

Practically Theorizing Theory and Practice

John Stewart and Karen Zediker

Our goal in these pages is to explore the central relationship that this workshop “works,” the connection between theory and practice. It is clear that the received view—that the two are separate, that theory guides practice, and that practice applies and tests theory—helps create the problems that this workshop is designed to mitigate. We’ve learned that another view—that theorizing is articulate praxis—can substantially enrich the communication experience of professionals and laypersons.

The communities that present the two of us with opportunities to work the connection between theory and practice on almost a daily basis are our classrooms. In these communities, one of the greatest and ultimately most satisfying challenges is to help students understand and articulate the relationship between the two as interdependent and holistic. It’s a challenge because we have to resist several impressions that students bring. Most have unreflectively adopted the tendencies of their teachers to separate the more intellectually difficult “theoretical” parts of chemistry, political science, economics, and communication from the more straightforward and less academically rigorous “practical” ones. Many have enjoyed the service learning, experiential, and internship credits they’ve earned while they have struggled with the philosophical, conceptual, and theoretical content of other courses. Some students in their twenties have heard their parents complain about trainers and seminar presenters at work who waste employees’ time with programs that focus on abstract theory and ignore the concrete practices of their jobs, and some returning students have personal experiences with this problem. As a result of influences like these, a clear majority of our

students understand theory and practice to be separate and distinct, feel uncomfortable with (which often means, are afraid of) theoretical course content, and strongly prefer application, practice, and skill-development.

In her public speaking course, Karen works toward changing these preferences and integrating theory and practice partly by requiring students to plan their talks as contributions to specific conversations. After selecting a topic, students are not asked to move directly to a thesis statement or toward plotting lines of argument, because that would be jumping the gun. Their first assignment is to identify important conversational threads in the literature about the topic they plan to explore. They compare and contrast similarities and differences in perspectives, as well as the ways standpoints are influenced by the agendas of those who articulate them. As they juxtapose what they learn with their own perspective, students are able to determine where they want to enter the conversation. In addition, by talking with and especially listening to classmates, student speakers can assess how their potential contributions might fit ongoing classroom conversations. These efforts position students to decide what they want to say to these specific listeners. As they develop their speeches, students are asked to continue to evaluate how their own experiences shape their arguments and to consider how members of their audience might influence their claims, evidence, and reasoning.

These pedagogical moves do more than enforce the requirement to “review the literature.” They also integrate theory and practice in two ways. First, they obviously require students to marshal theoretical principles of audience adaptation, discourse structure, language choice, etc. as responses to specific practical concerns—for example, whether to use an inductive or a deductive sequence of ideas at this point in this conversation with these

listeners. But more importantly and less obviously, this approach requires students to engage as embodied agents the conversational threads that ground and frame their principled concerns. The approach foregrounds biographical elements that are relevant to speech goals and builds into the speech the living praxis where the central theoretical concepts, for example, about the rights of prisoners or the ethics of casual sex, live and breathe. In these ways, this approach underscores the pervasive and intimate relationship between abstractions and concrete transactions, between principles and actual events, between theory and practice.

But the public speaking course is too easy a case, right? It is so obviously about the marriage of theory and practice that one communication scholar (Craig, 1989) makes applied rhetoric his first exemplar of practical theorizing. So let's see if this approach can work in the more difficult case that engages us now—our writing and your reading of what Kevin Barge calls “The first strand [of the workshop], theory, consist[ing] of academic presentations by the participants.” We've been asked by the workshop organizers to make this writing a theory move and, given our conviction about the topic of the workshop, we'd like to try to make it both “theoretical” and “practical.” As a first step toward this goal, we'll follow Karen's advice to her students and sketch some of the lines of the conversation that frame our contribution here.

Parts of the Ongoing Conversation

We notice two stories about the relationship between theory and practice in the print and living discourse. Story #1 is the received view that we've already sketched. According to this story, theory and practice are separate phenomena linked in a linear and often causal way. First one develops theory and then one applies it in a practical context, and theories are best tested by how successfully they predict and control practice. This story efficiently

separates the primary concerns of “town” and “gown,” and it includes a strongly evaluative component. From an academic perspective, theory is much preferred over practice, and for non-academics the reverse is true—a little theory can be helpful, but too much of it is definitely a waste of time. One indication of the plausibility of this story is the existence of one prestigious ICA journal dedicated to Communication Theory and another, often less highly-regarded one for Applied Communication Research. This story also grounds the perspective of individuals like one of our past colleagues who felt that it was a waste of his time to explain the practical relevance or application of his courses’ theoretical content. He believed that students’ inability to comprehend the connections between the theory he taught and daily communicative practice was a sign of the intellectual rigor of the classes he taught, and he took pride in the fact that only a few of his best students understood the point of his courses. Students whom he had converted to his view actually believed that the only courses that were truly “rigorous” were those they didn’t understand. Although he might be an extreme case, we suspect that everyone reading this knows professional colleagues who widely separate and differentially evaluate the Charles Bergers and Leslie Baxters from the Larry Freys and Julia Woods in the communication discipline. We’re even willing to bet that it would be easy for most of us to put a “T” or a “P” next to the name of each person on the list of workshop participants, and that, if we did, we’d discover considerable agreement. So Story #1 is clearly alive and well.

