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What's Basic About the Basic Course? Enriching the Ethosystem as a Corrective for Consumerism

Roy Schwartzman, Ph.D.

The basic course offers an ideal opportunity to examine how the study of communication per se is justified. Since the introductory course — be it public speaking or a hybrid of public speaking and other topics — represents the gateway into communication study for students, the impressions formed in this course play a major role in how students conceive of the field as a whole. If the basic course is basic in any sense other than bearing the lowest course number, it must occupy a central place in equipping students with the skills essential to effective communication. In this last sense, it is particularly urgent to ask and answer the question: What's basic about the basic course?

Too often, basic courses are debased, sinking to the bottom of the academic hierarchy because they are considered under-theorized, "mere skills" courses, especially if they are performance-oriented (Cronin and Glenn, 1991). Thus "basic" devolves into "base." In the laudable attempt to prove the indispensability of oral communication, advocates for the basic course may buy into a commercial metaphoric framework, arguing that educators can produce useful products that have market value. This essay explores to what extent the basic course should appeal to market-based demands for
better oral communicators. Does the attempt to “sell” oral communication shortchange some of the moral values that could invigorate the basic course as an important part of education for responsible citizenship? To narrow the territory a bit, attention will focus on the rationale for studying public speaking. The first section provides context by noting the prevalence and implications of an economic, market-centered view of higher education. Discussion then focuses on the ethosystem as a value-based framework that could supplement a market orientation and perhaps provide a fuller understanding of the educational process operant in basic communication courses. The ethosystem takes the form of moral considerations typically omitted or glossed over in communication pedagogy that relies on economically based strategies. By recognizing and emphasizing the components of the ethosystem, the basic communication course can occupy its rightful place at the core of education for responsible democratic citizenship.

MARKET FORCES THAT INFORM EDUCATION

The Lone(ly) Competitor

The image of the educated person as a lone thinker permeates American educational philosophy. Even when practical experience has been lauded, it historically tends to have been treated as individual accomplishment rather than service rendered in partnership with others. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1837 address “The American Scholar” proclaimed a declaration of indepen-
ence from "the courtly muses of Europe" (Emerson in Mead, 1970, p. 29). In this manifesto of free thought, the independent thinker remained detached from the social environment. Far from being embedded in a human community where knowledge claims are contested and negotiated, Emerson's scholar was a lone thinker in accord with "the new importance given to the single person" (Emerson in Mead, 1970, p. 29). Instead of emphasizing ties with the community at large and obligations to it, Emerson asked whether "the chief disgrace in the world" were "not to be an unit; — to be reckoned one character; . . . but to be reckoned in the gross, in the hundred, or the thousand, of the party, the section, to which we belong; and our opinion predicted geographically, as the north, or the south?" (Emerson in Mead, 1970, pp. 29-30) While Emerson does raise legitimate fears about conformity and generalization, his remedy portrayed the scholar as a self-contained unit whose reciprocal relationships with peers and surroundings are neither discussed nor developed. Emerson's silence on obligations to the community leaves unanswered the crucial question of how intellectual pursuits can improve and be improved by the experiences of others.

Knefelkamp and Schneider (1997) identify the "solitary individual, detached from specific social contexts or obligations" as the predominant view of the learner in contemporary educational philosophy (p. 331). The individualistic intellectual ideal infuses the perspective of "weak democracy," which addresses social problems by invoking the good intentions of "the privatized individual" (Lisman, 1998, p. 94). In weak democracy, academic endeavors will be justified and evaluated
based on their contribution to "individual development at the expense of the development of community and the common good" (Lisman, 1998, p. 95). In this vein, some basic course texts list the benefits of public speaking in terms of personal enrichment. "You," presumably the singular reader, will learn techniques useful in personal relationships, acquire marketable skills, and gain confidence (eg., Gregory, 1999, pp. 2-4; DeVito, 2000, pp. 3-4). Certainly there need be no tradeoff between personal achievement and community development, yet the speaker's advancement is not measured by yardsticks that include obligations to others. Thus the tendency to emphasize personal development often bypasses the social roots of persistent problems, such as inequitable distribution of resources, that squelch some voices (Lisman, 1998, p. 7).

Focus on the individual shapes a learning environment where "an orientation toward others is necessarily discouraged" (Howard, 1998, p. 24). Free thought has been equated with intellectual independence, but the image of the independent thinker can become its own caricature: the solipsistic intellectual. Knefelkamp and Schneider (1997) caution that "an educational ethos of unencumbered individualism has a very high cost in the neglect and diminishment of democratic society" (p. 333). This high price might be exacted by framing individual success in economic terms.

