20 Applied Communication Research in Educational Contexts

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Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it. (Arendt, 1968, p. 196)

There is no real teacher who in practice does not believe in the existence of the soul, or in a magic that acts on it through speech. (Bloom, 1987, p. 20)

We open with these two quotations, from very different thinkers, because they capture the essence of why it is important to have a chapter on educational contexts in a handbook on applied communication research. On a pragmatic level, schools are one of the few social institutions in which all people participate on some level. Some form of K-12 schooling is compulsory in the United States today, with anyone from age 5 to 16 required, by law, to attend school. Many individuals do not terminate their education in high school but go on to pursue an undergraduate, graduate, or professional degree. The system of employment that supports these educational experiences is vast; there are networks of teachers, administrators, and other staff who, although not students, are actively engaged in the social institution of education. Educational contexts, thus, are pervasive and implicate almost everyone. However, a pragmatic view alone is insufficient to capture the importance that education plays in society. Like many scholars, we believe that education is the basic tool of democracy (which, as we know, is not perfect) and that without access to and resources for education, access to good health, safety, and ideas about a better life is seriously compromised. Thus, we agree with Arendt (1968) that to be educated means to love and take responsibility for the world.

As Bloom (1987) posited, participation in educational contexts is a communicative accomplishment. At this point, it is almost a cliche to say that the difference between knowing and teaching is communication. We add that the difference between accessing information and learning also is communication. Because communication is vital to an educational enterprise and because education is a pervasive and essential component of U.S. culture, it is important to explore how communication functions in educational contexts. We need to know more about how teachers do and might use communication to better facilitate student learning, and we need to know more about how students use communication to engage or resist learning opportunities. We need to know more about how communication in educational contexts acts as a catalyst for social change or as a guardian for the status quo. This chapter explores how applied research has enhanced, and can better enhance, our understanding of communication in educational contexts.

We begin with some discussion of the parameters of this chapter. In particular, we first discuss three types of communication research that explore educational contexts and then describe our understanding of the characteristics of applied research. The bulk of this chapter then is devoted to a review of published applied communication research.
designed to explore significant problems that occur in educational contexts. That review is presented with respect to three significant issues: teaching as applied communication, classrooms as an applied communication context, and schools as communities created through applied communication. At the end of the chapter, we discuss the type of applied communication research in educational contexts that we hope to see more of in the future and the problems that we foresee in conducting that research.

Identifying Communication Research in Educational Contexts

Communication research that takes place in or examines questions about educational contexts traditionally has fallen into two categories or types: communication education research and instructional communication research. The first type of research has the longer history; in fact, some have argued that the modern version of our disciplinary work began with the set of curiosities that led to this type of research (Friedrich, 2002). Communication education research begins with questions about how to teach and learn communication as a subject matter, with a focus on better understanding ways in which instruction (teaching) can facilitate (or harm) the process of teaching or learning about communication. This research poses questions regarding, for instance, what types of model or sample speeches are best used when teaching introductory public speaking, how to conduct effective mock interviews in an organizational communication class, and what are the best ways to use videotape in that instruction (for an excellent review of such research, see Staton-Spicer & Wulff, 1984).

The second type of research about communication in educational contexts, instructional communication, begins with the observation that teaching is a communicative practice and focuses on questions about how communication facilitates or inhibits teaching and learning, regardless of subject matter. Sprague (1992a) traced this type of research to a 1972 conference where scholars shared their insights regarding how communication theory and research might be useful for understanding how people teach and learn together, mostly in classrooms. Research on interpersonal communication was among the first to be “imported” in this manner to discover, describe, predict, and control patterns of behavior in classrooms. Broadly, instructional communication research asks questions about types of communicative practices that teachers can use to promote better learning for students and what communicative behaviors teachers can use to keep students on task (for an excellent recent review of this research, see Waldeck, Kearney, & Plax, 2001a).

Research endeavors in both communication education and instructional communication seek to articulate generalizable claims that can be used to test, extend, or build theory. A third and more recent type of research that is relevant to our chapter has been referred to as the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Initiated by Boyer’s (1987b) landmark monograph on types of scholarship characterizing the work of the professoriate, this research initially was promoted by the Carnegie Foundation and has evolved into a national movement. SoTL is not grounded in research about teaching and learning communication to develop generalizable propositions, as is communication education research, nor is it grounded in research about how teaching and learning are influenced by communication principles and practices, in general, as in instructional communication research. Instead, SoTL research is guided by a curiosity about one’s own teaching and learning—in our case, about communication—and explores those questions using well-defined and appropriate tools of inquiry with the commitment to share whatever is learned in public, peer-reviewed venues (Darling, 2002). SoTL work is quite personal in that it explores teaching and learning in an individual classroom, but it also is social in
that the research is shared in public venues, such as in certain journals and at conferences. Because this type of research is so new, published reviews are not yet available, although the volumes of Communication Education published after 2003 include examples of this work in the communication discipline.

Defining Applied Communication Research

Our task in this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive review of research that falls into each of the three categories described above but, instead, to review applied research from each of these areas. Making distinctions about what research is applied in a discipline that some have argued is practical by nature is not an easy task (e.g., Craig, 1989; see also Barge & Craig, this volume). That task becomes more complicated in the case of research about educational contexts, because, in a broad sense, all communication education, instructional communication, and SoTL research is driven by a specific concern about teaching, learning, and communicating in a particular context (such as classrooms or schools). Still, an important distinction can be made between basic research that is designed to develop generalizable propositions and research that addresses a particular problem using such generalizable propositions.

Most definitions of applied communication research incorporate language about the importance of a specific context. Keyton (2000), for example, suggested that applied communication research “addresses or identifies a significant and practical communication issue or problem” and that “applied problems are those that exist naturally in context for interactants…[in that] the problem must be legitimate for the interactants” (pp. 166, 168).

Many, but not all, definitions assert that applied communication research should do more than continue an academic dialogue; it should be driven by a motivation to investigate systemic inequalities and, ultimately, to make a difference in people’s lives. Cissna (2000) made this point when he stated that “applied communication researchers are motivated not only to understand the world but also to change it in some respect” (pp. 169–170). Cissna advocated, in particular, that “the discipline should encourage its members to engage in research that (a) illuminates specific communication contexts or situations, (b) provides insight into the solution of social problems, or (c) leads to interventions that make a difference in people’s lives” (p. 196). This mandate to conduct research that makes a difference has continued to shape the development of applied communication scholarship (see Frey & SunWolf, this volume). Once communication problems have been identified, applied communication research should seek to ameliorate those problems through the application of communication theories and principles.

Over the course of the last decade or so, some scholars have suggested a specific agenda for applied communication research that uses communication theories and principles to ameliorate problems of social justice. Frey, Pearce, Pollock, Artz, and Murphy (1996) articulated this communication approach to social justice as “engagement with and advocacy for those in our society who are economically, socially, politically, and/or culturally underresourced” (p. 110; see also Frey, 1998; Frey & SunWolf, this volume; Seeger, Sellnow, Ulmer, & Novak, this volume). According to Frey et al., research commitments that inform a “sensibility” to social justice include foregrounding ethical concerns, performing structural analysis of ethical problems, adopting an activist orientation, and identifying with others. Taken together, these statements about applied communication research concerned with a social justice agenda require that such research be situated in an actual context, explore the nature of a pressing problem of social injustice, and seek to resolve that problem in a just way.
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In preparing to write this chapter, we were interested in finding research that fit the parameters of applied research in educational contexts generally, as well as projects that examined an educational setting through the lens of social justice. Thus, the research reviewed in this chapter addresses a specific communication problem, as it is experienced by interactants in a particular educational context (i.e., classroom or school), using theories generated from basic research about communication with a clear goal to resolve that problem. In addition, we were especially interested in locating any contribution to a social justice agenda emerging from scholarship in communication education, instructional communication, and SoTL.

