are in attendance this evening. They know I’ll ask them to engage in discussion, perhaps even debate, over issues central to power and pedagogy, which will be a challenge, especially for the students I’ve cast against type. And so they’re very

concerned with reviewing their reading; I have the sense that most of them never thought to consider their particular author's or constituent's perspective before . . . that they have been moving through the course reading for content, for issues, but not for that sense of groundedness in individual commitments and goals. One is grappling with how Foucault, with his discerning eye for discipline and power, might have spoken to instructional communication scholars, while another is tacking back and forth between her understanding of Delpit's (1995) "culture of power" and her own experiences as a "generation 1.5" student to explore what this entire discussion might mean for parents whose children are marginalized in schooling.

But there's more to the difficulty of the task—a fact of which I'm acutely aware. Jo Sprague is, literally, in attendance this evening; she is sitting in a corner of the classroom, apart from everyone else, writing . . . seemingly everything . . . in a legal pad. Just as I can see this, so can these students, and Jo's presence has heightened their concern for getting everything just right. I wonder if I've gotten everything just right too. When I asked her to provide a peer evaluation, for my tenure dossier, of a course she designed and developed and that I'm in my second time teaching, I knew I was taking a risk. And, of all the nights she could have chosen to attend, Jo quite understandably chose an evening where her work was the primary topic of conversation—riskier still. Each time she taps her foot, each time she notes a phrase, each time she steels her facial expressions, I wonder whether I've gotten everything just right. And my students do the same.

While nervous, I have never felt such a sense of promise from a classroom activity. Everybody is perched, precarious—awaiting that moment where something will happen, where everything will come together or fall apart. We walk this line for nearly an hour and a half. Students are tentative, confused—"Sprague" offers: "I think that what 'I'm' saying in this piece is that we should consider the consequences of power. . . ." Students are playful and provocative—as when "Foucault" notes that he was addressing all these issues years before us and that we're all behind the times. And, much to my delight, students become involved in the personal politics behind our scholarship, that sense of snarling, barely suppressed disdain for perspectives unlike our own; they grapple with Buber's (1970/1996) I-it/I-thou in a professional sense, in their sense of professional work, respecting their academic forebears' passion at the same time they are annoyed at how important disciplinary ideas seem to emerge from irritation, as sand in an oyster produces a pearl. This discussion troubles their sense of scholarship, their sense that ideas are produced in smooth sophistication and detached calm; this is perhaps my favorite outcome: They will think twice about theory, about method, about onto-epistemic commitments; they will wonder from whence sprang a particular idea or assumption or value. But I know

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this isn't necessarily Jo's goal, and I can't help but think about how she feels—her work put to this end—as she sits in the corner of the class.

I haven't asked, but I know my students sense my own anxiety. They're caught in a moment of wanting to please me, and wanting to be right, and wanting to resist the activity itself; they're mad at me for putting them in this position, and perhaps a bit proud of me for finding a way to engage the class that draws from and extends our work with critical pedagogy theorists/practitioners like bell hooks, and perhaps a bit excited at the chance to go somewhere new in their time in class. I can't blame them. I'm angry too, angry because I put myself in this position; I'm frustrated because they haven't prepared better, which isn't entirely their fault; I'm hoping Jo will be proud of me for finding a clever, cheeky approach to teaching the issues present in her foundational work, but I'm also uncomfortably certain she'll find fault with my approach, my values, my efforts in this classroom.

* * *

When you're junior faculty, more senior, established scholars are quick to offer advice—some of it very welcome, like how to plan for early retirement or how to secure modest seed funding on campus, and some of it very unwelcome, like how to dress in an “appropriate” manner or how to show students who's boss (as strong teaching evaluations might suggest an unseemly friendship with students). Most take mentoring very seriously, and most mean well by their efforts. (And, so we're clear: Jo Sprague has always been a very supportive, professional, and kind mentor to me; even when we don't see eye to eye, I treasure her insights.) Recently, one of my colleagues, freshly tenured, observed it was so nice to see an established line of scholarship emerging from my work with graduate students. At first blush, I took his compliment at face value, proud to have someone senior discern and express regard for what I perceived to be important and typically overlooked service efforts. But—and perhaps it is the nature of junior faculty status to question compliments, to read for subtext and to act cautiously—I also mark, in that compliment, an undercurrent of questions: Are you pushing your own paradigm, engineering your own mini-mes, nurturing scholarship the field will not sustain, reward, or tenure?