Story #2 outlines a significantly different relationship between theory and practice. As several recent works emphasize, some Greek Sophists first developed important parts of this story, and Aristotle fruitfully worked the theory-practice relationship with several of his central constructs, especially phronesis, techne, poiesis, and praxis (See Carr, 1995; Dunne,

1993; Gadamer, 1981, 1989; Lobkowitz, 1967, 1977; Schwandt, 1997). As Carr (1995) explains, for Aristotle and many of his contemporaries, poiesis was a “making action,” what Max Weber later called “purposive-rational” action, and what many now term “instrumental action.” This was contrasted with praxis, which was also action directed toward the achievement of some end, but the end is not to produce a specific product but to realize some morally worthwhile good. Examples of praxis include strategic planning and electing a leader. For these Greeks, praxis was not a neutral instrument or method but an inherent part of whatever is “done.” Thus praxis could not be understood as a form of technical expertise, because identification of the good which constitutes its end is inseparable from a discernment of its mode of expression. In other words, praxis intimately joined an abstract (theoretical) good with concrete actions (practices) that more or less effectively embodied it.

Because of these differences, poiesis relied on the kind of knowledge that Aristotle called techne, and praxis relied on the kind of knowledge that Aristotle called phronesis. Techne consisted of instrumental moves that produced predictable products and that could be organized into a technology (a logos of techne). On the other hand, a primary feature of phronesis was that it continually mediates between the universal (theoretical) and the particular (practical), between generalizations supported by cultural understandings and specific responses to the particularities of the case at hand (Dunne, 1993, pp. 362-363). These definitions and distinctions led Aristotle’s understanding of social theory to be intimately related to practice. They also motivate our inclination to use the term praxis to talk about the interwoven theory-and-practice we are essaying here.

Hans-Georg Gadamer is an influential contemporary teller of this story. Gadamer explicates how Aristotle’s works contribute to an understanding of the relationship between

theory and practice not only in social theory but also across the disciplines. As Dunne (1993) clarifies, “Aristotle’s schema appeals to Gadamer in the first instance because it gets us away from the modern conception of theory as generalized lawlike knowledge and of practice, then, as the domain where this theory is exploited or applied” (p. 157). For Gadamer (1989), understanding is an ontological dynamic, the human’s way of being-in-the-world, and understanding or interpretation is always already a practice. “It is not that interpretations may become practical by being applied in some ‘really practical’ context, but rather that they are practical anyhow since they arise within a prior engagement which is never detached and they are already an ‘application’ in the sense of a modification of the stand that one takes in the world” (Dunne, 1993, p. 156, italics added). This is precisely the sense of understanding that Karen’s public speaking pedagogy embodies. Students are required to acknowledge and articulate the “prior engagements” that help constitute the stand they are taking between their subject matter and their listeners. So both their rhetorical theory and their content theory are acknowledged as always already practical or applied.

Gadamer (1981) summarizes his understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in words that effectively preview recent versions of this story authored by communication scholars:

As far as hermeneutics is concerned it is quite to the point to confront the separation of theory from practice entailed in the modern notion of theoretical science and practical-technical application with an idea of knowledge that has taken the opposite path leading from practice toward making it aware of itself theoretically (p. 131, italics added).

Bob Craig and Vern Cronen are two communication professionals who have been pointing the discipline toward an Aristotelian-Gadamerian understanding of practical theory for at least a decade (Also see Campbell, 1998). In his “Communication as a Practical Discipline” chapter (1989) Bob understands his conversation partners to be, among others, Gadamer, John Dewey, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jürgen Habermas, and Richard Bernstein. Bob’s central claim is that “what is most interesting and distinctive about [this] field . . . is that communication is a practical discipline” (p. 97). This means that the field’s “essential [sic] purpose is to cultivate communicative praxis, or practical art, through critical study” (p. 98). It means that in this discipline, as Aristotle and Gadamer recognize, theory consists of articulated practice; that is, it is made up of constructs and principles designed to account for the practices of skilled practitioners. As Bob (1992) puts it, “practical theory is an idealized, rational reconstruction of practice” (p. 52. Cf. Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 252 and Gadamer, 1981, p. 131). He argues that practical theory—which is “the theoretical work of a practical discipline—takes shape in a dialectic of theory and practice, comprises a detailed technical account of practice, and fosters philosophical reflection revealing central principles, issues emergent in ongoing dialogue, and fundamental dilemmas” (1989, pp. 116-117).