Our reading and discussion of the applied communication research in educational contexts led us to organize this review in support of three general propositions: (1) teaching is an applied communication process, (2) classrooms are an applied communication context, and (3) schools are communities created by and through communication. In the next section, we review research supporting each of these propositions. Within each discussion, we describe research that has a social justice agenda; however, as we assert in the conclusion to this chapter, more research in educational contexts with a social justice agenda needs to be conducted.

Teaching as Applied Communication

Much of the basic research in communication education, instructional communication, and SoTL examines relationships between teachers’ communicative behaviors and learning outcomes. We were surprised, therefore, that our search for applied communication research that focused on teachers as communicators was not more fruitful. It seems that despite the abundant programs of research—such as those on teacher power, teacher immediacy, and teacher socialization—very little, in our estimation, has been done to use that research to manage or resolve specific problems experienced in particular educational settings. In this section, we first describe an applied communication project that revealed important information about the role of power in one particular educational research program. We then review five studies that explore types of teacher messages as related to either student learning or student engagement with the learning process.

Power Matters

Despite the importance of teacher communicative behavior to student engagement with learning tasks and to manage student behavior in classrooms, little communication research responds to applied problems of learning engagement and behavior management in particular classrooms. This finding is especially surprising given the well-established program of communication research on teacher power (e.g., McCroskey & Richmond, 1983; Richmond & McCroskey, 1992; Schrodt et al., 2008; Schrodt, Witt, & Turman, 2007; Turman & Schrodt, 2006). Because this is such an important potential area for applied communication research in educational contexts, we review the one published applied study that was conducted.

Webber, Martin, and Patterson (2001) conducted research within the context of a successful intervention program, Project Adapt (PA), for at-risk middle school students. Students were referred to this program because of rather serious behavior problems in school settings (e.g., pulling a knife on another student, being caught with drugs, or threatening to kill a teacher). Despite those dramatic and dysfunctional experiences, once in this program, students demonstrated significant and consistent gains on cognitive outcome measures (i.e., test scores and grades). Seeking to understand these significant gains in...
this context, Weber et al. used a classic process–product design to explore relationships among teacher communicative behavior (specifically, teachers’ use of power, as conceptualized within the teacher power research program), student interest in learning (defined along the three dimensions of meaningfulness, impact, and competence), and affective learning.

Forty-six PA students completed a battery of questionnaires early and late in the semester designed to measure teacher power, student interest, and affective learning. The results demonstrated strong relationships among these variables. In general, PA teachers tended to use more prosocial behavioral alteration techniques (BATs) than did teachers the students studied with the previous year. Furthermore, particular prosocial BATs (e.g., immediate reward, deferred reward, and reward from teacher) were related to both student interest and affective learning. As subsequent focus group interviews conducted with a smaller group of these students about their experiences with the teachers in this special program showed:

When probed for reasons why they liked these teachers and administrators better than the previous ones, two main themes emerged. Student responses reflected either (a) a respect for the discipline that the PA staff was able to implement or (b) a perception that the PA staff cared for each of the students. (Weber et al., 2001, p. 84)

This study, thus, provided not only insight into how specific teacher communicative behaviors might influence students who have not had success in a school setting but also the meanings that these particular students ascribed to those experiences. One possible reason for the effectiveness that prosocial BATs had in this setting is that they were interpreted by students as positive discipline—discipline enacted in the context of caring.

Weber et al.’s (2001) study demonstrates the important contributions that basic instructional communication research can make to an applied research project. We hope that more of this type of work is conducted and published, but we also urge scholars pursuing applied communication research about how teacher power is exerted in classrooms in response to particular problems to embrace contextualized and dynamic conceptualizations of power as enacted through communicative behavior. We join Sprague (1992b) in observing that postmodern notions of power reveal the fluid ways that authority and subordination get negotiated in individual relationships, groups, and organizations. Furthermore, given the rich collectivities that comprise most classrooms today, issues of power as understood through intersections of race, class, ethnicity (see Nicotera, Clinkcales, Dorsey, & Niles, this volume), gender (see Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Sterk, & Turner, this volume), and sexual orientation are important to elaborate. Postmodern notions of power in the classroom, thus, are important for instructional communication research driven by a social justice sensibility.

**Message Forms Matter**

The five studies included in this section focus on forms of messages that matter to student learning in particular contexts. Four studies explore traditional teacher message forms (e.g., lectures, instructions, and discussion strategies); the other study looks at message forms inspired by new technology. Taken together, these explorations provide grounded, contextualized evidence about the importance of teachers’ communicative behavior in relation to targeted learning outcomes and students’ experiences of learning in classrooms.

Baus (1995) experimentally tested the relationship between teachers’ mode of
presentation and students’ retention of complex material. Put in the language of applied communication research, the problem investigated was how knowledge about message types can inform teachers’ use of communication to help students retain complex material. Specifically, this study explored whether messages that are seen and heard (via lecture and role-play) were more effective in terms of student retention than messages that were only seen or heard.

Undergraduate students who participated in this experiment were exposed to one of three conditions: (1) lecture only, (2) lecture plus student role-plays, or (3) lecture plus videotaped role-plays plus student role-plays. Despite the fact that Baus (1995) reported no significant findings, this project provides an example of applied communication research that needs to be conducted. Given the importance of message and channel redundancy to effective communication, this research needs to be replicated to clarify the nature of any relationships among teacher messages, channel redundancy, and student learning.

Henricksen (1996) also explored how message forms influence student behavior, focusing on much younger students (ages 6 to 9) and their comprehension of the concepts of “buying” and “selling” rather than retention of complex information, as did Baus (1995). The applied communication question that inspired Henricksen’s research was not an educational one, strictly speaking; she wanted to extend research claims about young children’s critical-viewing skills. In particular, she sought to identify the interpretation skills that young children use when viewing advertisements. Because she focused on types of instruction given to children (by her as the researcher) and children’s responses to those instructions, it is relevant to this chapter.

Using an experimental design, Henricksen (1996) tested relationships among forms of instruction (direct or indirect) and types of transactions (buy or sell). One hundred twelve children ages 6 to 9 sat at tables with Bert and Ernie dolls (from the popular television show, Sesame Street) and were given either a direct instruction, such as “You buy a train from Ernie,” or an indirect instruction, such as “Make Bert sell a train to Ernie” (p. 99). The findings are especially important for applied communication research in educational contexts, as children were more successful in performing tasks when given direct rather than indirect instructions. In explaining these findings, Henricksen surmised that indirect instructions require perspective taking and that perspective-taking skills tend to occur later developmentally and are supported by proactive forms of instruction, such as role-playing, rather than lecturing about television form and content.

