

Why Communication Education is Important: The Centrality of the Discipline in the 21st Century

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This study provides a rationale for the claim that communication instruction is critical to students' future personal and professional success. Thematic analysis of 93 journal and newspaper articles, reports, and surveys provide evidence of the centrality of communication in developing the whole person, improving the educational enterprise, being a responsible social and cultural participant in the world, succeeding in one's career and in business, enhancing organizational processes and organizational life, and, addressing several emerging concerns in the 21st century including health communication, crisis communication, and crime and policing. The results of this study are compared to the themes identified in a similar study published in 2000.

Keywords: Importance of Communication Instruction; Centrality of Communication Discipline; Rationale for Communication Education; Communication in Higher Education; Role of Communication Education

Understanding how people use messages to generate meaning within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media (Korn, Morreale, & Boileau, 2000) is an issue of vital importance in contemporary society. Scholars outside of the communication discipline bear witness to the centrality of communication education. McCloskey (1994), a professor of economics, argues that speech or “talk” has become central in society, and hence, communication is one of the most pragmatic fields of study in academia. McCloskey presents three basic premises to support his claim: a nation of new minorities needs better communication; we are living in a

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communications revolution comparable to the invention of printing; and many people now earn their living from talk. McCloskey concludes that communication studies are central to interdisciplinary research and teaching.

A pressing need exists for communication instruction at all levels of the U.S. educational system. This assertion requires evidence to show that communication courses have the potential to improve the quality of communication in society. Recognizing this requisite, an earlier study found support for the centrality of the communication discipline (Morreale, Osborn, & Pearson, 2000). These researchers collected and published annotations of 99 articles, commentaries, and publications spanning from 1955 to 1999, all of which demonstrated the importance of the study of communication. Four of five major themes in that annotated bibliography provided support for the importance of communication education. The themes are listed here in the same order that they were presented in the original study, although they are not listed in the order of frequency. These themes include:

- (1) The development of the whole person (17 references). This theme suggested that communication education plays a key role in self-development by enhancing relationships with one's self, others, and society, and by improving related communicative skills.
- (2) The improvement of the educational enterprise (seven references). This theme suggested that communication education enhances the quality of classroom instruction and is key to successful collaboration in educational environments.
- (3) Being a responsible participant in the world, both socially and culturally (eight references). This theme suggested that communication education is vital to the development of skills and sensitivities that shape our social and political lives, help society's positive continuance, and erase cultural boundaries.
- (4) Succeeding in one's career and in the business enterprise (50 references). This theme suggested that communication education and skills are fundamental to career success and upward mobility in multiple professions.

A fifth theme in the 2000 study highlighted the need for communication education to be provided by those who are specialists in its study (15 references).

Most would agree that competence in oral communication is prerequisite to academic, personal, and professional success. However, while humans are born with the ability to vocalize, they are not born with a full accoutrement of the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that constitute communication competence. The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately is learned and, therefore, can and should be taught. The discipline of communication is well positioned to address students' personal, educational, and professional development. Simply stated, the communication discipline is viewed as central to the goals of the educational system.

To provide recent evidence and support for such a claim, this study updates the earlier efforts of Morreale et al. (2000). While only seven years have passed since the original study, the world has changed dramatically. Modern life and the role of communication have been affected by catastrophic events, such as the terrorists'

attacks of 9/11 and the outbreak of violence on high school and college campuses. These events have resulted in heightened interest in dimensions of communication, such as risk and crisis communication, negotiation, and conflict management. Moreover, new communication technologies are connecting people around the world and reshaping how we work, play, and communicate. The Millennial generation needs training in skills required to navigate a global world, including competencies related to electronic and intercultural communication. *New York Times* columnist and best-selling author, Thomas Friedman (2006), talks about what college graduates need to know and be able to do in order to be successful in the 21st century:

You need to like people. You need to be good at managing or interacting with other people. Although having good people skills has always been an asset in the working world, it will be even more so in a flat world [advances in technology and communication putting diverse people in touch as never before]. That said, I am not sure how you teach that as part of a classroom curriculum, but someone had better figure it out. (p. 106)

The communication discipline has figured it out and now needs to promulgate this knowledge to society. We in the discipline need to argue soundly and provide evidence of the importance of our subject matter.