Bob and Karen Tracy contend that both scientific and humanistic models are inappropriate for the discipline of communication, because they do not focus centrally on “the cultivation of communicative praxis” (p. 118). They also spell out some implications of this central construct:

Practical action depends on an interpretive understanding of situations and requires deliberation about purposes and moral standards (normative reflection) as well as means (technical rationality). The term praxis has come into use as a way of

emphasizing this fuller conception of practice as reflectively informed, morally accountable human action (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 249).

They note that “the ultimate test of such a practical theory is not, then, like scientific theory, its capacity to explain an existing reality but rather its usefulness for practice and reflection” (Craig & Tracy, 1995, p. 252).

Vern Cronen (1994, 1995a, 1995b) is the other communication scholar who has most insightfully and helpfully essayed Story #2’s version of the theory-practice relationship. In one work (Cronen, 1995a) Vern contextualizes the view of theory as articulate practice in Dewey’s conviction that “understanding society must be developed from real, situated interactions of embodied persons, rather than facile appeals to forces of class, history, or institutions” (p. 33). Vern also emphasizes that “communication is not a phenomenon based on a singular transcendental logic [grand theory], but is the locus of action, wherein different kinds of connections emerge to be extended, critiqued, changed, or discarded” (p. 44). He concludes there that “the point of a social theory . . . should be practical in the sense that it informs our ability to describe, interpret, critique, and influence real communication processes” (p. 61).

In the chapter provided to participants in this workshop, Vern highlights five defining features of practical theory: First, that it “is concerned with the way embodied persons in the real world act together to create patterns of practice that constitute their forms of life,” second that practical theory “provides an evolving grammar” for discursive and conversational practices, third that these practices “constitute a family of methods for the study of situated social action,” fourth that “practical theories are assessed by their consequences,” and finally that “a practical theory coevolves with both the abilities of its

practitioners and the consequences of its use, thus forming a tradition of practice” (Cronen, 1995b, pp. 232-233).

As we indicated at the start of this paper, our primary goal here is to hold our feet to the fire that has been stoked by the tellers of story #2—Aristotle, Gadamer, Dunne, Craig, Cronen, the authors they cite, and Kevin Barge and his workshop organizers. We want our contributions to this workshop to integrate what we believe is still often misunderstood as the separate realms of theory and practice. We are motivated by the continuing presence of aspects of story #1 in even the discourse of efforts like this workshop to develop story #2—as in the request that the pre-workshop writing that you are presently reading be “theory. . . consist[ing] of [an] academic presentation.” If the theory-practice relationship is worth (re)working, and we firmly believe it is, then we believe it is worth reworking in this writing and in our contributions to this workshop.

We’ve tried to begin living into Story #2 by framing our comments explicitly as a contribution to an ongoing conversation consisting of utterances in ordinary language authored by concrete individuals who, when we know them, we’ve referred to by first name. We’ve also identified individual parts of our co-authored discourse, given some concrete examples of abstract notions, and generally tried to engage as embodied agents the conversational threads that ground and frame our concerns.

These efforts are difficult partly because, as phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists have known for some time, it isn’t easy to make the implicit explicit and still make sense, or to render lucidly processes grounded in embedded assumptions and fraught with recursive loops. Discourse with these goals is often confusing and anything but parsimonious. We’re also challenged by a version of the bootstrap problem. Efforts to

change ways of doing theory and practice are forced to use the very vocabulary and grammar that help constitute the problems we're working to overcome. It is only possible to reconceptualize a configuration of constructs from inside aspects of the very configurations being worked. This helps account for Bob's and Vern's term "practical theory," which is useful in that it helps move toward integration, but also can help reinscribe the problem if it is understood to indicate that they are proposing a new kind of theory to be contrasted with the "impractical" kind.

At the same time, there are benefits to counter-balance the difficulties inherent in this effort. To the extent that misleading distinctions between theory and practice can be overcome, a common grammar can be developed to promote conversations among the range of professionals attending this workshop—and in this discipline. Not only can this grammar reduce the stigma that often shadows "practitioners," but it can also broaden the audience and enhance the value-added of "theorists" contributions. Diverse voices focused on common problems can engage a grammar or language of praxis in collaborative meaning-making.