Two studies used SoTL as an approach to understand how teacher communicative behaviors (message forms) influence student learning. Wulff and Wulff (2004) described the evolution of the first author’s teaching style from relying on lecture to using more active approaches to teaching and learning, such as class discussion. Quantitative and qualitative perceptual data were gathered to ascertain the degree to which students learned, to determine whether teachers’ communicative behaviors made a difference in that learning, and to document specific types of teacher behaviors that made a difference. The quantitative standardized data took the form of course-evaluation information and formal assessments of student learning, and the qualitative data (used to understand and interpret the quantitative data more fully) were acquired via interviews conducted with and questionnaires completed by students (several times during the course). The analysis revealed four teacher communicative behaviors that students reported as important to their learning in the course: encouraging open communication, demonstrating examples interactively, structuring opportunities for application through problem solving, and engaging students in reflection about their learning.

Also using the structure of SoTL, Dallimore, Hertenstein, and Platt (2004) were interested in how teachers use communication to inspire more vibrant classroom discussions.
In the context of graduate courses in an MBA program, Dallimore et al. specifically focused on strategies that teachers might use to elicit participation from students less inclined to volunteer their observations and comments. Questions about the perceived effectiveness of a strategy known as *cold calling* (calling on students whose hands are not raised) were at the center of this investigation. Students in two MBA courses, one that was required and the other an elective, completed questionnaires about the quality and effectiveness of the discussions held in class. The teacher of these two classes (also one of the authors) engaged in cold calling in both classes. The results confirmed Dallimore et al.’s suspicion that cold calling enhances the quality and effectiveness of classroom discussion. Students reported six categories of teacher behaviors that were helpful to the quality and effectiveness of discussion: (1) required and graded participation, (2) incorporating instructors’ and students’ ideas and experiences, (3) active facilitation, (4) asking effective questions, (5) creating a supportive classroom environment, and (6) affirming student contributions and providing constructive feedback.

Each of the studies reviewed in this section dealt with questions about communicative behavior in traditional face-to-face settings, whereas a study by Waldeck, Kearney, and Plax (2001b) focused on electronic communication. Specifically, these researchers focused on whether students preferred to use e-mail rather than face-to-face meetings to engage their teachers. Thus, the applied communication problem at the center of this project was how teachers and students can use e-mail effectively to accomplish instructional goals. The researchers employed two well-established constructs from instructional communication research—extra-class communication and willingness to communicate—to understand how e-mail messages might influence the teaching and learning process.

Two hundred eighty-nine undergraduate students completed a battery of questionnaires, with questions about computer access and savviness included. The findings revealed three types of reasons for why students used e-mail: (1) personal or social reasons (to self-disclose, discuss personal feelings and ideas, learn more about the teacher, and impress the teacher), (2) procedural or clarification reasons (to ask for course or task direction, guidance, information, and feedback), and (3) efficiency reasons (to avoid wasting time and minimize face-to-face or phone contact). Of these reasons, students identified procedural or clarification reasons as the most important, with efficiency as an important second reason (see also the recent study of characteristics of parent–teacher e-mail by Thompson, 2008)

The researchers also examined whether teacher message behaviors influenced students’ willingness to use e-mail to communicate for instructional purposes. Waldeck et al. (2001b) found that when teachers used immediacy in their e-mail messages (e.g., began their messages with the student’s first name and inserted smiley faces and other emoticons to help students understand the meaning of those messages), students were more willing to communicate with their teachers online.

To conclude this section, first, surprisingly, little applied communication research exists about how teacher communicative behavior can help or harm student learning. Scholars, thus, need to explore more fully how concepts from the robust instructional communication literature might generate understandings of specific learning or engagement problems in classrooms and schools. Second, the research that does exist demonstrates ways in which applied research can enrich our understandings of teaching and communication by providing evidence of how certain message types and forms appear to be more effective than others in terms of student learning and student willingness to engage in the learning process.
Classrooms as an Applied Communication Context

The previous section reviewed applied communication research on the act of teaching, with scholars trying to better understand how teacher power and teacher messages work in the classroom. This section highlights applied communication research that focuses on teaching methods employed in classrooms and how those methods may contribute to student learning. Here, we review 11 studies about how various teaching methods used in certain contexts may invite student learning to occur in ways not previously considered. Scholarship examining teaching methods was the most abundant type of applied research in educational contexts, and we describe this body of work with respect to four categories: college classrooms, classrooms redefined, service-learning education, and deliberative education.

College Classrooms

Researchers have explored the use of communicative practices in the service of pedagogical objectives within specific classrooms. Two studies were situated within composition classes, with both of those classes bringing students and their community together, although they did so using very different techniques.

In the first study, Swan (2002) considered how graduate students in a public policy program engaged with members of the Community Literacy Center in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Using a communication tool called the “community problem-solving dialogue” (CPSD), students and community members created and developed a community-centered project that focused on how to write collaboratively about urban issues. Specifically, students used tools of discourse analysis (see Tracy & Mirivel, this volume) to examine how students and community members use strategies to write and talk about complex social problems. Specifically, students analyzed the rhetorical strategies and decision-making moves made during the development of the project. Using the CPDS tool, students learned how strategies were employed by the multiple parties and determined which decisions were privileged in this community–university collaboration.

Swan’s (2002) exploration demonstrated how educational experiences can enhance the use of communicative practices—rhetorical strategies—in community–university collaborations to uncover the type of situated, specific knowledge that is important for working toward solutions to social problems. Swan asserted that teaching students skills of rhetorical practice and the CPSD—in particular, skills of seeking the story behind the story, rival hypotheses, and options and outcomes—opened an important space for community representation in the classroom. Using this tool as a map for how to talk and write about problems, students and community members together identified pressing problems in a specific context, and students learned about the possible multiple dimensions of social problems and the possibilities for change in that context. However, Swan observed several roadblocks to the inclusion of community expertise in academic research. In particular, the disciplinary focus on the outcomes of academic work tended to neglect local data received from community members and erased many community members’ concerns.

Garcia (2002) also focused on classroom strategies to promote communication across communities. She developed a pedagogy in a first-year composition classroom that used poetry to access the diverse cultural and linguistic skills, experiences, and knowledge that students at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) bring to the classroom. This program was created in response to CSUMB’s vision statement, which promises to serve the diverse people of California (especially working-class, historically undereducated, and low-income populations), and to create a multilingual, multicultural intel-
lectual community. Garcia’s objectives for the course were to create a space where all students felt that their voice was valued and recognized, their multiple knowledges validated, and where various literacy practices were employed.

In reflecting on these students and on the program, Garcia (2002) described how, in some instances, integration of nonmajority students’ cultural practices and diverse literacies triggered and reinforced negative stereotypes rather than promoted transformative relationships across racial and ethnic groups. She realized that when this occurred in the classroom, Chicana/o students used silence to cope with these comments, which served a number of purposes, including avoiding bitter outbursts and potential backlash, and signaling their disagreement with the statements made. This important recognition highlights silence as a form of literacy in the multiracial classroom.

Several studies have explored communication instruction in classrooms focused on a different disciplinary subject matter, commonly referred to as “communication across the curriculum.” This work applies communication pedagogy within noncommunication classrooms, such as in engineering courses, with the central question being how to import communication instruction effectively into these classrooms. An entire special issue of Communication Education on “Communication Genres in Disciplinary Discourse Communities: Theoretical and Pedagogical Explorations of Communication across the Curriculum and in the Disciplines” (Dannels, 2005) was devoted to this scholarship, which built on an impressive corpus of previous research (for comprehensive reviews of this literature, see Cronin & Glen, 1991; Dannels, 2002).