As in 2000, the purpose of this study is to provide communication instructors and administrators with a solid rationale for communication education based on its importance in contemporary life and society. Articles, commentaries, and publications from an array of sources, all of which emphasize the need for communication skills and communication instruction, have been examined and organized thematically. The sample in this study included 93 journal and newspaper articles, reports, and surveys that have utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. The content and importance of each of six themes is provided in this report; and the themes are discussed and compared to those identified in the earlier 2000 study.

Several questions were addressed. Is communication education important in contemporary life and society? Do surveys, studies, and reports identify the same rationale for the importance of communication instruction as did the earlier annotated bibliography? As we advance into the 21st century, do different reasons for our discipline's presence and centrality in the educational system emerge? Finally, and perhaps most important, what recommendations might we proffer that would make our discipline more meaningful and better understood by administrators, other educators, and employers?

Method

This study replicated the method used in the 2000 study with regard to data collection (Morreale et al., 2000). Data analysis varied from the earlier study in that two raters, rather than one, were used to categorize annotations of the references thematically.

Data Collection

The writings included in this study were derived from a comprehensive search of both academic and nonacademic literature from 1998 through 2006. First, a search of academic journal articles was conducted using a variety of electronic databases including EBSCO Host's Communication and Mass Media Complete; Sage Publication's full text collection, Communication Studies; Business Source Premier; PsychInfo; the general databases Academic Search Premier, Expanded Academic, and WilsonWeb; and Communication Abstracts. Journals in the areas of communication, business, and education were emphasized because most articles in the 2000 study were located in those literatures. Using keywords such as *importance* and *important* with *communication* yielded a substantial number of articles, some of which were useful and some of which were not. The articles were carefully read and reviewed to select those that pertained very directly to the research topic: "Is communication education important in contemporary life and society; and if so, how so?" Some articles, while they discussed the importance of a variety of skills including communication, did not focus sufficiently on communication to warrant inclusion.

Second, magazines, newspapers, and reference books in nonacademic presses were searched using a general interest database, General Reference Central Gold. By applying the same key words as those in the academic search, many more articles were identified. In addition, a general search of the Internet also was conducted using three search engines: Google, Yahoo, and AskJeeves. That search did not provide any new articles. The academic and popular press search processes resulted in a total sample of 93 articles, reports, and surveys published from 1998 to 2006. The sample in the previous study consisted of 99 articles spanning 1955–1999. Although it may appear that the same articles would be eligible for both studies, no overlaps occurred. The earlier study did not include all of the articles from 1998 and 1999 because of discrepancies in availability of the journals. The present study looked at the 1998 and 1999 references for articles that had not been included in the earlier study.

Data Analysis

Because annotations could be categorized more easily into themes than full text writings, the 93 sources first were annotated individually by a trained research assistant and the authors of this study. After the 93 articles were annotated, two raters separately read and categorized each annotation using the following four categories from the 2000 study as a foundation for a thematic categorization system: the development of the whole person; the improvement of the educational enterprise; being a responsible participant the world, both socially and culturally; and, succeeding in one's career and in the business enterprise. The earlier study had used a grounded theory approach to derive these four core categories from the entire sample (Punch, 2005). Had the references in the present study not clearly fit into the four categories from the original study, the raters would have returned to the grounded theory methodology and developed a new set of categories for the present study.

Each of the 93 annotated references was examined in terms of its claim about communication's importance to the original four categorical themes. Any reference that did not clearly fit in one of the four categories was set aside for later re-examination. Based on re-examining those unassigned annotated references, new themes were identified and new categories were added to the original four. Next, the two raters met and compared their individual results from the categorization process. Any references about which the raters agreed were assigned to that thematic category. Using Scott's pi, the two raters reported their intercoder reliability, the proportion of agreement for categorizing the annotated references, at .80 (Reinard, 2008, p. 123). That is, the two raters independently agreed on the appropriate category for approximately 74 of the 93 references. Any references about which the raters did not agree were discussed and recategorized. As necessary, the raters revisited the content of the original article, rather than the annotation, to determine the most appropriate category for a particular reference. Through this process, the two coders reached 100% agreement on coding all of the references.