**Illusory Consumer Empowerment**

Although much ink has been spilled to proclaim that students should be considered customers (e.g., Rinehart,
1993; Sallis, 1992; Seymour, 1993; Cornesky et al., 1992), less attention has been paid to delineating the kinds of customers who inhabit higher education. Student-customers rarely drive educational improvements because many are satisfied with the least demanding curriculum available for the dollar (Creech, 1994). In the marketplace, customers already know what they want. They have very clear ideas of what constitutes excellence. But some customers simply shop the sale racks, settling for the cheapest product that suits immediate purposes. Some students do shop for quality, and they know that rigorous standards ultimately equip them for challenges beyond the classroom. The bargain basement students, on the other hand, contribute little and perhaps demand even less. This attitude does "buy into" metaphors derived from commercial transactions. Since a vendor merely provides a commodity, the student need do nothing except passively receive the goods (wa Mwachofi et al., 1995, p. 2).

The distinction between quality seekers and bargain hunters has other implications for educational practice. Some students, never having been exposed to substantive academic work, may equate quality with ease and comfort. The resultant definition of quality renders education a one-way street: "The burden is on the 'vendor' to provide customer satisfaction" (wa Mwachofi et al., 1995, p. 2). Adopting the philosophy of the market, students may think "that a University education requires no more effort or involvement than making a purchase" (Rodeheaver, 1994, p. 2). Indeed, the language of passivity and spectatorship infuses talk about education. Students "attend" or "go to" college.
Rarely do discussions include how students might "contribute to" or "shape the future" of the institution. Students "get" or "receive" grades, diplomas, and degrees that institutions "give." More active verbs such as "earn" or "work for" hardly sprinkle conversations that bypass what one does to merit the rewards of an education.

Many, if not most, students want to become more active participants in their own education. But the consumer empowerment that accompanies marketplace language is illusory. Sacks (1996) contends that consumerism has transformed into "hyperconsumerism" by extending to realms heretofore unaffected by a consumption mentality, a sentiment shared by some communication scholars (Schwartzman, 1995; McMillan and Cheney, 1996; Cheney, 1998). Customer satisfaction might fuel the drive to improve quality, but the burden to adapt lies solely in the hands of the provider. Instead of a mutual transaction in the highest economic sense — with responsibility and accountability shared by customer and vendor — the market relationship becomes skewed. The designated seller constantly tries to adapt to customers, who have no obligation other than to express their preferences. In the realm of education, the model of a financial transaction translates into receipt of a product without the purchaser putting forth any effort (Sacks, 1996, p. 156). In fact, effort would reduce value because convenience counts as an advantage that makes the product more desirable. Sacks (1996) offers a vivid comparison: "Indeed, some consumers of education seem to invest no more personal responsibility in the transaction than a McDonald's..."
customer buying a Quarter Pounder with cheese” (p. 156).

Notwithstanding value-laden mission statements, the market mentality sidesteps the sense of responsibility and commitment at the heart of communication. Instead, “Education becomes an economic transaction for immediate personal gain, rather than individual transformation for self and community betterment that, at its best, liberates the student and may produce its most powerful results long after the student has left the classroom” (wa Mwachofi et al., 1995, p. 2). A market-driven model of communication emphasizes what students can “get out” of the market and other people. From its roots in the Greek polis, communication has attended (perhaps not exclusively, but emphatically) to how communicators can add to public life. The speaker’s moral habits were a dimension of ethos (Bitzer, 1959), which Aristotle identified as the most influential aspect of persuasion. Additionally, logos infused public deliberation with rationality, transforming physical aggression into argumentation. Whatever might have changed over the centuries, these constituents of communication do and should remain. We should not harbor illusions of altruistic persuaders defying all market pressures in a capitalist society. Nor should we adopt the cynical market mentality that values lie outside marketplace transactions. A healthier view of communication would take account of “real life” market concerns and “ivory tower” moral commitments.

Paradoxically, the same metaphoric framework that touts quality and consumer empowerment ends up devaluing the educational experience. Once the market becomes the primary source of educational initiatives,
education has only instrumental value. Kant and, much later, members of the Frankfurt School condemned reduction of people to means. Horkheimer (1974) associated such instrumental reason with the reduction of people to objects who could be manipulated at will to serve the ultimate goals of the manipulators. According to the instrumental ideal, the more an educational program can promote personal career goals, the more successful its graduates can be. Responsibility to others, which should increase as one acquires more wealth and power to wield influence, rarely gets attention aside from platitudes in institutional mission statements (Ehrlich, 1999, p. 8). Attention now turns to how market-based values inform communication education.