Although some of this scholarship is more clearly identified as basic research (e.g., Darling & Dannels, 2003), other studies are more applied in structure and purpose. Two studies, in particular, seem especially salient, as both adopted SoTL as their framework. In the first study, Dannels, Anson, Bullard, and Peretti (2003), all members of a National Science Foundation grant team that was awarded funds to explore effective ways to implement communication instruction in chemical engineering classrooms, used qualitative methods to focus on students’ responses to the communication instruction. They identified four learning issues: (1) integrating multidisciplinary information, (2) managing varied audiences and feedback, (3) aligning content and communication tasks, and (4) addressing interpersonal team issues. Consistent with the SoTL framework, Dannels et al. reflected on how these learning issues need to be integrated in future communication instruction in chemical engineering classrooms.

Chanock (2005) also used the SoTL framework to explore student learning about oral presentations in an honors archeology course. Using theories of functional grammar to guide the analysis of her ethnographic observations of the classroom, Chanock described five features that, according to participants in the honors seminar, distinguished more effective disciplinary speakers from those perceived to be less effective: mode of presentation, structure of presentation, use of visual aids, speakers’ “presence,” and oral grammar.

Classrooms Redefined

The second set of studies differs from the first set in that the projects extend beyond traditional college classrooms, taking communication education to the workplace and to even more unconventional settings. In perhaps the most provocative study, Hartnett (1998) called attention to a context quite distinct from the traditional higher education classroom—a prison classroom. Hartnett described a communication pedagogical activity—a reenactment of the Lincoln–Douglas debate (with a slight historically inaccurate modification of adding the Black abolitionist David Walker to the event)—conducted
as a final assignment in a speech communication course on “Historical Forms of Public Address,” a course that might be taught in any classroom on any campus in the United States. Students first were given time and resources to research the original Lincoln–Douglas debates and then, after being given time to practice, reenacted the debate, framing their arguments using actual discourse from the original debate. Members of the prisoners’ families, as well as prisoners not enrolled in the course and guards and prison officials, attended the debate, meaning that the final performance had a distinctly public audience.

Elegantly described in Hartnett’s (1998) essay, this debate was an unqualified success, both with regard to oral performance skills that students/prisoners mastered and in terms of demonstrating how they had internalized racist discourse of the past. Specifically, Hartnett pointed out that the internalization of racism by the students/prisoners demonstrated how the tropes of racism of a previous historical time still exist today. Hartnett, however, did not view this classroom success as the only, or even primary, contribution made by this event; instead, he described ways in which the debates, and talk about them, reached beyond the classroom to the general prison population and prison administration, guards, and family members who were drawn into discussions of slavery, race, and current developments in U.S. prison culture.

Service-Learning Classrooms

A number of studies have focused on the service-learning course, an approach to learning that integrates academic instruction with public service and individual reflection. Because this approach encourages students to take the knowledge that they are learning and use it in a specific community context, classrooms implementing service-learning practices are an important focus for applied communication research in educational contexts. Consequently, the following literature applies the concept of service learning to a number of communication curricula and courses (e.g., intercultural communication, organizational communication, teaching communication, and research methods).

In the context of an intercultural communication course with a service-learning dimension, Crabtree (1998) explored ways to use intercultural communication as a subject matter and as a skill set to encourage college students to create a two-way process of empowerment when working with people who are visibly, culturally, and economically different from them—in this instance, with people in “developing” countries (see Kincaid & Figueroa, this volume). This course was part of the Center for Civic Education and Leadership at Crabtree’s university, and was designed with a required service-learning component, typically conducted in a Third-World nation (e.g., Peru, Mexico, and Guatemala had been visited in the past). Crabtree’s case study described students’ transformative experiences in the two sites of El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Student journals provided the corpus of the data, with Crabtree’s analysis focusing on participants’ cognitive, affective, and behavioral transformations. Journal entries revealed how students’ learning and confidence in their understanding of the subject matter—intercultural communication—encouraged and structured a transformational learning experience. Specifically, students’ work illustrated their growth in cultural knowledge, strong levels of communication motivation, and the development of relational network integration. Crabtree asserted that students’ writing demonstrated an approach to intercultural communication that “depicts a concern for participatory collaboration, global awareness, and action for social justice” (p. 195).

In the studies conducted by Braun (2001) and O’Hara (2001), students employed communication audits as part of their service-learning project in an upper division organi-
zational communication course. In Braun’s project, students worked with a program, titled “Communities for Education/Education for Communities,” created to foster better communication between the local school district and its constituencies—in particular, with families of students in grades 7 through 12. In that communication course, students worked together in teams to study the organizational communication that occurred and to offer suggestions for improved practices, becoming student consultants to the organization. Braun concluded that this service-learning approach to an organizational communication course allowed students to influence a community partner—in this case, the local school district. Students, in turn, reported an increased understanding of course content, felt personally connected to the curriculum, and experienced powerful and memorable learning opportunities. Braun articulated a number of practical suggestions to improve the course, including starting fieldwork earlier and better preparing students for the uncertainty they are likely to face as they conduct community-based research.

O’Hara (2001) described a service-learning organizational communication course she designed using principles of democratic education and what 12 students learned from that course about communication, democratic practice, and social justice. As an applied communication research project, O’Hara described student learning as a process rather than as a set of outcomes, and she attached that process to a specific set of experiences that students had in this course.

Similar to Crabtree’s (1998) study, O’Hara (2001) asked students to keep a journal and to produce several papers. Analysis of these writings revealed that students were confronted with the need to develop team relationships that were productive and to negotiate relationships with clients who were difficult. The course also appeared to achieve its goals of enhancing students’ capacities for civic engagement and sensitivities to social justice. In short, students learned that the content of their communication instruction was dependent on the relational contexts in which they were assigned to work. This was an important learning for these students, who reported feeling more confident in their ability to use their education to make a difference.

Two case studies employed service learning to encourage students to teach oral communication to two populations. Students who took a communication training and development course offered by Gibson, Kostecki, and Lucas (2001) worked with the Work First and School to Work programs, which assist people with career counseling and job skill training as they transition into the labor force. Students in this course took on the role of student–trainer and offered instruction to improve program participants’ job-related communication skills, such as interviewing, resume writing, conflict management, listening feedback, and team building.

Using a framework much like those found in SoTL projects, Gibson et al. (2001) drew on 11 best-practice principles identified by the National Society for Experiential Education to design and implement this service-learning course. They found through guided classroom dialogue and review of students’ work that these principles served as an important foundation for improving students’ performance in the course. Furthermore, they asserted that the principles provided an effective framework for dialogue with other teachers. The authors concluded that four principles emerged as core elements of the service-learning project: intent, authenticity, mentoring, and reflection.

Staton and Tomlison (2001) utilized a service-learning approach in their course on “Communication Education Outreach” to provide students with opportunities to integrate theory and practice, develop critical-reflection skills, and gain practical experience. Drawing on calls by Boyer (1987a), the Goals 2000: Educate America Act (1994), and the Speech Communication Association (1996) concerning the need to educate elementary school-age children to be more proficient orators, Staton and Tomlison developed a course...
where college students teach oral communication skills to children in grades K-12. Using students’ in-class participation, quality of their written work, evaluation of their teaching performance, and final course grades as the corpus of their data, the authors asserted that this class allowed communication education students to expand and refine their cognitive understanding of communication concepts and principles, and to integrate theory and practice aids to prepare for actual classroom teaching.