Results

Six themes that provide evidence of the importance of communication instruction in the 21st century emerged from the thematic analysis of the 93 annotated references. The first four themes are the same as those identified in the earlier study (Morreale et al., 2000):

- (1) development of the whole person (10 references);
- (2) improvement of the educational enterprise (19 references);
- (3) being a responsible participant in the world, socially and culturally (6 references);
- (4) succeeding as an individual in one's career and in business (23 references).

The last two themes are unique to this study, although they are conceptually related to the fourth theme:

- (5) enhancing organizational processes and organizational life (24 references)
- (6) emerging concerns in the 21st century (11 references focused on health communication, crisis and communication, crime and policing)

The fourth theme primarily focuses on what an individual needs to know about communication and be able to do in order to succeed professionally. The fifth theme is not concerned with the individual but rather with the capacity of communication to affect an organization in a general sense. The sixth theme extends this organizational perspective and draws attention to communication in specific organizational settings (health, crisis, crime and policing).

Table 1 lists each of the six themes with the corresponding sources or citations that support each theme. This six-part category system used to distinguish trends in academic and nonacademic literature may appear constituted of disparate category

Table 1 Relevant Citations for Each of the Communication Education (CE) Themes Identified

Themes	Number of citations	Relevant citations
1. CE is vital to the development of the whole person	<i>n</i> = 10	Barker (2006), Downing (2005), Finn and Powers (2002), Levine (2005), McCracken (2006), Mukherji (2005), Reed, McLeod, and McAllister (1999), Reed and Spicer (2003), Shannon (2004), Time Warner (2003)
2. CE helps to improve the educational enterprise	<i>n</i> = 19	Barrett et al. (2002), Bippus et al. (2003), Bollag (2005), Brinkman and van der Geest (2003), Dannels (2001a), Dannels (2001b), Dannels, Anson, Bullard, and Peretti (2003), Ellis, Shockley-Zalabak, and Hackman (2000), Gose (1999), Helsel and Hogg (2006), John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development (2000), Leatherman (1999), Martin and Myers (2006), Morreale (2003), Myers, Martin, and Knapp (2005), Saulny (2005), Wilkinson (2002), Zhao and Alexander (2004), The \$100,000 question (2002)
3. CE encourages being a responsible citizen of the world, socially and culturally	<i>n</i> = 6	Berry (2005), Communication is key in Europe, (2002), Du-Babcock (2006), Haslam (2002), Scudder (2004), Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004)
4. CE helps individuals succeed in their careers and in business	<i>n</i> = 23	Bates (2006), Booher (2005), Build your practice step by step (2004), Buyers rate communication as most vital skill (2007), Clement (2001), Cline (2005), Darling and Dannels (2003), Emory (2002), Foxworth (2001), Gamauf (2004), Hoch (2006), Hon et al. (2004), Hynes et al. (2002), "Ideal" job candidates know how to communicate (2001), National Association of Colleges and Employers (2002), Nelson (2002), Olsztynski (2004), Robbins, (2007), Step out of the shadows (2007), Tucker and McCarthy (2001), Weir (2006), Williams (2002), Wolter (2006)
5. CE enhances organizational processes and organizational life	<i>n</i> = 24	Armour (1998), Brumberger (2005), CCH (2000), Clemons (2003), Cronin III (2001), Editorial—Communication is what you need (2005), Fletcher (2001), Hall (2003), Higginson (2006), Hood (2006), Hornik et al. (2003), Horton (2000), Kimball (2003), Longo (2004), Lundelius (2005), Moore (2006), O'Donnell and Boyles (2004), Quinn (2003), Quirke (2001), Rodenbough and Fletcher (2006), Silverman (2001), The importance of communication (2001), Using coaching to improve communication (2006), Washatka (2004)
6. CE addresses emerging concerns in the 21st century	<i>n</i> = 11	Bright ideas-improving communication (2004), Cantrell (2004), Elliot (2003), Farmer and Tvedt (2005), Johnson (2004), Levine (2004), Mantone (2004), Riell (2003), Schrader, Mills, and Dick (2001), Stark (2005), Woods (2000)