**Market Orientations Creep into Basic Communication Instruction**

In his 1969 National Book Award acceptance speech, Robert Jay Lifton ominously labeled the time “an age of numbing” (1970, p. 376). His words echoed the psychological effect he identified in survivors of the Nazi concentration camps and other catastrophes: “a cessation of feeling” (p. 198) that rendered many victims mere automatons who no longer exhibited empathy for fellow humans. Although far less extreme, the “speak your way to success” ethic fails to speak to the moral duties incumbent on communicators as functional members of a community.

As long as the consumers in some sense pay for an education, they supposedly have absolute sovereignty over how to dispose of it. The decision of how, when, or whether to consume, as well as the effects on others and
the environment, are value-neutral. Consumerism is simply amoral, with the individual consumer invested with authority to decide the ends and means of education (Cheney, 1998). The prevailing symbols of the marketplace and the consumer have become disconnected from participation in a functional democracy. In the “seduction of economic reductionism” (Cheney, 1998, p. 31), the language of economics provides a comprehensive explanation or justification without clarifying the values that might inform decisions. The basic communication course easily becomes an amoral laboratory to test techniques that can yield individual benefits rather than a forum for engaging students in the challenge to consider their mutual responsibilities (McMillan and Cheney, 1996). Consumerism finds ready company in the mentality of entitlement (Sacks, 1996, p. 161). If consumers are to be served, then they function as the recipients of whatever caters to their desires. Failure to meet these desires equates with being cheated or ill-served. The demand to satisfy individual desires leaves little room for deferring to the desires of others or recognizing that the consumer should give as well as get.

The market value of public speaking does infiltrate justifications for studying communication. Gronbeck et al. (1997) begin with an objective that promises intrinsic rather than market value: to build community and recognize diversity (pp. 5-10). Then the authors state: "Unless you have the speaking talents necessary to engage in committee discussions, presentations to clients, and interactions with your managers, you may be in trouble on the job" (p. 10). The text cites a study of “over one thousand corporate leaders” who identified
communication courses as the most useful in preparing students for a career (p. 10). The flip side receives attention as well (p. 10): “Put another way, far more people are fired due to an inability to communicate or handle basic human relations than are fired due to technical incompetence.” The first of the book’s many “Communication Datelines” highlighting research on a specific topic addresses “Communication and Your Career.” The insert points to communication as appropriate preparation for a number of careers. “No matter what you will do after graduation, think of communication skills training as training for your life’s work” (p. 19). Many students would consider the Gronbeck et al. (1997, pp. 10-11) discussion of communication’s career relevance to be more important than the more abstract principles of diversity.

Osborn and Osborn (1997) claim that the study of public speaking confers personal, social, and cultural benefits. Under personal benefits, the text lists “Growth as a Public Speaker” and “Practical Benefits.” The practical benefits include, but are not limited to, career advancement. Oral communication skills are critical to “success at work” and to “getting and holding a desirable position” (p. 7). The concepts of success and desirability remain undefined, but students presumably could equate both with financial gain, a principal sign of success.

An often cited reason to study public speaking is that effective oral communication can prove “essential for individual career success” (DiSanza and Legge, 2000, p. 3). At least one text observes, “The speaking industry is lucrative,” citing the steep appearance fees top professional speakers can garner (Wolvin, Berko, and Wolvin, Volume 13, 2001

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Better communicators tend to ascend the corporate ladder more rapidly. Essentially, improved speaking ability will enhance acquisitiveness and hopefully encourage inquisitiveness along the way. Indeed, many introductory texts treat communication as a way to serve the needs of the corporate environment. Public speaking skills can enhance "productivity and effectiveness" in the workplace (Wolvin, Berko, and Wolvin, 1999, p. 3). Businesses demand and reward articulate communication far more than education or hard work (Adler and Elmhorst, 1999, p. 3). Communication helps to motivate employees, adapt to organizational change, improve workplace creativity, and is central to management theory (DiSanza and Legge, 2000, pp. 1-3).