Finally, two articles analyzed service learning in undergraduate communication research methods courses. Although both Keyton (2001) and Artz (2001) employed service-learning pedagogy, they took drastically different approaches to teaching research methods. Keyton focused on the practical issues associated with using service learning to teach research methods, suggesting that applied methods courses with a service-learning orientation need to consider how research can be designed and conducted to answer specific questions asked by the agencies with which students work. Framing research in this way leads students to gain new awareness of underserved populations about significant social and policy issues. Moreover, students conducting such applied research frequently interact with people from backgrounds different from themselves and, in the process, students learn more deeply about their capacity to conduct research and to utilize their communication skills with diverse people.

Keyton (2001) described three term-length service-learning projects that students engaged in over her numerous years of teaching a research methods course. She examined how students in these projects used their skills to offer suggestions to the nonprofit organizations and agencies with which they worked. Because the work in which students were engaged was tied to problems in the context, research methods, and, specifically, statistics, were employed as meaningful tools to solve real-world problems rather than studied as abstract concepts. In her most general conclusion, Keyton asserted that when utilized effectively, the goal of service learning is to encourage students to assess social problems and, thereby, to become active participants in solving the problems and concerns of underserved agencies and organizations.

Artz (2001) also argued for using a service-learning orientation to teach communication research methods, but his course taught students a very different orientation to communication research than did Keyton’s course. Specifically, his course, entitled “Critical Ethnography for Communication Studies,” taught students to use critical ethnographic research skills in their service-learning projects. Using this qualitative, social justice-oriented research methodology, students’ attention was attuned to how communication theory and practice might address social justice problems, raise social awareness of those problems, and promote civic activity to solve them by offering more socially and economically just opportunities.

In his essay, Artz (2001) was critical of how service-learning approaches usually are implemented. He argued that the focus too often is on students’ individual acts of altruism and is motivated by charity rather than the collective need to change fundamental systemic practices that give rise to social injustice. Artz’s course, in contrast, encouraged students to examine the symbolic, cultural, and social practices that undergird social problems, and to articulate how communication is central to both systemic oppression and liberating activities.

Using students’ written responses to and quantitative evaluations of the course, Artz (2001) described how this approach to teaching communication research methods moved students from seeing service as charity to viewing service as advocacy (see also Frey et al., 1996). He argued that this orientation to service learning and communication research methods directed students’ attention to, as Thomas (1993) put it, “symbols of oppression by shifting and contrasting cultural images in ways that reveal subtle qualities of social
control” (p. 20). However, Artz also warned that teaching a critical ethnographic methods course with a service-learning advocacy orientation does not guarantee certain outcomes. Despite the focus of the course, some students did not conduct a critical ethnography. Moreover, students who already were advocates for particular social issues were better able to engage in research activities and advocacy, whereas students who chose projects only for the class frequently were frustrated and demonstrated difficulty establishing relationships with community partners. Most students in the course, however, became more aware of inequality and some gained further insights into the power of communicative practices to promote equality. Furthermore, by offering students opportunities to use their understandings and skills, the course led them to connect the relationships among communication, institutional structures, and political and cultural practices. In doing so, students joined or recommitted to the struggle for social justice and democratic communication.

**Deliberative Education**

Instruction in the arts of deliberation has been one significant heritage of an education in communication (see, e.g., McDevitt & Kiousis, 2006; Murphy, 2004). Several recent studies focus attention on how the application of deliberation skills might enhance students’ tendencies toward civic engagement and democratic participation.

McMillan and Harriger’s (2002) case study reported on their experiences of teaching deliberation in three courses. Based on literature suggesting that college-age people today feel politically alienated and demonstrate apathy toward political participation, the researchers hypothesized that teaching students deliberation skills should act as an antidote to these troubling trends. Based on their observations and reflections as teachers, McMillan and Harriger described six lessons about how larger societal struggles with deliberation manifest themselves in the classroom. These lessons are discussed here at some length and include recommendations for pedagogy implicated by each lesson.

The first lesson that McMillan and Harriger (2002) reported concerns how undergraduate students appear to approach group process. They noted that students do not come to college with positive or sophisticated views about group process, and that these negative feelings underlie their antipathy toward deliberative processes. Thus, among the first steps in a curriculum seeking to engage students in deliberative processes is attention to their initial and implicitly held assumptions about those processes. Second, they noted that students do not come to college well skilled in deliberative processes but, instead, come prepared to be individual orators of some skill; hence, they do not arrive ready to listen, question, probe, and decide in collaborative settings. Third, they reported that merely giving students opportunities to engage in deliberation increases their knowledge and curiosity about a particular issue; in other words, deliberation can trigger a more expansive understanding and appreciation of focal issues. Fourth, topics that are intrinsically interesting to students proved to be more potent in stimulating energetic deliberation. The issue of relevance, of course, is not new to educational scholars but these first four lessons, taken together, provide the interesting observation that although the act of deliberation matters per se, it matters *more* if students deliberate on issues that are important to them. Fifth, much of the theorizing on democratic practice identifies context as an essential aspect of the process, and McMillan and Harriger noted that context also is significant in classroom deliberations. Specifically, their students reported that for deliberative pedagogy to be effective, the classroom climate must be a safe one (where individuals do not fear humiliation or reprisal) that has a high degree of “internal efficacy” (a sense that any individual student has the capacity to alter the system in some meaningful way). Finally, McMillan and Harriger reported that the greatest challenge to
deliberative pedagogy was diversity, which meant “providing a space that accommodates all players” (p. 249). For both teachers and students, the most imposing challenge to successful deliberation was developing ways to accommodate different points of view and varying interests created during discussions.

Two additional studies on deliberative education support McMillan and Harriger’s (2002) work. Gravel (2001), also concerned about students’ civic apathy and cynicism, drew on the idea that issues that were local and relevant successfully engaged students in deliberative practices and, consequently, would be more likely to increase their willingness to become civically involved. Modeling his course using the theories and practices of a local agency, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), Gravel focused instruction on getting students to become more active and willing participants in discussions about how power operated in their community through dialogues about real-life and real-time issues related to church, family, and neighborhood associations. Gravel incorporated assignments in his course that encouraged students to see institutional power relations and that increased their skills of deliberation and persuasion by engaging in the process of building relationships among individuals and local community groups.

Gayle (2004) explored the notion that effective deliberation requires skills not commonly developed prior to college. Extending McMillan and Harriger’s (2002, p. 174) observations about the need for skill development, Gayle focused on the degree to which students were willing and able to engage in attitude change, referred to as “subjective reframing,” as a result of their participation in deliberations about controversial topics. Using SoTL as an empirical framework, Gayle’s 34 honors public-speaking students participated in this project. Students gave three presentations on the same topic, with at least two presentations including viewpoints in opposition to one another. Students also reflected on their listening practices, reflections that were recorded on videotape and in student journals. Gayle’s analysis of the data focused on the types of listening behaviors of which students were self-reflexively aware. The findings showed that students demonstrated attitude change and could be self-reflexively aware of the types of listening behaviors that might motivate such change. In this case, students who listened to the evidence presented were likely to experience subjective reframing.