Note. Total *N* for citations = 93.

types: generic categories (i.e., self-development; responsible participation in the world), communication contexts (education, organizations), and specific context-related situations (health, crisis, crime and policing). Since a grounded theory approach was used to identify the categories, the entire sample determined the category system and thus what may appear to be disparate categories.

A summary of the content and significance of each of the six themes follows. A general discussion and comparison of these themes to those identified in the earlier study is provided after these results.

Theme 1: Communication Education is Vital to the Development of the Whole Person

The ten writings that support the first theme listed in Table 1 suggest that being able to communicate is vital to developing as a complete person. Educators and researchers expressed concern that, as young people develop in contemporary society, they may not be learning the critical language, verbal, and oral skills that they will need (Barker, 2006; Time Warner, 2003). These concerns were related to the development of an array of communication abilities by young people of all ages and at all grade levels, including those with disabilities (Downing, 2005). Communication education helps to develop the ability to communicate with an array of different types of people in different situations including peers, parents, and teachers (Reed, McLeod, & McAllister, 1999). Communication training also aids in the development of self-confidence and people and human relation skills (Shannon, 2004). Levine (2005) provides this summative statement in support of the first theme:

Many young adults are growing up in a nonverbal culture that makes few, if any demands on language skills. This has been considered as one of the reasons why more college students today have development problems such as difficulties in processing language or communicating verbally (both speaking and writing), an inability to focus attention or reason quantitatively, and a serious lack of problem-solving skills. (pp. B11–B12)

Reed and Spicer (2003), in a study of 143 teachers in 17 private and parochial high schools, found that interpersonal communication is fundamental to forming and maintaining relationships, including student–teacher relationships. These researchers argued that the ability to communicate effectively is recognized as a key factor that influences how individuals are perceived and the quality of their relationships with others.

Theme 2: Communication Education Helps to Improve the Educational Enterprise

The 19 sources that support the second theme suggest that communication education is integral to, and will help improve, the educational enterprise, itself. For example, communication education is deemed necessary in the sciences (Wilkinson, 2002), for business and management students (Barrett, Worley, & Dyrud, 2002; “The \$100,000 question,” 2002; Zhao & Alexander, 2004) as well as those in engineering (Dannels, Anson, Bullard, & Peretti, 2003), and architecture students and those in applied

science programs (Brinkman & van der Geest, 2003). All students, including those at the graduate level (Leatherman, 1999), need to learn to communicate orally, interpersonally, in small groups and teams, and in public (Dannels, 2001b). Interestingly, students also need to learn to communicate effectively outside the classroom with other students and with teachers (Bippus, Kearney, Plax, & Brooks, 2003; Martin & Myers, 2006). Pedagogical approaches, such as the use of communication-across-the-curriculum (Dannels, 2001a) and communication laboratories (Ellis, Shockley-Zalabak, & Hackman, 2000; Helsel & Hogg, 2006), are useful to enhance students' abilities to communicate. Bollag (2005) supports this theme by stating that:

There is emerging consensus among educators, business leaders, and accreditors on what skills are necessary for all students as undergraduates. Those skills include good written and oral communication, a capacity for critical thinking, and the ability to work in teams. However, the data available nationwide suggest that many students graduate with serious weaknesses in those areas. (p. A38)

Gose (1999) pointed to a national survey developed by experts in the field of higher-education assessment that measures the extent to which colleges use "good practices" to encourage learning. Those good practices include communication as a key to successful collaboration in all educational environments. Communication elements identified as measures of quality include activities such as number of presentations given in classes, number of papers that were at least 20 pages long, and number of times students confer with their professors.