Beyond the realm of college textbooks, the market focus becomes more overt. Popular author Joan Detz (1992) entices readers to study public speaking by linking communication skills to success in the new millennium: "Now, as we move through the 90s toward the new century, the ability to give a good speech has become an absolutely critical skill — a skill that can provide business people with a competitive edge" (p. 1, emphasis in original). The competitive edge, an almost militaristic outmaneuvering of opponents in an adversarial environment, lies at the heart of Detz's vision of public speaking. "Read on . . . make notes . . . and learn how to prepare a powerful speech that will give you the competitive edge" (Detz, 1992, p. 2, emphasis in
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original). Interestingly, this comment immediately follows a remark that directs the benefits of public speaking toward the collective employer rather than toward to individual employees. Detz (1992) seeks "to show you how to write and give a speech that will produce solid, substantial benefits for your organization" (p. 2, emphasis in original). A Market (capitalized to indicate its regulative force) orientation suits the environment of economic scarcity. The Market represents the mother tongue of corporate America. To appease those who wield the purse strings, educators are implored to confirm rather than challenge the prevalent values of the Marketeers. Education thus is expected to reinforce the values and priorities of those who have economic power, and compliance is rewarded with financial support.

The educational method and ethic that informs some public speaking instruction is in effect an egosystem, a climate that focuses on individual achievement without the accompanying responsibility to others. The egosystem is an attenuated environment that makes the world of values coextensive with the self. Although the articulate speaker becomes empowered to take a stand on issues, that voice can be a solo performance (basking in the limelight) or one that invites additional dialogue.

**FROM EGOSYSTEM TO ETHOSYSTEM**

The ethosystem highlights the dimensions of interpersonal dialogue that can restore moral values to communication. As thinkers such as Gadamer (1975) have insisted, people cannot become detached from their
geographic surroundings, historical heritage, and personal commitments. The concept of the ethosystem is allied to its cognate, ecosystem. Like the physical environment, the ethosystem is always present and unavoidable. The individual encounters the natural habitat as a pre-established world. The world of values emerges the same way, as the unquestioned background assumptions that guide attitudes and actions. The unquestioned, however, is not unquestionable. Particular values that constitute the ethosystem can be doubted and altered but, like the ecosystem, the value-infused environment per se cannot be discarded at will. As many philosophers of science (e.g., Proctor, 1991) have observed, even the ideal of value-neutrality relies on objectivity as a core value. As discussed earlier, Emerson seems to buy intellectual independence at the price of civic engagement, perhaps because he maintains the individual thinker as his unit of analysis. Heidegger (1962) probably argues most aggressively for the contrary idea: no one is a lone individual but should be understood as being-in-the-world [in-der-Welt-sein] along with the social responsibilities that membership in the human community entails.

The following components of the ethosystem offer correctives to a narrow focus on market concerns in communication education. These emphases are far from new. In fact, they bear labels that recall longstanding rhetorical traditions. These traditions deserve further consideration because the market-based educational environment risks attenuating the study of communication to the point that its intellectual richness becomes measured by its contribution to economic profitability or immediate "consumer" satisfaction.
**Recover Ethos as a Communicative Partnership**

In the competitive economic environment, each communicator is an autonomous agent. One measure of a successful communicator may be the degree to which that person may “speak for one’s self,” thus gaining an authentic voice in the public forum. Adopting the language of management by objectives, “effective speakers make their choices strategically; through strategic planning they identify their goals and then determine how best to achieve them” (Zarefsky, 1999, p. 6; emphasis in original). Certainly a communicator wants to have a carefully crafted message, but the focus on strategic planning may obscure the audience’s role as anything other than a means to achieve an objective unrelated to the audience’s welfare. Indeed, the techniques of analyzing audiences place them in almost an antagonistic relation to the speaker who must take them into account. “Even though an audience can thus be a constraint on a speaker’s freedom, you can work with that constraint by careful audience analysis . . . ,” says one textbook (Zarefsky, 1999, p. 64).

The ethosystem could enrich the relationship between communicators and audiences. These added dimensions need not be limited to public speaking situations, although the theoretical groundwork was laid in the context of public speaking. The quality of communication could be gauged by the degree to which it empowers audiences (instead of viewing communication primarily as imposing constraints on speakers). Rather than functioning as instruments of a speaker’s
will, audiences should be recognized as potentially placing moral demands on the speaker that do not necessarily coincide with the speaker's own desires. This discovery of the audience as a moral agent compels the speaker to understand them as the end of the communicative effort, not simply the means for implementing the speaker's objectives. Such a view of the audience coincides with the interpretation Farrell (1993) offers of Aristotle. The very formulation of objectives must take into account, as a moral obligation, the recognition of others as moral agents. By recognizing the nature of the audience as something other than an aggregate of demographic and psychographic data to be manipulated, communication becomes relational. In this way, "it is rhetoric that removes us from the immediacy of familiar appearance, thereby allowing us to formulate conditions for appreciating the needs of others" (Farrell, 1993, pp. 70-71). The result is to shift the focus of communication away from the model of compliance-gaining, where the speaker tries to move an audience in the direction of a pre-determined goal. Rather than having an agenda for the audience, presuming "I know what's good for you," the audience is recognized as an extension of the speaker, capable of having the same emotional and cognitive reactions. Thus "emotions are themselves relational, allowing the sense of recognition we require whenever we are taken outside our own immediacy: from the neighborhood to the moral community. . . . Without rhetoric's intervention, we would have only the partiality of immediate interest, the familiar locale" (Farrell, 1993, p. 71).