I hear the questions even as I know my course reader is filled with scholarship the field is publishing and sustaining, however recalcitrantly, from Pelias's (2000) “The Critical Life” to Heinz's (2002) “En(gay)ging the Discipline: Sexual Minorities and Communication Studies,” from Cooks and Sun's (2002) “Constructing Gender Pedagogies: Desire and Resistance in the ‘Alternative’ Classroom” to Hendrix and Jackson's special issue of

Communication Education on gendered, racialized, and sexualized identities. I am part of a critical community, a chorus of voices growing in both volume and presence. One vision of the field is that Sprague's work (1992, 1993) helped give rise to and garner legitimacy for these questions that had been heretofore overlooked as "embarrassments to theory" (Hendrix, Jackson, & Warren, 2003); a review of *Communication Education* from 1992 until the present shows threads of critical scholarship, authors weaving works back and forth to create a rich, more complete tapestry of communication and pedagogy. For example, authors of critical race theory, in their efforts to engage pedagogy have helped to lend depth and nuance to our collective understandings of culture, identity and power (e.g., Cooks, 2003; Giroux, 2003; Martin & Davis, 2001; Warren, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Warren & Hytten, 2004). More voices will continue to join in the conversation.

On Joining the Community

"Pretentious and absurd. But well written." Our first efforts to join in the conversation met with mixed reviews. Each of us has stories of work we've attempted to place in journals like and including *Communication Education*, stories of editors torn between an enthusiastic supporter (a "revise and resubmit" or, perhaps, "accept with revisions") and an angry critic (somewhere between a "reject" and a "stop wasting my time"). Admittedly, many of our first attempts were characterized by the usual rhetorical limitations of critical theory: We went after other scholars as though we were killing snakes, beginning our pedagogical conversations on a more finely worded equivalent of "you know what's wrong with you?" It's much easier to deconstruct than to build, to criticize without a hopeful and generous sense of possibility; we wouldn't have appreciated the insinuations either.

And indeed, we don't—at a recent conference, we were sitting in the pub enjoying a conference beer or two when some former and current graduate students of ours joined us. As relatively new faculty members, we still marvel at the desire of students who actually want to talk to us. When a student approaches and notes s/he liked or used our work in a class paper, we blush, we dismiss our efforts because we are still so new to being known beyond our small group of friends and former graduate school colleagues. So here are these graduate students, awaiting us, pulling up chairs, gathering their brews and lighting their cigarettes, ready for our wisdom. And as performers in our own right, we step up—we ask them to position themselves carefully, to think contextually, to not begin with their own sedimented opinions, but to ask questions and listen. We do this because in their talk, in their

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excitement about this reading or that panel, they want to begin with “let me tell you what’s wrong with you”—and we know this trap, we feel this trap, we have been caught in this trap and know the exclusion of feeling one believes s/he knows but no one listens; most often this exclusion is because s/he (I, we) haven’t listened in the first place. Those moments of “let me tell you . . .” are often the result of not listening. Yet, here are the graduate students and we know they will need a place, a location to go to, a community they can build, trust and affirm. And while we, Deanna and John, may or may not be that community, we do know they will need to find one.

Perhaps one of the most refreshing moments of our academic careers occurred in those panels or email exchanges where we trade ideas about pedagogy and ideology with scholars who share common commitments (even if those ideas have divergent avenues or paths or processes). In those moments, we can think together, build ideas together, and imagine futures together. Looking for rewards from people who can’t see beyond their own ideological short-sightedness will always produce disappointment, regardless of who they/we are or where they/we stand. The key, then, is to create community where you are, build alliances and hold on to others you know to be both thoughtful and humane.

And in this moment at the bar, with these students, we spend time—we welcome their ideas and plant seeds for collaborative efforts—plant suggestions about what it means to seek community where you can find it. Community is the lifeblood of critical work: If we displace collaboration in favor of “being right” or showing others how they are irretrievably wrong, we engage in violence; we reconstitute education, scholarship, and intellectual engagement as necessarily contentious, necessarily aggressive, necessarily dismissive. Instead, we must forge this community together; forging necessitates heat, requires conflict, but must also be tempered, by understanding, by curiosity and by respect.