An integrated understanding also has the potential to reduce the fear and scorn of theory among students and clients and the disdain for practice among purist academics. Since they are inherently praxical, communicative engagements consist of both abstract—conceptual/ethical—and concrete—situated/actional—dimensions, so discourse about them ought to be similarly multi-dimensional. When the relationship between theory and practice is understood to be hermeneutic—constituting a spiral or helix of moves between part and whole—and when theory is understood as articulate practice, it will be easier to appreciate the contributions of both to full human understanding.

In Summary So Far

Up to this point we have introduced our concerns, reflected on the conversation we are joining, and sketched some difficulties and benefits of engaging this topic these ways. But you might have concluded that we seem to have said more about what we are doing here than we have “done it.” You might be asking, “Where’s the beef? Where’s the content about theory and practice that’s promised in the first paragraph?” If this is part of your response, you’re helping us make one of our main points.

Framing moves are frequently viewed as ancillary and truncated, especially in academic presentations, partly because they threaten “objectivity.” But we’ve come to believe that serious writing always has biographical and autobiographical components. Embodied persons choose topics, develop research and consulting agendas, manifest preferences for learning and teaching strategies and tactics, and follow threads in what strike them as promising directions. These biographical elements help constitute the living praxis where ideas breathe, and “theory” and “practice” will only be integrated, we’re convinced, when these elements consistently and fully enter the discourse of communication professionals. As Bakhtin (1986) elegantly emphasizes, none of us is Eve or Adam, and all of what we say and do is responsive to what precedes it in our lived experience. Gadamer (1989) agrees when he emphasizes that human prejudices must not simplistically be viewed as biases to be overcome, because they constitute the ground of every understanding that constitutes us. Humans can only understand through the judgments they already own (their pre-judgments or prejudices). As a result, when relevant autobiographical elements are absent or truncated, listeners cannot know what speakers or writers are responding to and how their experiences influence these responses. Discourse about our picture of the

conversation we are entering constitutes the practical frame into which we are presently writing. We make these moves at some length because they help clarify how our theorizing and our practices are integrated in the praxis we are sketching here. In brief, we argue that one way to help integrate theory and practice is, in both professional speech and professional writing, to articulate explicitly, in some detail, and with a sense of ownership, the living praxis where the concepts or ideas being discussed move and breathe.

Objectivists might resist this advice because it compromises rigor and threatens dispassionate generalizing. But consider what's known about how people learn. As Harvard education professor Richard Elmore (1991) summarizes,

one insight from the current research is that all learning is contextual in at least three senses: new knowledge is acquired by extending and revising prior knowledge, new ideas acquire meaning when they are presented in a coherent relationship to one another, and knowledge becomes usable when it is acquired in situations that entail applications to concrete problem-solving" (p. xiv).

In other words, research by educators indicates that people naturally, characteristically, and typically connect new concepts and insights to learnings they've already appropriated, integrate the parts of a new understanding into a coherent whole, and search for how to apply new ideas. Why not discuss both "theory" and "practice" in ways that fit—or exploit—these human tendencies?

Praxical teaching, as we understand it, integrates "theory" and "practice" consistently, and across the curriculum. It acknowledges that all theorizing (theory development, theory analysis and criticism, theory application) is context-dependent and that this context is multivocal—shaped by a variety of more-or-less effectively articulated standpoints. By

calling it multivocal we emphasize again that it is emergent from diverse biographies, voiced, and therefore ethically freighted. This context implicates personally- and professionally-practical concerns, centrally including interests in the “So what?” and “What’s next?” questions. In other words, theorizing is carried out by persons collaboratively acting into and out of concrete and moral situations with identifiable consequences.

The more abstract and the more concrete parts of theorizing are related hermeneutically—from part to whole and back again. The practical concerns that motivate and constrain theorizing fold back onto its generalizing language in recursive loops that only have beginnings and ends when interlocutors punctuate them that way. As Gadamer (1989) notes about “play,” there is no beginning- or end-point of this process and no final resolution of its animating tensions. It helps students in our classes to understand clearly that, because of the inherently emergent quality of human life, communication theorists don’t yet “have it right,” and they never will.

In addition to being biographical and hermeneutic, a third important feature of this context is that it is linguistic in the senses that are developed by Wittgenstein (1953), Heidegger (1971), Gadamer (1989), Volosinov/Bakhtin (1973), Rorty (1979), and Stewart (1995). This is to say that the context is built in communicating and passed from one collaborative group to the next discursively. The context of praxis (theory↻practice) is verbally and nonverbally spoken-and-listened into being, which means that it constitutes a culture. When teachers help students learn this way of orienting to course materials, they are helping them broaden their own culture and live into a related one. Barnett Pearce (1989) insightfully and usefully labels this a cosmopolitan perspective and contrasts it with more ethnocentric ones.