In a market mentality, audiences are instrumental to achieving the speaker's objectives. The notion of ac-
countability reduces to efficacy — the extent to which compliance with the speaker’s desires was gained. The ability of an idea to “play” to an audience is the ultimate measure of its desirability. The market, therefore, becomes the universal arbiter of propriety. In the ethosystem, the communicator is answerable to the audience in the sense that decisions should be justified to stakeholders. Specifically, those who stand to be affected by discourse — regardless of whether they can benefit the speaker — are entitled to input. Such input goes beyond customer feedback, which applies only to those who are the objects of persuasion. In the ethosystem, accountability extends to everyone who stands to feel the impact of communication. The scope of accountability broadens considerably, thereby increasing the responsibility of communicators to multiple communities. In the marketplace, the seller’s primary obligation is to the consumer or client. In the ethosystem, the communicator is accountable in varying degrees to stakeholders who may not be shareholders. While the stakeholders encompass everyone who may be affected by discourse, the audience in the marketplace is the mechanism for achieving a desired outcome. In the ethosystem, audiences stake a claim to influence discourse because they may feel its effects, not simply because they can confer benefits to the speaker. The audience is a trusted partner of the speaker instead of a potentially hostile force to be manipulated or cajoled.

Develop Contextualized Dialogues

This essay has expressed reservations about the Emersonian model of the individual learner, reproduced
as the singular source in the Shannon-Weaver communication model that informs virtually every introductory public speaking textbook. One factor that contributes to communication reticence is, of course, the feeling of isolation — not liberation — that the lone speaker feels in preparing for and facing an audience. What might the ethosystem offer as a way to place communicators within an ongoing, cooperative conversation rather than a confrontation with audiences or situations and a zero-sum competition with other speakers?

Bakhtin furnishes an antiseptic against the atomistic communicator engaged in a quest to conquer the recalcitrant audience. Although Bakhtin offered his comments in relation to the novel, they bear equal relevance to oral communication, especially when he questions the value of stylistic virtuosity as “private craftsmanship” that “ignores the social life of discourse outside the artist’s study . . . ” (1981, p. 259). Bakhtin suggests revisiting the principles of “oft-neglected rhetoric” to restore the rich complexity to the relationship between speaker and language (1981, p. 267). For Bakhtin, two forces influence every utterance. The drive toward a “unitary language” that is monologic, a single, standardized voice (e.g., the unitary, reliable narrator or the depersonalized voice of scientific research) coexists with “social and historical heteroglossia,” the diverse ideologies, values, and lived histories that mitigate against telling the authoritative version of a story (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 272).

Bakhtin calls attention to the desirability of “dialogizing” language by restoring its interplay with radically diverse, “socially alien languages” whose con-
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glomeration can enrich understanding (1981, pp. 284-285). An important caveat is that these languages (not simply different tongues but different means of expression, such as literary genres) become more nuanced and more expressive by their coexistence. "Therefore languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 291), a point often lost on those who advocate a single, overarching model or metaphor as a description of communication. Heteroglossia serves as a reminder that the market is not the sole arbiter of communicative practice. The concept of heteroglossia also should raise suspicions about metaphoric bifurcation, as if communication should either obey or shun a market orientation. As Cicero revealed in De Oratore, the proper practice of rhetoric reconciles philosophical rigor with practical skill, borrowing and melding the principles espoused by Crassus and Antonius.

Perhaps most crucially for teaching communication, the concept of heteroglossia extinguishes the idea that communication is value-free (as in the Shannon-Weaver view) and springs ex nihilo as original utterances of a speaker. Alternatively,

language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293)
Retaining the gustatory metaphors, the educator’s task may be to restore the flavor to communication that has been boiled down to lexical and connotative blandness in the cultural melting pot. Speaking more practically, heteroglossia can incorporate diversity as part of the method of constructing presentations rather than as the mere tokenism of ethnic-sounding names in examples. Even when addressing a totally homogeneous audience, the listeners and presenter should be aware that the perspectives in the presentation take into account the larger context of diverse populations beyond those who are physically present or who wield the power to aid the speaker. No audience exists in a vacuum; everyone is embedded in and has a stake in a multicultural community (Goldzwig, 1998). Inclusion of speeches in progress could concentrate on how the same speech would change when the audience composition changes. None of the major public speaking textbooks contains an example of the same speech revised to appeal to different audiences. As a result, sensitivity remains an abstract imperative that students may have difficulty implementing.

