

Roots and Branches of the Ohio Communication Association: Perspectives on Pedagogy

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This article focuses on tracing the roots of the Ohio Communication Association's (OCA) contributions to pedagogy, while exploring future branches of teaching and learning. As co-authors we have experienced pedagogy in distantly different eras. As a Master's student at Western Kentucky University in 1985, and even as a Ph.D. student at Ohio University in 1994, the predominate methods of teaching differed in significant ways than the pedagogy of today. Mr. Clemens' experience as a Ph.D. student at Bowling Green State University is informed by new theories and new methods of both teaching and learning. The goal of this article is to trace some of the dedication to pedagogy made by the members of OCA while providing a brief review of the state of pedagogy in the communication discipline. Further, this article will acknowledge the rise of andragogy as an increasingly favored teaching method. Finally, we will suggest that perhaps it is time we, while embracing pedagogical roots, further our research in the branch of which shifts the focus of the teacher as 'locus of control' to a more learner-centered paradigm.

Before launching into our discussion, it is worth noting the reasoning behind the theme for the 2016 conference. This year

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marks the 80th anniversary of the OCA conference. As the Executive Board discussed possible conference themes, we wanted to note the extraordinary landmark we have reached. After a search of anniversary traditions, we discovered that while not common in the United States, in the United Kingdom, oak is considered the traditional gift and nomenclature of the 80th anniversary. The rationale behind this tradition is that the oak tree takes a long period of time to reach full maturity.

Oak is considered one of the strongest wood types in the world. Further, oak has been discussed as representing wisdom and longevity. It is able to withstand the extreme pressures that come with many years of life. The Ohio Communication Association, and our conference, have similarly been able to survive many challenges to emerge as the strong and healthy organization it is today. Through the commitment of our members, past and present, we embraced our 2016 conference theme, “Strong Roots-Branches of Communication.”

Our Pedagogical Roots

According to Arthur P. Bochner (2012), “Academic life involves reading, observing, thinking, and writing. We learn to conduct research and write monographs by reading and studying the work of our predecessors and mentors” (p. 7). Although Bochner’s argument was focused around research and publication, we believe he could make the same argument focused solely around pedagogy. In order to become the most effective educator, it is critical to study the work of our predecessors and learn from the mentors we have in our lives. Looking back at and utilizing the work individuals have created in the past is the only way we have been able to continually move forward and progress through the years. This especially holds true to the values upheld by the Ohio Communication Association.

According to the archives of the Ohio Communication Association, the roots of communication pedagogy under auspices of our association began in 1923 as the Ohio Association of Speech Teachers (Feezel, 2016). In the 1939 Program of the Ohio College Association, the Ohio Association of Teachers of Speech section of the program detailed the following presentations:

“Discussion of speech education in elementary schools” presented by Professor Marie Mason of Ohio State University, and “Secondary schools, speech teachers from various sections of the state” presented by E. Turner Stump of Kent State University (“Program,” 1939). These presentations and others demonstrate a clear focus on pedagogy at all levels.

Pedagogy and the communication discipline are inexorably linked. As noted above, a central focus of our Association was traditionally the methods most effective for the teaching of communication. According to Long (2012), learning occurs as the result of an intentional process of action and critical reflection (i.e. pedagogic innovation). As noted in the 1939 program of the Ohio Association of College Teachers of Speech, “The Committee on Teacher Training under the able chairmanship of Prof. W. Roy Diem of Ohio Wesleyan has been especially active” (“Program,” 1939). Meaning, from the early years of the association, OCA has continually strived to promote an association focused around teaching and education.

As Sprague (1992) states, “When teachers recognize they are intellectuals, they can choose to act as transformative intellectuals” (p. 8). OCA has strived to encourage its members to act as transformative intellectuals, and it has been deeply rooted in the science and art of pedagogy. The focus of our research on both graduate and undergraduate levels has long been a hallmark of our association. Fostering a culture where both graduate and undergraduate students can submit their work to the conference has been important to the growth and development of our association. Investing time into the development of our students has been critical for maintaining the longevity of the association. Further, action research, which utilizes a collaborative and transformative focus is an important method for developing creative practice pedagogy (Long, 2012). Through promoting G.I.F.T.S. (Great Ideas for Teaching Students) at the OCA conference, we have been able to see action research at work. Encouraging educators to share the methodology they use inside of their own classrooms has been extremely beneficial to the members who attend the annual OCA conference.

Our Andragogic Branches

Over the years, the Ohio Communication Association has not only strived to promote communication research practices, but it has also placed a strong emphasis on adult education. Malcom Knowles (1980) began identifying his work in the field of adult education as *andragogy* in the 1960's. Andragogy is when the instructor acts as a guide in the learning process, encouraging student participation by connecting students' own experiences to the classroom content (Blackley & Sheffield, 2015; Leigh, Whitted, & Hamilton, 2015). Knowles (1984) observed that when instructors incorporated the interests of learners, the result was a better educational experience for both the instructor and the learner. Also, Carney (1985) discusses the importance of utilizing andragogy in the classroom, as opposed to pedagogy, because of the individualized needs of student learners.

Forrest and Peterson (2006) advocate that andragogy focuses on the adult learner and creation of an independent, adaptable individual. Based upon Knowles (1984) work, Forrest and Peterson (2006) suggest there are four assumptions underpinning andragogy: a self-directing self-concept; use of experience; a readiness to learn; and a performance-centered orientation to learning. Though pedagogy and andragogy are both focused around educating and bettering students, the terms themselves do have differences in their meaning that need be acknowledged.

While Knowles (1980, 1984) framed andragogy as having little in common with pedagogy, his perspective evolved over time. It seems clear that as a communication discipline, we have yet to fully apply Knowles' work in our research. A small group of scholars have included Knowles' concept of andragogy in our research on teaching and learning in communication studies (Murray, 2014). Engleberg (1984) states that "It is the professional obligation of the speech profession to understand and embrace the world of adult education" (p. 17). This quotation from Engleberg does not mean that we do not have an understanding of the world of adult education, but it does mean that as educators within the speech profession we have to continually work to improve our educational practices.

As an organization, the Ohio Communication Association has always promoted pedagogical practices, but recently it has started to make a shift to promote more andragogic practices. OCA encourages participants to submit “Short Course” submissions to its conference. Short courses are where presenters bring demonstrations of the methodology they use inside their classrooms, but at the same time they allow the participants or adult learners in the audience to also contribute to the conversation. Meaning, there is an exchange in dialogue where the adult learners offer examples of how they have similarly taught courses of their own. Short courses are great ways for individuals to embrace andragogic practices across the discipline.

Our Strong Future

As an Association, we have much of which to be proud. We welcome scholars and practitioners at all stages of their professional journey. We have persevered to become one of the oldest (if not the oldest) state associations of communication. From both a current professor and a future professor, we acknowledge the tireless work of those who have provided us the opportunity to extend our own branches. Here’s to the next 80 years and beyond!

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