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The Importance of Communication Skill Instruction and Research in a Changing Society

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The purpose of this paper is to describe the importance of communication skill development as central to the communication discipline. In addition, additional theory and research is needed to support prescriptions for enhanced communication effectiveness. The paper presents arguments suggesting that improving human communication skills should be a critical element in communication curricula. Specifically, the paper reviews the importance of communication skill development in the past, the centrality of skill development in contemporary communication curricula and makes a case that communication skill and theory and research about communication skills are needed in the future.

Keywords: communication, skills, communication discipline, instruction, curriculum, competencies

Introduction

The development of communication skills has been a prime objective of communication research and pedagogy for centuries. Humans have been and continue to be interested in how to communicate effectively, appropriately and ethically. Contemporary books that prescribe how to enhance communication skills (e.g. *The 5 Love Languages: the Secret to Love that Lasts*, Chapman, 1992; *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Carnegie, 1936) continue to appear on bestseller book lists. Ancient Greek and Roman philosopher/rhetoricians suggested that the study and practice of rhetoric should emerge from philosophy, the search for truth, and human virtues of goodness and ethical thought and action. Anchoring the rhetorical process in

philosophy was, in part, a reaction to sophists who emphasized more behavioral elements of rhetoric rather than cognitive-philosophical perspectives. Today communication instruction de-emphasizes the philosophical underpinnings of communication in favor of the cognitive, behavioral and affective domains of learning.

Historical Background

Contemporary study of communication in the U.S. emerged from early 20th century academic departments that taught English literature and composition. The study of written English and literature was among the first specialized areas of study to gain department status. Embedded within early departments of English were educators who emphasized spoken rhetoric. By the late 1800s, it

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