Beyond adapting to diverse audiences, however, heteroglossia reminds speakers that their words are embedded in histories of usage and contested meanings. Although the concept of the source of communication seems unproblematic in the apparently value-free world of information theory, students should recognize that in many nations much ink and blood has been spilled in clashes to define who will count as a citizen and thereby qualify as a public voice in many nations. Furthermore, the choice of channels to communicate messages is influenced by who has the economic and social clout to

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access various media. The range of political viewpoints that can get television airtime is severely restricted by the ability of candidates to generate revenues. Even a third-party candidate such as Ross Perot was able to mount a challenge largely because his ample wealth enabled him to buy the time to broadcast his platform. Current concerns about the so-called “digital divide” raise similar questions about access to media — questions that place the elements of communication within the context of social class structure, economic empowerment, and other factors that extend beyond a single disciplinary or discursive framework.

**Recognize the Value of Silent Partnership**

Perhaps the most ubiquitous assumption that informs basic courses of every ilk can be labeled The Communication Mystique: the unquestionable commitment that oral communication is good, and the more communication the better. As Robert L. Scott (1993) has observed, the privileged value utterance has over silence may be simply cultural tunnel vision, since many Eastern cultures respect silence as a highly nuanced communicative act. The ease with which communication can be generated electronically also directs attention to message production, with silence receiving little notice. At a glance, silence seems valueless, an impediment to effective communication. Silence is often treated as an obstacle to be overcome, hence the desire of new acquaintances to “keep conversation going” at all costs (McLaughlin & Cody, 1982). The need to continue speaking induces the utterance of any comment, often without regard to its relevance or importance. Guests at
a party feel uncomfortable when the crowd momentarily hushes for no apparent reason.

Silence, however, need not be ignored. J. Vernon Jensen (1973) and Richard L. Johannesen (1974), for example, recommend devoting more attention to silence as a communicative phenomenon, and Henry Johnstone (1978) advises that silence can function rhetorically. Peter Ehrenhaus (1988) answers the plea to research silence by examining how silence functions as tribute in the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

Attention to the significance of silence can serve as an antidote for The Communication Mystique. Cultivating an appreciation for silence as a sign of respect and deference for others highlights the ethical dimension of listening. Rather than the mere absence of speech, silence signifies the willingness to recognize someone else as worthy of attention. The act of silent contemplation, as in silent prayer, counters the quest for power over others through words. Instead, deliberate silence acknowledges the willingness to receive the gift of another person’s speech. Deliberate suspension of judgment could represent the first step toward mutual understanding because as long as the silence lasts, interlocutors need not engage in the struggle to be heard. Indeed, the rush to generate more messages, with its nadir exemplified by televised talk shows or “debates” that are little more than shouting matches, calls for some intermission. Silence offers the chance to reflect and at least momentarily allow the pace of interpretation to catch up with the frenzy of information production.

Communication teachers should encourage productive rather than passive silence. Students who sleep
during class, for example, are not productively silent. When used effectively, silence can send powerful messages. Silent protest can show profound disagreement; silent respect may be the only proper display of awe before a higher power (as in "Silent Night, Holy Night"). Greater appreciation for silence might cast some light on the silent classrooms that teachers interpret as signs of student apathy. Perhaps this silence represents a more active refusal to partake of educational activities that seem irrelevant to student experiences and expectations. Greater fluency in the messages of silence could instill greater sensitivity toward other communicators and provide a respite from the overwhelming barrage of words. When an argument becomes acrimonious, the remedy may be a resort to silence instead of accelerating the production of words that may magnify misunderstanding.

**Affirm the Practice, Not Just the Business, of Communication**

During a time that language of the marketplace has supplanted discourse of the *polis*, when students are described as customers instead of learners (Schwartzman, 1995; McMillan and Cheney, 1996) and economic acquisitiveness overshadows intellectual inquisitiveness, it is refreshing to find some recognition of public speaking as a cooperative rather than a corporate venture. Osborn and Osborn (1997) replace the venerable Shannon and Weaver (1949) mathematical model of communication — depersonalized sources, receivers, signals, and noise — with the portrayal of communicators as climbers attempting to erode and
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ascend the mountain of interference. Later, Osborn and Osborn describe students as builders who must choose the most appropriate and durable organizational structures. Finally, students become weavers of arguments as they interlace different types of proof and supporting material into a sustainable position.