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development (2000) conducted a national survey of American workers asking them what should be done to improve education. Of 1,015 adult workers, 87% rated communication skills as being very important and said that schools need to prepare people with skills and attitudes that are important to workplace success such as communication skills and critical thinking skills.

Theme 3: Communication Education Encourages Being a Responsible Participant in the World, Socially and Culturally

The six sources that support this theme suggest that being able to communicate, and therefore communication education, will help individuals to become responsible participants in today's global community. In the world of commerce in the 21st century, good communication skills, added to understanding cultural differences, will help individuals to participate effectively in complex and diverse global organizations and multidisciplinary environments (Berry, 2005; Scudder, 2004).

Du-Babcock (2006) explains that in the 21st century, with the growth of communication, communicators will be directly or indirectly exposed to an array of cultural differences, information exchange possibilities, and communication dynamics, which will require them to adjust to the competency levels of their communication partners. Teachers of communication must teach students how to

cope with, and communicate in, these increasingly complex and diverse global communities. Communication skills are essential business tools and prerequisite for successful participation in, and management of, global economic organizations and effective government (Haslam, 2002).

Theme 4: Communication Helps Individuals Succeed in Their Careers and in Business

The 23 references that support the fourth theme suggest that being able to communicate will help individuals to succeed in a wide array of different careers and types of businesses. For example, studies indicate that good communication abilities are critical to success in the following positions and careers: leaders and managers (Bates, 2006; Williams, 2002), sales personnel (Booher, 2005), public relations and advertising professionals (Hon, Fitzpatrick, & Hall, 2004), engineers (Darling & Dannels, 2003; Robbins, 2007), actors and their agents (Emory, 2002), technicians (Gamauf, 2004), athletic directors and coaches (Hoch, 2006), accountants ("Build your practice step by step," 2004; "Step out of the shadows," 2007), franchise operations administrators (Nelson, 2002), purchasing professionals ("Buyers rate communication as most vital skill," 2007), and contractors (Olsztynski, 2004).

While interpersonal and general communication skills are ranked by some as most in demand by employers and most needed in today's workplace (Cline, 2005; Foxworth, 2001; Tucker & McCarthy, 2001; Weir, 2006), other essential communication skills include: leading meetings and managing teams (Gamauf, 2004; Hynes, Worley, & Dyrud, 2002; Robbins, 2007; "Step out of the shadows," 2007), problem solving (Clement, 2001), resolving conflict and managing negotiations (Hynes et al., 2002; Robbins, 2007), listening (Robbins, 2007; "Step out of the shadows," 2007), building interpersonal relationships (Clement, 2001; Nelson, 2002), delivering presentations (Booher, 2005; "Step out of the shadows," 2007; Wolter, 2006), and conducting performance reviews (Hynes et al., 2002).

The ability to express oneself orally and in writing is referenced as the single most important skill to career advancement (Booher, 2005). In a business setting, Booher warns that "... if you can't communicate your ideas with impact, your words do not inspire confidence in your recommendations" (p. 13).

In a report on workforce development and the new economy, Clement (2001) provides a list of critical areas where a shortage of trained labor exists. Of the skills that are in short supply and sought after universally by employers in the new economy are three essential communication-related skills: critical thinking, problem solving, and interpersonal relations. The objective of Clement's report, which was derived from a series of public forums conducted throughout the U.S., was to ascertain if there is a skills shortage; and if so, which skills are lacking and how the problem can be addressed.

Cline (2005) reports the results of a poll of 330 employers. Ninety-six percent of executives rated communication and interpersonal skills as the most valuable employee trait. One executive interviewed states that attitude and aptitude are equally valuable in the office; however, communication skills still rank at that top of her list.