In concluding this section, we note, first, that applied communication research that examines teaching methods has focused on communication classrooms in the context of higher education and that more studies need to be conducted on communication teaching methods in the K-12 environment. Even more exciting are studies that followed Hartnett’s (1998) lead, for given the rapid growth of the prison industry and the alarming large number of men and growing number of women getting their education in prison (see, e.g., Novek & Sanford, 2007), we need to better understand the power of various pedagogies in that setting. Second, there is a great deal of applied research that examines communication pedagogy, with service learning and deliberative education appearing to be practices that a number of teachers are using with some success. Studies of service learning and deliberative education show that these pedagogical tools can help students to become more deeply engaged in their learning experiences. However, more research with a social justice sensibility needs to be done to understand the relative power of these pedagogies to be socially, as well as individually, transformative.

**Schools as Communities Created through Applied Communication**

The previous two sections highlighted research that focused on teachers and classrooms. This section reviews applied communication scholarship that examines schools. This research explores ways in which schools are embedded within communities (e.g., ways in
which parents, families, friends, and neighbors, and neighborhoods participate in educational processes) and how schools function as communities (e.g., students, faculty, and staff from across a campus or several campuses working together on projects), revealing the rich relationships between education and community.

Community Provides Support through Communication

Any educator who has worked in the K-12 setting recognizes that successful schools are embedded in caring communities. Principals, teachers, and counselors all agree that parental involvement, neighborhood engagement, and support from friends and family all matter a great deal to individual student learning, as well as to school success. Despite this widely held conviction among educational practitioners and scholars, until very recently, little research has explored specific ways in which communication influences community support and student success in educational contexts.

Rosenfeld and his colleagues have engaged in programmatic research to understand the types of social support that are available and important to students and schools identified as being “at-risk.” This research program has explored relationships between supportive communication and school outcomes for both at-risk students and students not identified as being at-risk in middle schools (Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 1998) and high schools (Rosenfeld & Richman, 1999). Reasoning that supportive communication, if present from the right people and in the right ways, ought to lessen the degree to which students identified as being at-risk because of their social or economic status experience negative school outcomes (e.g., poor attendance, behavioral problems, and negative affect for school), these scholars sought to identify the sources and types of support that might be most helpful. Thus, these studies explore ways in which communicative behavior—specifically, supportive communication—distinguishes between individuals who, given their social and economic standing, have a likelihood of having successful school experiences from those who do not.

For both the Rosenfeld and Richmond (1999) and Rosenfeld et al. (1998) studies, the data were obtained from a national database, the School Success Profile, a comprehensive instrument used to measure a wide range of school success indicators. Analyses of those data indicated that, in general, parents are a primary source of support for both at-risk students and not at-risk students in both middle and high school, results, which by themselves, happily, are unsurprising. The results also showed, however, that for at-risk students, parents were identified as the only source of communicative support, as these students did not report receiving support for positive school outcomes from teachers, administrators, friends, or other family members. Parents’ and adult caretakers’ supportive communicative behavior, however, did help at-risk students to achieve higher school engagement and satisfaction, as well as fewer behavior problems.

Barge and Loges (2003), in another study of parental involvement, focused on differing perceptions and meanings of parental involvement among parents, students, and teachers in a middle school context. Meanings of parental involvement were explored because of the particularly powerful role that parents can play in helping middle school students to have successful educational experiences. Parents and students engaged in focus group conversations about the meanings of parental involvement, and data from teachers were acquired through the completion of a questionnaire.

Barge and Loges (2003) reported both similarities and differences in people’s perceptions of parental involvement. All three groups (parents, teachers, and students) viewed parental involvement as attempting to build positive relationships with teachers and as monitoring children’s academic progress. However, there also were clear differences
between the groups. Specifically, ideas about discipline and encouragement varied across the groups, as did the role of extracurricular activities and community networks. Barge and Loges concluded by proposing that two discourses—information transmission and partnership—guided understanding and communication conduct in this setting. Information-transmission discourse framed effective communication as that through which “schools provide academic data on student performance to parents and parents actively soliciting this data,” whereas participation discourse framed effective communication as being “about creating supportive relationships among parents, teachers, and community members to foster the academic and social development of the child” (Barge & Loges, pp. 158–159). Barge and Loges recommended that the discourse of partnership has more potential than the discourse of information transmission to create and maintain environments in which all students can have successful school experiences.

Recently, Rosenfeld, Richman, Bowen, and Wynns (2006) began exploring relationships among the communication of social support, exposure to community violence, and school outcomes for high school students. They focused on the degree to which the availability of social support mitigates the negative influences of violence on school outcomes, such as attendance, trouble avoidance, school satisfaction, and grades. Using a national probability-sampling database, 1109 high school students completed the School Success Profile, which includes items measuring perceived neighborhood danger, personal neighborhood danger, and indications of social support.

Rosenfeld et al. (2006) reported that neighborhood violence, especially when experienced personally, has clear and negative consequences on students’ school behavior and outcomes. Moreover, the communication of social support appears to mitigate school satisfaction and grades, but has less impact on attendance and trouble avoidance. The authors concluded that providing social support is necessary but insufficient to address the problems experienced by at-risk youth and the effects of community violence; issues of poverty and institutionalized forms of discrimination also must be confronted if schools are to be safe places for all students and institutions that foster positive social change.

**Communication across Communities Can Engage Social Justice**

A final set of studies relate community involvement, communication education, and social justice. These studies have been conducted in a wide range of settings, from campuses to school boards to entire nations, but each study explores applied questions about ways in which communicative practices and/or educational practices about communication can promote the agenda of social justice. These studies, thus, go beyond questions of how communities can better serve the needs of schools and learn how communities can promote social change through communication education.

Christian (2007) and her colleagues (Christian & Lapinski, 2003; Christian & Prater, 2003) have been interested in how principles of civic journalism might be employed to promote a social justice agenda. Civic journalism counters the neutrality and objectivity commonly identified as defining features of journalism. Instead, civic journalism asserts that journalists should take responsibility for the communities in which they work and make overt attempts to improve those communities through the practice of journalism. Christian’s projects, therefore, explore ways in which an education in civic journalism might have effects on communities.

Christian (2007) reported how, over the course of several years, she developed a partnership between her undergraduate journalism students and students enrolled in a school newspaper class at a local high school. The goal of the partnership, called the Student
Newspaper Diversity Project, was to coproduce an annual special edition of the school newspaper that focused on diversity in the local community. In pursuing that goal, university and high school students learned about each other through mentoring relationships, students gained journalistic skills, and everyone involved (including members of the surrounding community when one issue of the newspaper was circulated across that community) became engaged in conversations about diversity in the community.

Based on individual interviews and focus group conversations, Christian (2007) concluded that high school and university students were affected by the project in two important ways. First, students became aware of how their prejudices were challenged and changed in some instances due to their participation in the project. Second, students learned more about journalism as a craft as they engaged the project. Christian’s project, therefore, appears to have been successful on many levels.

Exploring the context of higher education, Artz (1998) described how an education in communication can facilitate a social justice project. Specifically, undergraduate communication majors at Loyola University of Chicago used their understanding of communication to address the problem of low African-American enrollment at that university by launching a campaign for institutional change. Using Bitzer’s (1968) concept of a “rhetorical situation” as a guide, Artz described how students worked together to gain multiple and sometimes opposing viewpoints on the situation, and to develop possible solutions to that problem. Consistent with a social justice perspective, students successfully organized and implemented a conference on “African-Americans in Higher Education” that targeted issues on their campus but also invited speakers from nearby universities.