Osborn and Osborn’s metaphors have important pedagogical implications. In the tradition of Emersonian and masculine self-reliance, students are customarily urged to “do their own work” by crafting presentations in an intellectual vacuum. The metaphors in Public Speaking share a central quality: if taken seriously, they require students to enlist the aid of others. Mountain climbing is riskiest when attempted alone. One person usually does not have all the skills needed to build a house. Durable fabrics are woven from blends of material. Rather than dwell on the metaphors themselves, teachers and students might concentrate on the process-oriented approach to communication they imply.

Perhaps the most crucial lesson from these metaphors is that they should fuel the intellectual curiosity to experiment. Climbing, building, and weaving are not one-shot attempts. The very nature of those activities prepares us for occasional falls, structural collapses, and tearing along the way. Classrooms need to be “safe zones” where students can experiment and fail without becoming failures. A mountain climber never places all her weight on a new foothold; the speaker should experiment with different approaches before settling on one that has withstood the scrutiny of sample audiences. Textbooks can assist in this task by including more examples of presentations as works in progress.
English composition texts show draft after draft of the same essay as it evolves into a finished product. Similarly, public speaking textbooks should show the stages through which a presentation develops.

Just as a novice quilter would be discouraged by seeing only finished, exquisitely crafted quilts, an inexperienced speaker needs to discover how to approach the level of the speeches included as samples in the texts. Chapters on presentational aids, for example, might show several possible ways to illustrate a point in a speech, then explain why one option should be chosen over others. In a word, our textbooks need to foster the spirit of creative experimentation by showing how speakers might try many methods — and sometimes fail — to communicate. Perhaps the process of communication deserves greater attention by delving into the changes speakers make as their preparation progresses. If I. A. Richards (1991) accurately described rhetoric as “a study of misunderstanding and its remedies” (p. 106), then students need to see more of the trials and errors involved in climbing toward, building, and weaving communication. Consideration of the ethosystem serves as a reminder that communicators are in practice, not just in business.

**Cultivate Communities of Caring Communicators**

What measures might be taken to restore humanity to students, empowering them to be communicators rather than presenters? This distinction is vital, since the etymological root of “communication” is to contribute to collaborative human interaction. That objective
sounds quite distant from the presenter who acts as a conduit for conveying an image that will lend a competitive advantage to an individual or organization.

Success at achieving personal goals carries with it a responsibility toward others. Skill at public speaking does enable people to express themselves and to impress those who can confer material rewards such as higher salaries and promotions. Becoming a more articulate public speaker, however, also should encompass greater awareness of the populations whose interests often are not articulated in public forums. The obligations of a public speaker need not entail speaking on behalf of others, but rather to increase awareness of the often-overlooked stakeholders in communicative acts. Minimally, a communicator's success might be judged by how well s/he takes into account people who do not have power to contribute to career advancement. This version of success invokes the virtue of caring, which is praiseworthy precisely because it is directed toward people beyond one's own family, friends, or immediate associates (Todorov, 1996, p. 82). While solidarity with one's family or coworkers is expected, the caring communicator extends consideration to people beyond such in-groups. Care configures people who are disempowered or overlooked as worthy of consideration by speakers, thereby recognizing and ennobling them as stakeholders who deserve to be taken into account.

Perhaps the climbers envisioned by Osborn and Osborn (1997) also should be excavators, digging to destabilize antiquated assumptions and damaging stereotypes. As excavators, students would be called upon to unearth taken-for-granted exclusion or marginalization of certain populations. In other words, communication

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might broaden from enhancing individual careers to encouraging communities of carers.

The introductory communication course offers a forum to practice ways of interacting that yield more than individual benefits. Ethical obligations bind speakers and listeners into a community. The role of each student as classmates, trying to achieve independently or perhaps competitively versus other students, transforms into something very different in the ethosystem. The act of public speaking draws speakers and listeners into a web of mutual caring. Attention to the ethosystem could combat depersonalization by re-personalizing the communicative environment. The basic course may play an important role in repopulating the ethosystem with people who respect each other, who hold each other in high enough regard to treat them as something other than means for (or impediments to) personal advancement. The basic course classroom should be the site to build communities of communicators.