Theme 5: Communication Education Enhances Organizational Processes and Organizational Life

The 24 writings that support the fifth theme suggest that communication education has a significant impact on a variety of processes in organizations and on life in organizations. Poor communication can negatively affect employee recruitment and retention (CCH, 2000), as well as the “bottom line” (Washatka, 2004). On the other hand, organizations benefit from well-developed communication strategies and processes (Quirke, 2001; Silverman, 2001) and from the effective use of communication, in good times (Hood, 2006) and in downturns (Fletcher, 2001).

Many different organizational processes can benefit from improved communication including builder and contractor interactions (Moore, 2006), customer service relations (O’Donnell & Boyles, 2004), communication with external service providers (Quinn, 2003), franchise operations (Higginson, 2006; Kimball, 2003), information systems development (Hornik, Chen, Klein, & Jiang, 2003), insurance management (Hall, 2003), internal and external legal counsel relations (Longo, 2004), situations involving technical communication (Horton, 2000). Training (Rodenbough & Fletcher, 2006) and coaching (“Using coaching to improve communication,” 2006) help to improve communication in organizations.

Poor communication is a frequent and time-consuming problem in contemporary organizations. One survey found that 14% of each 40-hour workweek is wasted because of poor communication in organizations between staff and managers (Armour, 1998). Accordingly, poor communication has become a frequent problem and is proving to be quite costly, eroding productivity, and leaving employers at a competitive disadvantage.

In another survey of 4,000 human resource professionals (CCH, 2000), 72% of respondents said that improved communication and communication skills are key to retaining employees. A good working relationship where employees are valued, and understand how their work contributes to the organization’s goals, is essential to satisfied employees.

Internal communication is more important today than in previous years, and it helps employees to perform their jobs more effectively (Clemons, 2003). Organizations can benefit from a well-developed and implemented internal communications strategy, which keeps employees motivated and engaged by sharing clear, consistent messages in a timely manner.

Theme 6: Communication Education Addresses Emerging Concerns in the 21st Century (Health Communication, Crisis and Communication, and Crime and Policing)

The 11 sources that support this theme suggest the emergence of some new concerns in the 21st century that may be positively impacted by communication education. Health and medical issues may be better addressed through more effective communication in medical environments, medical centers, and medical practices and by providing communication skills training for those working in health-related

programs. More effective communication also is critical before and during times of crisis in organizations, and communication can be a key factor in solving criminal cases and improving community-policing programs.

In any medical environment, communication may be the most important component of successful relationships (Mantone, 2004). Nurses said that good communication might be more about listening than talking (Cantrell, 2004); and 72% of dentists stated that good communication was the most important feature when choosing a laboratory with whom to collaborate (Johnson, 2004). Poor communication is linked to misdiagnoses, the ordering of unnecessary tests, and the failure of patients to follow treatment plans; only 15% of patients fully understand what their doctors tell them, and 50% of them leave their doctors' offices uncertain of what they are supposed to do to take care of themselves (Levine, 2004).

Good communication can save lives and corporate reputations, when it comes to crises management (Farmer & Tvedt, 2005; Riell, 2003). Effective communication is essential during a crisis, and educating and training employees regarding crisis management and response is critical. Communication skills are vital for those engaged in community policing (Woods, 2000). Community policing encourages direct, face-to-face communication. Five communication skills—listening, questioning, information giving, observing body language, and describing—are central to policing. Of these, listening was ranked as the top skill by police officers. Moreover, communication was one of the key factors to solving the District of Columbia's sniper case in 2002 (Elliot, 2003).

Discussion

In general, the discovery of 93 new articles and reports on the importance of communication education and instruction in the last nine years is heartening. These results provide continuing rationale for the centrality of communication instruction in the U.S. educational system. Realizing that scholars and popular writers continue to make the case for communication suggests that the communication discipline is viewed as focal. However, a cursory review of the 93 sources suggests that the discipline continues to be known primarily for developing communication skills. People are less aware of the underlying body of research and theory that also constitutes the communication discipline. The promotion of such awareness rests on the shoulders of communication scholars and teachers. Public understanding of the discipline, not just as ubiquitous but also as substantive, is the next frontier.