Artz (1998) described the process of using communication to advance this particular social justice project, with the undergraduate students involved becoming applied communication practitioners as they engaged in the process of facilitating talk and promoting action. What initially was a classroom project became a campus-wide initiative spurred by dialogue, debate, and consensus building. Although Artz observed that it was too soon to tell whether socially just ends would be achieved in this situation, the students’ struggles to bring the issue to the attention of the campus more broadly, as well as their personal struggle to hear and understand multiple viewpoints, created an educational experience for them that was rich with opportunities for transformational learning.

Because boardrooms are a place where school policies, which direct daily conduct in classrooms and schools, are created, they are an important site of educational practice. Despite the importance of these settings, few communication researchers have studied them. One study by Tracy and Ashcraft (2001) is a notable exception and is especially important because it explores discourse about a district-wide diversity policy, which, when put into practice, could have direct implications for social justice.

Tracy and Ashcraft (2001) analyzed discussions of the Boulder Valley School Board (BVSB) and its community as participants created a strategic plan to craft a school district-wide diversity policy. These applied communication researchers claimed that the common occurrence of disputing word choice and meaning was an effective strategy for managing interactional dilemmas and, ultimately, led to a more inclusive diversity policy. Through examining these discussions, Tracy and Ashcraft found that BVSB members used three frames to discuss the language choices in the diversity policy document: technical editing, inadvertent changing of a policy, and wordsmithing.

The researchers argued that these word battles are means by which individuals assert their importance, play out personal animosities, and avoid more important tasks. As Tracy and Ashcraft (2001) explained, “Warring over words enables groups to navigate troubled waters—to become clearer about what a valued commitment is to mean, and to build agreement among group members” (p. 311). In other words, power negotiations
often occur in the context of quibbles over word choice. Awareness about the subtexts of policy discussions—in this case, discussions about a diversity policy—is important to the overall goal of communicating effectively of and about social justice, as well as the creation of more inclusive policies and products.

According to Tracy and Ashcraft (2001), struggling with hard-to-articulate problems can lead to more tolerance of controversial positions. Understanding the complexities of dilemmas increases the likelihood that group members forward innovative and effective conversational moves. This study also illustrated how mundane and apparently obstructive communication patterns can move a group toward the goals of social justice. In this instance, power was negotiated through seemingly automatic, taken-for-granted conversation about language choice.

Two studies in South Africa explored communication curriculum projects in a national context. In both studies, teams of researchers were interested in understanding how communication pedagogy or curriculum might facilitate that country’s recovery from the devastation of apartheid. The study by Newfield, Andrew, Stein, and Maungedzo (2003) explored the use of multimodal communication pedagogies in the context of an outcomes-based education (OBE) model in Johannesburg. The South-African version of OBE explicitly attended to policies that addressed inequities of the apartheid past; focused on principles of redress, social justice, multilingualism, and multiculturalism; and encouraged consideration of issues of equity in teaching, learning, and assessment. Teachers across the curriculum used pedagogical strategies to provide students with learning opportunities across visual, linguistic, and performative communication modes, with students encouraged to write poetry, dance, and create quilts rather than focus on the written word as the only mode of communication. The teachers’ interest in multimodal communication pedagogies focused on building a democratic culture that “privilege[d] multiperspectival knowledge and lead to new forms of deliberation, analysis, and communication” (Newfield et al., p. 63).

Newfield et al. (2003) conducted a case study of Robert Maungedzo, an English-as-a-Second-Language teacher, and how he responded to the OBE model by using a number of pedagogical approaches to encourage and motivate the disaffected Soweto youth in his course to explore their culture and identity. Maungedzo designed the class projects as a way for these youth to communicate their identities and cultures in an exchange program with students living in China. Students created cloth maps of South Africa, called a “Tebuwa cloth”; wrote izibongo, historical South-African praise poems; constructed three-dimensional objects representative of their “cultural groups”; and composed contemporary poems in English.

Newfield et al. (2003) claimed that the complexities of this project and other multimodal approaches to OBE required the development of new criteria for assessing the learning achieved by students. Specifically, they argued that multimodal assessment needs to move beyond assessing independent objects (e.g., individual papers or test scores) to evaluating objects in relation to their contexts, histories, creative processes, and the inherent value of students’ work. They asserted that placing human agency and resourcefulness at the center of educationally produced objects stresses the importance of meaning making within a social world that relies on the transformation, design, recruitment, reflection, and interaction with others rather than seeing those objects as isolated and discrete creations. Education in this context, thus, was a means for underrepresented populations to learn how to express themselves by various methods in a complex world.

Jones and Bodtker (1998) also reported on a social justice curriculum project in South Africa that involved an international team of educators from the United States and South Africa collaborating to develop conflict resolution education for four high schools in four
communities in the Gauteng province. They described the process that evolved as this group of international educators worked together in the service of this ambitious project. Using dialectical theory as applied to groups (e.g., Smith & Berg, 1987) and focusing specifically on significant turning points (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986), Jones and Bodtker discussed how the paradoxes of identity (individual or representative identity and collective or shared identity), authority (balancing attempts to gain or exercise authority with needs to avoid disempowering other members of the group), and participation (engaging in appropriate levels of disclosure, trust, and intimacy) influenced the group process and, ultimately, the success of the project.

Jones and Bodtker’s (1998) case analysis has much to offer those interested in systematic institutional change in the service of social justice. It reveals, in rich detail, the ways that individuals of different backgrounds (in this instance, international, as well as interdisciplinary) struggled to develop common ground. Threats to common ground, such as loyalties to identities and groups external to the project group, were carefully described. Jones and Bodtker concluded that “in our analysis, the role of community as a context for group identity, as an alternative focus for energy from which group members can reinvent themselves, becomes more apparent” (p. 370). This case study encourages further consideration of the role of conflict in social justice education. Given the natural tendency for groups to resist fundamental changes to the status quo, however inequitable, Jones and Bodtker’s analysis of how this particular group navigated tensions in identity, authority, and participation provides useful information for planning similar types of educational interventions.

**Directions for Future Research**

The literature reviewed in this chapter focused attention on questions about communication in educational contexts and concerns about particular problems in those contexts that might be effectively addressed by communication theory, research, and practice. This review leads us to conclude that there is a great deal of exciting applied communication research in educational contexts. In this final section, we celebrate that observation and pose new questions and concerns worth exploring.

We began by exploring applied research focused on teacher communicative behavior. Given the extensive program of research on teacher power (e.g., Waldeck et al., 2001a), and given that classroom management is among the most compelling communication challenges of practicing teachers (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993), we expected to see a much more robust collection of studies exploring how teachers’ use of power affects specific classroom management problems. Instead, the one relevant essay by Weber et al. (2001) reported that teachers in a program designed for students who had not been successful in school used positive forms of power and were perceived by those students as caring.