This atmosphere of caring civility approaches what Tönnies (1957) envisions as a community [Gemeinschaft], which he contrasts with a society [Gesellschaft]. Societies are incidental relationships that place people alongside each other without establishing a mutual bond. Societies are common in business, for example, and the social ties of such alliances are transitory (Tönnies, 1957, pp. 33-35). In social environments, people function alongside each other out of expediency or external necessity, such as pooling resources to accomplish a task. A society consists of people whose unity may occur in spite of their essential separateness. A community exemplifies exactly the opposite condition.
Societies often require contracts and formal rules to prevent their dissolution. Communities exist as units, their dissolution tending to result from external forces such as conquest, cultural assimilation, or environmental changes.

Tönnies (1957, pp. 42-44) identifies friendship, for example, as a kind of community that enables people who are not bound by blood ties to feel united. Friends are "united by a spiritual bond and the co-operation in a common task" (Tönnies, 1957, p. 44). Less metaphysically, friendships develop when a social situation creates a state of interdependence among people. Tönnies uses religious rites as an example because they place worshippers in the collective service of a deity. Rituals therefore are communal to the extent that all participants have roles that call for others to assume their roles that are necessary for the observance to take place. Participation in the ritual identifies the participant as part of the ceremony, not as an individual who is taking part but literally as a component of the ritual’s enactment (Campbell, 1988). Thus we speak of ‘communal rites.’ Perhaps it is time to revive the communal rite of public speaking. The basic course could be a site where solidarity arises from mutual dedication to the moral challenges that inform public communication.

CONCLUSION

The terminology a field uses to describe itself says volumes about the values it embraces. The free-market competition among and within institutions of higher learning might offer a significant benefit to students by...
enhancing their choices among alternatives. Theoretically, the quality of services should improve as competition increases and each competitor must outdo the offerings of its rivals. Certainly the consumer could be configured as a chooser, selecting the best alternative from the range of available choices (Gabriel & Lang, 1995). The limitation of this choice, however, is that the relationship between provider and selector presumes an economic model of consumer choice. When choosing the best value, "roles as citizens, creators, or even activists with independent will and a sense of direction" (Rushkoff, 1999, p. 109) tend to be placed within an economic framework that insufficiently accounts for educational values, objectives, and processes.

An important first step in countering the prevalence of a market orientation is to denaturalize the metaphor. Some metaphors have become so customary that their predications remain unquestioned and their employment unreflective. Any adoption of a metaphor represents one choice among many possible metaphoric and literal descriptive alternatives. Each descriptive option implicates discursive rules and practices attendant to its use. No metaphoric description is automatic. Its adoption and use are voluntary, although a particular metaphoric framework may be "given" in the sense that its embeddedness in custom may make it seem to be the "only" choice. Douglas Rushkoff, an ebullient early endorser of electronic communication as a way to create greater human community and more savvy media critics, now laments the interpenetration of commerce and friendship. With even the wide-open frontier of cyberspace succumbing to commercial appropriation, Rushkoff (1999) warns that friends may be able to
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relate to each other only as potential clients, while apparent friends may be using affability as a guise for making money (p. 62).

To escape from the tyranny of metaphors, it might help to explore alternative metaphoric frameworks. For example, Sontag's (1990) recommendation simply to stop using metaphors that glorify disease carries little force unless some other descriptive means are available to clarify whatever falls within that metaphoric domain. Greater consciousness of the language used to discuss educational practices might not constitute educational reform, but it is an important step in rethinking educational practice. Analysis of how issues such as the student's role in society are framed linguistically "can perhaps point to the need for a struggle to develop such a new 'language' as a key element in building resistance to marketization without simply falling back on tradition" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 159) and without dogmatically reasserting the immunity of education from economic concerns.

To resist the hegemony of one family of metaphors and to restore the breadth of imagination that an ingrained metaphoric framework may have narrowed, metaphors should be treated as provisional and not exhaustive. Rather than introduce alternative metaphors, the task here is to press embedded metaphors to their limits. At what point do the accepted metaphors break down as accurate descriptions? Tensional theories of metaphor stress that metaphors highlight similarities but also call forth differences between figurative language and what it describes (Wheelwright, 1962). By observing dissimilarities as well as resemblances between commercial markets and education, the

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metaphor does not become reified as a complete, literal description of reality. In this way, the almighty Market no longer serves as the ultimate arbiter of values in education. The stakes are large, especially if education is to serve as more than training to acquire money. "If the ultimate aim of education is to encourage human flourishing, the arts and sciences must embody a vision of human life that transcends the economic" (O'Donovan-Anderson, 1999). The values attendant to considering the ethosystem may open the path to such transcendence.

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