How Do We Do Praxis in Our Communities?

If you job-shadowed either of us, you'd discover that we spend the lion's share of our work hours the same ways most academics do—reading, teaching, writing, and consulting. As we've already sketched, we attempt to embody Story #2 in our writing in at least four ways. First, we frame our subject matter praxically, which means that we try to identify how we analytically and experientially approach our subject matter and where we experience our topics living and breathing. In other words, we include relevant features of our biographies that function as the context for our discourse. Second, we attempt to engage our conversation partners—especially authors of sources we cite and our prospective readers—as the embodied interactors they are. We relate as fully interpersonally as it is possible with individuals making up both groups. Obviously there are limitations; Wittgenstein is dead, Rorty is on another campus, and we haven't yet met some workshop participants. But Wittgenstein's and Rorty's biographies are as relevant to our understanding of their works as ours are to yours. We're continually aware that Kevin, Will, Vern, Stan, Barnett, Kim, Tarla, Sallyann, and several others we don't know will be reading this. We try to write with this point at hand, and to personalize the writing however we can. Third, we attempt to 'write with our ears,' to put something approaching conversation on the page. This effort, too, is limited by the obvious constraints of time and medium, but we want to draw you (second-person pronoun, rather than third) into our thinking-out-loud as much as we can. Fourth, we cast our case as unfinished and write into it an explicit invitation to respond. These moves help constitute praxical writing as a ☯ joining of theory and practice.

We also attempt to live this view of theory and practice in our classrooms. As we indicated earlier, our choice is to privilege the second story over the more traditionally

expressed version in our talk, and much of our conversation takes place with students in our courses. We make a point to acknowledge that each of our classes is about theory and application. While some may be labeled in the curriculum guide as “theory” courses and others as “practical,” “skill-building,” or “applied,” we believe that everything we teach embodies both. For example, in both the first year introduction to interpersonal communication course, and the senior level course titled Communication Models and Theories, we show students how theory can be understood as articulated practice and how day-to-day communicative practice gives birth to new theoretical questions and interpretations. There are many ways the story gets told in the syllabus, the selection and reading of texts, assignments and exam questions, classroom discussion, and the ways we model connections for the students in lecture and illustrations.

Consider the syllabus, for example. Many teachers view their course syllabus as a contract in which teachers detail their expectations of students for the course, and outline what the students can expect throughout the term. We have found that the syllabus is also a good site to offer a concrete contribution to the conversation about theory and practice. In Karen’s syllabi she articulates her own perspective on the course and offers specific suggestions for how students can fruitfully engage with the authors of their texts and with each other. For example, under the heading “Course Description” for the Communication Models and Theories course she is teaching this quarter, Karen writes the following to her students:

SPCH 476 is a five-credit course that presents an overview of communication theories. We will read and discuss chapters on the nature of theory and inquiry as well as survey the major topics of communication theory in the discipline. In addition to learning about the different theoretical perspectives, we will be developing experiential understanding and exploring applications of theory both in research and day-to-day communicating. Through readings, class discussions, and individual

analysis of specific communication phenomena, you should become more articulate about both the approaches manifest in the readings and your own perspective on theory in practice. By the end of this course, you should not only be able to identify and describe the theoretical traditions central to the communication discipline, but also be able to substantiate the claim that theorizing is a natural human condition and not something to be avoided at all costs.

The success of student learning in this class will rely heavily on your preparation and willingness to actively participate in class discussion. Interpretations of, questions about, and challenges to readings will provide the basis for class discussion. I expect that each of you will bring to the class your own perspectives, but that you will be open to the views and positions of others as they engage in reflective analysis of the theoretical approaches to communication presented throughout the quarter. I trust that you will enter this course with an openness that allows you to develop and/or re-evaluate your current perspectives and beliefs about communication theory. I do not expect each of you to whole-heartedly accept and adopt all of the ideas presented in this course. In fact, I encourage you to bring your questions and challenges to the course material so that together we can engage in the kind of dialogue which may result in a greater level of understanding for all. I do expect, however, that you will have a greater understanding about communication theory and its manifestations in practical experience, and about the ways in which your own experience serves to illuminate and generate theoretical development.