Do the current findings point to the same reasons for the importance of communication instruction as identified in 2000? Table 2 outlines the themes in both studies. Despite the fact that the two studies have nearly the same number of annotated writings, drawing direct comparisons between the two sets of thematic results is problematic. The 99 writings in the 2000 study extend from 1955 to 1999, whereas the sample of 93 writings in the present study spans a 9-year period from 1998 to 2006. While these differences in sampling render most comparative claims invalid, several observations may be made.

Table 2 Thematic Analysis of References of Articles on the Importance of Communication Education

Themes identified in each study	2000 study	2007 study
Development of the whole person	17	10
Improvement of educational enterprise	9	19
Responsible participant in the world	8	6
Succeeding in one's career and in business	50	23
Enhancing organizational processes and organizational life	0	24
Emerging concerns in the 21st century	0	11
Communication education provided by specialists in its study	15	0
Total number of references	99	93

The four original themes in the 2000 study did reappear in the 2007 study, albeit with some shifts among number of writings in the four thematic categories. We now can assume that these four themes or reasons for the importance of communication instruction are well supported and documented over time. Any communication professor or administrator could point with some confidence to these four themes as part of their rationale for the discipline's centrality on their campus. The two new themes in the 2007 study also are notable (communication processes in organizations and emerging concerns in the 21st century).

The role and importance of communication in contemporary organizations certainly are emphasized in the new findings. The communication discipline, based on its expansive research and scholarly tradition in this area, is the most logical choice in the academy to address the need for instruction about communication in organizations.

By comparison to the 2000 study, three other emerging concerns were identified: health communication, crisis communication, and crime and policing. Communication instructors and researchers already are addressing and studying these emerging issues as well as the need for communication skills related to economic globalization identified in the third theme.

Finally, in the 2000 study, 15 references spoke to the need for communication specialists to provide communication instruction. No similar articles or reports were found in 2007. Optimistically, this result may suggest that, by now, it may be a given that communication should be taught by those most expert in its instruction. In any case, communication scholars and teachers should remain watchful and continue to stress professionalism and awareness of the discipline, as we continue to expand.

Limitations and Recommendations

The themes identified in this study call attention to the importance of communication in contemporary society and, therefore, the centrality of communication education in the educational enterprise. These results have significance and value for communication educators and administrators, but the study has its limitations.

First, this investigation does not represent original research, as most of the writings in the sample are available elsewhere, electronically or in print. The purpose in gathering them together in this study is simply to provide a summative rationale for studying communication. Second, this study does not address the question of why some academic institutions still fail to conceive of, and recognize, the importance of communication instruction. Again, this study's purpose is to provide a rationale for changing those conceptions. Finally, while these results identify the skills and dimensions of communication that are considered socially relevant and important, germane communication curricula and instructional strategies are not provided.

Future studies may consider how communication educators might address the societal needs and concerns represented by the themes in this study. What appropriate teaching strategies and curricula are in place, or should be in place, so we can ensure that communication education is helping to improve the quality of communication in society? How can communication educators help facilitate the achievement of the broader societal aims identified in the themes in this study? For example, future researchers might combine the results produced in this study with those of an earlier study that examined the state of the art in instructional and developmental communication (Waldeck, Kearney, & Plax, 2001). The themes identified in this present study tell us what society deems important in terms of communication needs and instruction. Waldeck, Kearney, and Plax categorized all instructional communication research published during a 10-year period. A research question of interest might consider the extent to which instructional communication researchers are addressing the themes identified in this study.

In summary, communication educators should be mindful of the critical role they play in the future lives of their students. These students may be communication majors, or nonmajors participating in the only formal communication instruction they may ever experience. While many factors affect the course of any life, competent communication plays a critical role in how our students will react to and manage life's challenges.

Administrators within and outside the communication discipline including department chairs, college deans, academic provosts, college presidents, and chancellors should recognize the imperative of the communication discipline and of communication instruction. In some cases, college and university mission statements only provide lip service to communication education for their campus' students. This study suggests that academic institutions ought to ensure that all of their students graduate with the communication competencies necessary to succeed personally and professionally in their lives.

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