Given this very hopeful finding, more applied communication scholarship needs to explore problems of classroom management using the research on teacher power. Such applications might do much to help teachers understand the communicative dimensions of classroom management, as well as help scholars interested in how power is communicated in classrooms to understand the localized and contextualized dynamics of that application. We join Sprague (1992b) in expressing concern, along with curiosity, about the degree to which our currently decontextualized tools for measuring power will stand the test of application in actual classrooms, with complex combinations of students and talents, and in the service of widely varying notions of control and management. Still, in the spirit of good academic inquiry, we look forward to a solid, evidence-based conversation about this important issue.
A second collection of essays reviewed centered on questions about how teachers’ messages facilitate students’ learning. Some of this research emerged from communication education and instructional communication areas, but communication scholars increasingly are gravitating toward the SoTL framework as a way to understand better particular applications of teacher message behavior in relation to student learning outcomes. In addition, newly energized research about communication across the curriculum is making important contributions to understanding how communication skills develop and enhance learning in a variety of classrooms, such as in engineering, business, and design courses.

However, given the rising importance and ubiquity of new communication technologies (see Lievrouw, this volume), we were surprised to discover only one applied research project by Waldeck et al. (2001b) that explored how new communication technologies might help or hurt teaching and learning. In addition to understanding how and why students might use e-mail to contact their teachers, we recommend learning how teachers and their students might use communication message arenas, such as blogs and chat rooms, to clarify course content, develop skills, and collaborate. There also are many questions that emerge from a social justice perspective about issues of access to such technologies and cultural imperatives for, or prohibitions against, using technologies for particular types of relating, as well as questions of voice and inclusion.

The studies reviewed also revealed a number of projects that focus on engaged pedagogical approaches to student learning, with research on service learning and deliberative education in the communication classroom some of the most abundant. The findings from this research demonstrate how an education in communication applied to a specific context encourages stronger connections and more holistic understanding of the role of communication in these settings than similar courses without a service-learning or deliberative education component. For example, some of the service-learning projects invite us to consider how to create better connections between communication subject matter and skill development (such as intercultural communication, organizational communication, research methods, and teaching communication). This work also is particularly important because it demonstrates how, through engaged pedagogical approaches, students report stronger personal connections to the curriculum (e.g., Artz, 2001; Braun, 2001; Gravel, 2001; Keyton, 2000; McMillan & Harriger, 2002) and increased confidence and deeper understanding of the subject matter of communication (e.g., Artz, 2001; Braun, 2001; Crabtree, 1998; Keyton, 2000; O’Hara, 2001; Staton & Tomlison, 2001). Furthermore, much of this work suggests that service learning and deliberative education are promising pedagogical tools for increasing students’ social awareness and willingness to become civically involved (e.g., Artz, 2001; Crabtree, 1998; Gayle, 2004; Gibson et al., 2001; Gravel, 2001; Keyton, 2000; McMillan & Harriger, 2002; O’Hara, 2001). Many scholars reported that students in these settings saw new ways to integrate theory with practice, and how to use their education to make a difference in their lives and in the lives of others (e.g., Artz, 2001; Crabtree, 1998; Gravel, 2001; O’Hara, 2001; Staton & Tomlison, 2001).

Given these findings, we are intrigued by the possibilities of this work, as it invites educators and scholars to consider how communication education might create possible solutions to some of society’s most vexing problems. However, this hope does not come without worry. We also heed the cautions expressed about seeing engaged pedagogy as a panacea for solving all of society’s ills. Specifically, Artz (2001) warned that engaging in service with the intent to better society must be viewed critically, and he cautioned that the view of service as charity, which dominates pedagogy and research, leads to temporary solutions that reinforce the status quo and keep dominant systems in place and people who have been historically disenfranchised on the margins. Artz’s warning encourages us to consider that engaged pedagogical approaches, such as service learn-
ing, can be extensions of implicit social contracts of dominance and inequity. We, thus, cannot assume that pedagogies, in and of themselves, can do the work of social justice. Teachers and scholars need to move beyond taken-for-granted assumptions about how individuals engage in the social act of teaching or learning to focus on the social functions that are produced and reproduced in schools. Given that service learning and deliberative education are social and applied pedagogical approaches, the question becomes how we might construct more critical understandings of the role of communication and communicators in specific, applied educational settings.

In addition to the pedagogical approaches that encourage and facilitate community engagement, we are optimistic about the number of studies that extend the work of civic engagement and social justice outside of the individual classroom. A number of studies explored applied questions about how communicative practices in educational settings can serve a social justice agenda (e.g., Artz, 1998; Barge & Loges, 2003; Jones & Bodtker, 1998; Newfield et al., 2003; Rosenfeld & Richman, 1999; Rosenfeld et al., 1998; Tracy & Ashcraft, 2001). These studies move beyond questions of how communication can better serve the needs of schools and learning to how communities also may be engaged in social change through communication education. Given that schools are located in neighborhoods and communities, and impacted by local, state, and national decisions, scholars need to understand more fully the embedded nature of communication in educational contexts and its implications for promoting social justice.

Specifically, the studies reviewed in this chapter teach us about how schools and communities—broadly defined—may work together to create more inclusive practices (e.g., Artz, 1998; Barges & Logues, 2003; Jones & Bodtker, 1998; Rosenfeld et al., 1998) and policies (e.g., Newfield et al., 2003; Tracy & Ashcraft, 2001). However, as Hartnett (1998) cautioned, the work of social justice is not only about agenda setting or creating “blueprints for change, but rather to an open-ended and literally infinite process of articulating needs and aspirations within a democratically organized social space” (p. 233). This view means that education and scholarship focused on communication in educational contexts that is socially just must remain constantly diligent and critical of how access, representation, resources, and equity in schooling affect those who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised in society and, therefore, in schools and classrooms.

The research reviewed in this chapter also introduces new questions, as well as highlights responsibilities, for those who study communication in educational contexts. Specifically, it is the responsibility of communication scholars who are interested in education to critically examine how issues of power, access, equity, and equality are negotiated through and in day-to-day practice. As the applied communication research that has been conducted shows, one way that scholars can focus on the creation of social justice in educational contexts is through examinations of daily conversations that occur in classrooms, hallways, boardrooms, and staff lounges. The work of Jones and Bodtker (1998) and Tracy and Ashcraft (2001) teach us that issues of power and inclusiveness, related to educational contexts, are negotiated in policy-making and curricular conversations, and the research conducted by Artz (2001) and Barges and Loges (2003) illustrates how we need to provide opportunities for people to talk about important educational issues in more skillful and inclusive ways.

Conclusion

As this chapter clearly demonstrates, the tradition of applied communication in educational contexts is alive and well. Scholarship from the perspectives of communication education and instructional communication has continued to make contributions to
understanding how teachers can communicate more effectively and how particular pedagogies can be employed skillfully. Increasingly, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning framework is being adopted to conduct applied research about communication teaching and learning. However, as we argued in the opening section of this chapter, a commitment to applied communication research for and about social justice in educational contexts means a commitment to systemic social and cultural transformation. Fulfilling our obligation to social change, thus, is an imperative charge to scholars in communication education and instructional communication. In fact, it is difficult to imagine how social justice will ever advance without attention to classrooms, schools, and the process of education in the United States today. Furthermore, it is not sufficient for that commitment to take the form of academic dialogue; it must be expressed on social, political, economic, organizational, and personal levels. A commitment to social justice in research, teaching, and other practices requires adopting an activist orientation and connecting with those who are different from us, inventing ways to share resources equitably, and devoting ourselves to creating a society that embraces and cherishes all of its members. Thus, we end this chapter by imploring our colleagues who are interested in communication in educational contexts to join us in this work. Simply put, we must do more.

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