These syllabus paragraphs illustrate several of the concepts we have discussed. By explicitly stating that theorizing is part of the natural human condition and indicating that students have already developed perspectives on theory in practice, Karen helps them understand that theorizing is a tangible rather than an abstract process. She also introduces the idea that voice plays an important role in conversations about praxis. Both the students' in-class contributions and the theorists they read, embody points of view open for discussion and debate. This move helps students see communication theories as praxis—ethical products that rely on the hermeneutic play between the universal and particular characteristic of phronesis or practical wisdom.

The syllabus section devoted to readings emphasizes how praxis is conversational.

I encourage you to engage with the texts with a critical ear - as you might listen to a speech or lecture. Ask yourself which parts of the material presented by the author you understand clearly and which sections remain unclear to you. The texts are not provided as a pool of information for you to absorb, but as a resource

from which you may draw. In my opinion, for you to learn from the text, you will need to bring your current understandings to it and engage with the authors in "conversation" as you might with me and your other colleagues in class. Much of what you read will not be repeated in lectures, but you are encouraged to offer questions or comments from your reading as agenda items for class.

This contribution to the conversation with her students underscores themes of multi-vocality (students will engage with multiple conversational partners including the scholars they read, their peers and their instructor), the embodiment of perspectives (someone has something to say), and active participation rather than passive observance (praxis involves engaging with ideas rather than accepting and memorizing facts). Karen's discourse also introduces the notion that critical engagement with differing opinions can and should be done in respectfully responsive ways.

Text selection, as any teacher knows, also strongly influences the shape and development of a course. When selecting texts for her classes, Karen makes the point to choose books that provide students with the opportunity to struggle with the tensions between Story #1, and Story #2. Generally, she assigns one text that serves as a comprehensive summary of the extant research on the topic, and a second text that either provides an extended case study or a clearly authored argument. At the beginning of the term she takes time in class to explain her rationale for a) selecting a variety of texts, and b) why the specific texts were chosen over others on the market. In addition to making her biases regarding authors evident to her students and discussing her own history with the authors and/or ideas they present, Karen assigns her students to read the preface, introduction, table of contents, and any other front matter of the text prior to reading the first chapter. These materials are used to fuel a class discussion of the perspective of the author(s) and the ways in which they approach the topic at hand. Importantly, the schedule for

assigned readings is designed so that students read the texts in tandem rather than serially, in order to engage them more fully in an experience of multivocality.

For example, in a recent Communication and Conflict course, she assigned Wilmot and Hocker's Interpersonal Conflict text, and Kohn's book, No Contest: The Case Against Competition. Wilmot and Hocker gave students an overview of the literature, and Kohn's text provided them with a controversial point of view. Karen explained to her students that she chose Bill and Joyce's book because her experience as their students significantly influenced her own understanding of conflict (Bill was the chair of her Master's committee and Joyce was an undergraduate teacher). She assigned Kohn's text because he makes arguments that stimulate a variety of passionate responses from his readers. For example, a student athlete in her class vehemently disagreed with "Alfie's" point of view and made a point to bring his book to class each discussion day (complete with personalizing marks on his picture) to ensure that her group could argue with him, not just with his ideas. Class discussions, assignments and exam questions were designed to explore the interrelationship of the perspectives present in both texts.

In the course on Family Communication Karen has assigned Noller and Fitzpatrick's Communication in Family Relationships and Napier and Whitaker's The Family Crucible for some similar reasons. Noller and Fitzpatrick's text provides a social scientific account of family communication whereas Napier and Whitaker's book offers an interpretive account. As in the conflict class, students are assigned to read the texts in tandem, forcing them to come to terms with the tensions between alternative forms of theorizing about family communication. From the perspective of Story #1, a professor could argue that one text is "theoretical" and the other is "practical," but from the perspective of Story #2, the authors of

both texts provide students with a rationale for and voiced examples of their ways of configuring aspects of communication theory and practice.

Many of our instructional strategies are also designed with praxis in mind. Instructional discussions and structured experiences help embody Story #2 by weaving extensive student experiences into the conversations of theoretical constructs. Lectures about theoretical concepts are sandwiched between conversations and activities designed to encourage students to bring their contributions to the classroom. As indicated in the course syllabus, students are expected to be engaged in the process of theorizing, making connections, testing assumptions, struggling with ideas presented as theory and testing them with their own experience.

We both also work to make course activities, assignments and exam questions consistent with the perspective we articulate. When we teach the theory course, we both devote the majority of the first week to exercises designed to help students understand theorizing as an everyday activity. By developing their own theories about what they should expect and what will be expected of them in the class, students not only provide us with important information about our audience, but also begin to realize that theorizing is not as difficult to “grasp” as they initially thought it was. Rather than assigning traditional term papers summarizing the literature, students write praxis papers that make three moves. The first is an articulation of their central concern and a review of the literature addressing it. The second move is a description of a communicative phenomenon or situation that the student is currently wondering about or struggling with, and the third is an assessment of some ways theoretical constructs can inform the situation and how the student’s own experience helps him or her to understand the theoretical construct. In addition to paper assignments, we write

exam questions that are designed to have students articulate the interdependence of theories and communicative practice (their own or as reflected in case studies, etc.). We grade their responses by assessing both the extent to which students can report about theoretical perspectives AND the ways in which they can explain them in context.

If teachers want to live Story #2 and help students to develop their own understanding of the interdependent relationship between theory and practice, we've also found that the language used in the classroom must reflect and reinforce this point of view. We cannot continue to talk about simply "applying" or "testing the validity of" theory in practical contexts. It is also not enough simply to choose an instructional strategy that appears consistent with Story #2 and hope that students develop a new way of thinking. Assignments should be designed to have students articulate the interpenetrating relationship between theory and practice and to discuss the ways in which theories and the student's own practice are mutually influential.

Our own engagement with the subject matter also serves as a model for the student's engagement. Many students say that one of the things they experience as unusual in our courses is that we share with them our own processes of making connections with the material. They particularly note the autobiographical nature of our classroom comments about course content. We let students know about our own experiences with the material, and how we came to understand it. We also let them know that we have professional and sometimes personal relationships with many of the authors they are assigned to read. We try not simply to "name drop" in order to build credibility but to underscore how our relationships (positive and otherwise) shape our interpretation of the material we summarize in lecture and include on tests. This is one more way to demonstrate that theorizing occurs in

the context of communicative practice. Students also comment on the fact that we often use examples from our own life experiences to help illustrate concepts in class just as we ask them to do in their papers or exams.

Students tell us they learn to engage with multiple perspectives by developing a sense that all contributions to the conversation have the potential to be credible and engaging. One of the challenges we face as teachers is helping to establish an environment in which questions and convictions can be introduced, evaluated, challenged, and cherished, even when some contributions to the conversation seem initially to be off the point or out of line. We often find it helpful to take on the role of devil's advocate regarding a position we favor or to bolster what we take to be a conceptually or ethically untenable position in order for it to be adequately voiced in the classroom conversation. For example, we try to provoke critical thinking by arguing that dialogue is an impractical, pie-in-the-sky ideal, or by offering strong arguments supporting, Deborah Tannen's claim that conversation between males and females is always gendered.

Our consulting practices offer yet another context in which we can treat theory and practice as interdependent. For example, while some clients want to hire a "sage on stage," we both typically engage companies, work teams, and individuals in the processes of solving their own problems. Early in the process some clients worry about paying for a process rather than a final product, but as the relationship develops, they learn the importance of both. One of John's goals is to help his clients identify helpful and distracting patterns in their verbal and nonverbal discourse in order to recognize how these general features can be translated to or excluded from new contexts. When a client asks a direct question demanding a particular "fix," John tries to respond with both some specific advice and the general

(theoretical) principle the advice embodies. For example, to representatives of two firms wanting to know what to say about their joint venture in their presentation to a prospective client, he tends to ask, “What’s the truth?” since that’s a key principle governing his advice. Then he helps them express what’s true as effectively as possible in the particular context. Karen’s work as a trainer also balances theoretical concepts and practical applications. When asked to develop a series of workshops for fire safety educators, she learned that some of the trainers were individuals with education degrees hired by local fire departments to teach fire safety classes to children, senior citizens, and businesses, and other trainers were firefighters assigned by their local chiefs to serve as community education officers. Each set of trainers viewed the other with suspicion, and felt that their counterparts were under-prepared in one aspect of the job. The firefighters viewed the education specialists as theory people who “didn’t know squat about fire fighting and fire safety,” and the educators were sure that the firefighters knew nothing about theories of education. In addition to developing a training program that met the needs of the fire safety education agency, she also needed to develop ways for firefighters and teachers to recognize that both perspectives were vital to the success of the whole, and to explore how each could collaboratively and productively inform and be informed by the other. Workshop activities engaged both audiences in such a way that successful completion required each group’s expertise to be integrated into the solutions.

Whether working in one-on-one coaching situations, with groups of architects competing for bids, in the context of mediation, or training fire safety educators, both of us look for and direct our client’s focus toward generalizable patterns. We use assessment, strategizing, and role plays to help clients search for and label these patterns, to track how they manifest in practices, and then to develop alternative patterns of communicating to

support alternative practices. When this approach works, clients begin to see how theoretical principles are embedded in communicative practices and how their own theoretical generalizations can be used diagnostically, therapeutically, and practically.

As This Contribution Comes to a Close

In most academic writing we have read and composed, this is the point for a concise summary of the contributions the writers hope to have made. Many of us have, in fact, read an abstract and skipped to the conclusion to discern the author(s)' main point. Whether intentional or not, this convention of academic writing implies that a statement is "finished" rather than contributed in a suitably tentative way to an ongoing conversation. We believe that while articles are punctuated by "conclusions," the turn-taking sequence is not complete without responses from readers.

If we were discussing this view of praxis with our students rather than writing in response to this workshop call, we would be inclined to ask them what they were thinking and to encourage them to join us in conversation. We'd like to ask you to do the same thing.

Some of you might believe that this paper has contributed little to the conversation about practical theory. We would encourage you to articulate the criteria you use to make this judgement. Or, if you found yourself intrigued with something we have said, what did you find most compelling? Why is one concept more compelling for you than others? What might account for differences between the two possible sets of responses just raised?

We would also like you to consider some of the "So What?" questions which may arise in response to what we've said. What difference would it make if we were to view all theorizing as praxis? All practice as praxis? How would it change what we do and what we say in our professional lives? If you believe as we do that praxis is biographical and

autobiographical, what demands might this place on you? What would you risk personally and professionally if you were more explicit and reflexive about your own interests in the topics you theorize and the practices in which you engage?

We both look forward to engaging with you in a broader conversation about relationships between theory and practice in Waco.

REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). Speech genres and other late essays. V. W. Mc Gee (Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Campbell, J. A. (1998). Rhetorical theory in the twenty-first century: A neo-classical perspective. Southern Journal of Communication, 63, 291-308.
- Carr, W. (1995). For education: Towards critical educational inquiry. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Craig, R. T. (1989). Communication as a practical discipline. In B. Dervin, L. Grossberg, B. J. O'Keefe, and E. Wartella (Eds.), Rethinking communication: Paradigm issues (pp. 97-122). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Craig, R. T. (1992). Practical communication theory and the pragma-dialectical approach in conversation. In F. H. van Eemeren, R. Grootendorst, J. A. Blair, & C. A. Willard (Eds.), Argumentation illuminated (pp. 51-61). Amsterdam: SICSAT.
- Craig, R. T. & Tracy, K. (1995). Grounded practical theory: The case of intellectual discussion. Communication Theory, 3, 248-272.
- Cronen, V. E. (1994). Coordinated management of meaning: Theory for the complexities and contradictions of everyday life. In J. Siegfried (Ed.), The status of common sense in psychology (pp. 183-207). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Cronen, V. E. (1995a). Coordinated management of meaning: The consequentiality of communication and the recapturing of experience. In S. Sigman (Ed.), The consequentiality of communication (pp. 17-66). New York: Erlbaum.
- Cronen, V. E. (1995b). Practical theory and the tasks ahead for social approaches to communication. In W. Leeds-Hurwitz (Ed.). Social approaches to interpersonal

- communication (pp. 217-242). New York: Erlbaum.
- Dunne, J. (1993). Back to the rough ground: Practical judgment and the lure of technique. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Elmore, R. F. (1991). Foreword. In C. R. Christensen, D. A. Garvin, & A. Sweet (Eds.), Education for judgment: The artistry of discussion leadership (pp. ix-xix). Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1981). Reason in the age of science. (F. G. Lawrence, Trans.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1989). Truth and method, 2nd rev. ed. (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.) New York: Crossroad.
- Heidegger, M. (1971). On the way to language. P. Hertz (Trans.). San Francisco: Harper.
- Kohn, A. (1996). No contest: The case against competition, revised ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Lobkowitz, N. (1967). Theory and practice: History of a concept from Aristotle to Marx. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Lobkowitz, N. (1977). On the history of theory and praxis. In T. Ball (Ed.), Political theory and praxis: New perspectives. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Napier, A.Y. & Whitaker, C. (1988). The Family Crucible: The Intense Experience of Family Therapy. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Noller, P. & Fitzpatrick, M. (1993). Communication in Family Relationships. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Pearce, W. B. (1989). Communication and the human condition. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

- Rorty, R. (1979). Philosophy and the mirror of nature. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1997). Qualitative inquiry: A dictionary of terms. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stewart, J. (1995). Language as articulate contact: Toward a post-semiotic philosophy of communication. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Volosinov, V. N. (1973). Marxism and the philosophy of language. L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik (Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wilmot, W. W. & Hocker, J. L. (1998). Interpersonal Conflict, 5th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1953). Philosophical investigations. G.E.M. Anscombe (Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.