WAC/WID Meets CXC/CID: A Dialog between Writing Studies and Communication Studies

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Introduction

WE WORK IN THE SAME ENGLISH DEPARTMENT doing the same kind of work—but in two very different fields. Here at Iowa State University (ISU), English includes Speech Communication and Communication Studies. We sat down to have a coffee, find out what we have in common (and do not), and speculate about the future.

Writing- and Orally Communicating-to-Learn

David R. Russell—You and I have been doing similar work here at ISU—helping faculty in the disciplines develop assignments, researching their uses of communication in teaching, but we haven't talked much about specific differences in our traditions. The slogan that people have used and debated now for forty years in WAC/WID is "Learning to write, writing to learn," since WAC/WID is really about the relationship between writing and learning. But I don't know how relevant that is to Speech Communication and Communication Studies.

Denise Ann Vrchota—"Learning to communicate, communicating to learn" was a motivation for the people at Central College to launch their CXC program in 1976 (Cannon & Roberts, 1981), and the phrase has been used as an argument for disciplinary support of a more widespread scope by others such as Cronin, Grice, & Palmerton (2000). Can it be justified as a pedagogical approach? Intuitively, yes. If you have students in communication class (or history or whatever) communicating

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orally, do they learn? Yes. But I say "yes" not as a result of research conducted in communication, but from the results of approaches to learning such as the learner-centered approach and related approaches such as cooperative learning, active learning, reflective learning, and so on. These focus more on communicating to learn compared to work done in the Communication discipline.

DRR: "Communicating to learn" and "writing to learn" sound similar, but the concept of "writing to learn" was developed specifically for the medium of writing, as distinct from oral communication. And isn't "speaking to learn," in a sense, kind of a truism? In a face-to-face classroom, isn't oral communication necessary for teaching? And speaking seems like something that doesn't need to be taught except for special cases, such as delivery of "formal" presentations, or to special populations who need speech therapy. So couldn't improving oral communication be thought of as another way of saying "improving classroom teaching"?

DAV: Perhaps your comment is dependent on the definition of communication. What I have learned from my Communication in the Disciplines (CID) research, which identifies perceptions of communication in other disciplines, is that faculty all too often don't think of what they are doing in class as communication. For example, a faculty member describing to students the circumstances in which they will need to be able to work in groups or on teams as practicing professionals, and how they will do that, that's all about communication. That's teaching communication. And students must be able to translate their technical knowledge so that members of other professions can understand that knowledge, or present it so as to disagree with those in authority. That also is communication. How do students learn to participate in complex interpersonal or group interactions? If communication is the process of working toward shared meaning or a common understanding, how do they get better at it? In Communication, we have courses in this process, which is valuable to students in all the disciplines.

DRR: I guess I was buying into the stereotype of communication as something natural, not teachable. And ironically, it's a similar stereotype to the one I hear many faculty in the disciplines express about writing. The "good" students know how to write. It doesn't need to be taught, only remediated. Or faculty claim writing is not something that can be taught, except for elementary grammar, spelling, etc.

But then I recall that Antonius in Cicero's *De Oratore* also argued that public speaking can't be taught, that it's a gift or knack just picked up.

DAV: Most everyone seems to equate the field of Communication with public speaking, don't they? For me it's ironic because most people in their careers don't do a lot

of public speaking, at least in comparison to the amount of time spent in classrooms to teach them and to practice doing it. But it's really difficult to convince individuals beyond the Communication discipline that a body of theory, research, and teaching practices exists that go beyond presentations. Interpersonal, organizational, group, intercultural, gender, nonverbal, computer-mediated communication—everything except written—one might say. So we have something to offer teachers in all the disciplines.

DRR: Communicating to learn?

DAV: Most pedagogical research in Communication Studies focuses on students learning about the communication process as applied to various contexts, usually professional. But there is research that focuses on interpersonal or group communication or even presentations such as lectures in terms of how they influence learning in educational settings. So you have a study of "Relational turning point events in college teacher-student relationships" that looks at teacher-student communication and learning regardless of the discipline, or "a review of research on humor in educational settings" to say what researchers have learned about how teachers using humor in their communication help students learn. But I'd say that researchers in the field of Education rather than Communication have done more to study the role of communication in learning. It is my impression that "writing to learn" is a more immediate concept to WAC/WID researchers and practitioners. Is that accurate?

DRR: Maybe for WAC/WID practitioners. But I don't think so for researchers. Much of the research in writing to learn has been done in psychology or educational psychology, just as you say it has been done in educational psychology for communication and learning. If learning is defined as absorbing content, then writing doesn't seem to have much effect on that kind of learning. But if learning is conceived in more complex terms, then there does seem to be an effect. But again, this is research mostly from educational psychology, not from WAC (Klein, 1999).

And there really hasn't been much theorizing of Writing to Learn since Britton (1975) and Emig (1977) in the 1970s—until about five years ago (Russell, 2012; Russell and Cortes, 2010). Bazerman (2009) and others have been developing the theory around genre. The genres of a discipline, conceived in terms of social action and not just their formal linguistic features, are a way of organizing the thinking and learning—the epistemology and methods—of each discipline differently. So genres might provide a scaffolding for learning. And this might be true of non-written or mixed mode genres, too.

DAV: Lee Shulman, a founder of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) (1987), discusses something he calls "pedagogical content knowledge." He defines it as a "special amalgam of content and pedagogy" (p. 8). I interpret that as meaning that pedagogy is site specific. If that is correct, the site-specific pedagogy of the communication discipline would include much of the disciplinary content.

DRR: That sounds like the "didactics of writing" research in Europe and Latin America, where they study the particular ways a discipline's knowledge (or writing) is—and can better be—formulated for teaching it. A crucial point is that if writing has an effect it's not general. Certain genres or ways of writing are conducive to learning certain kinds of content or learning in certain ways.

DAV: I agree that we need to look at the specific ways writing and speaking are used, and in what particular contexts—that is a foundational principle of CID. So it's very much the context of the speaking/writing that determines or influences whether and how much Writing To Learn or Speaking To Learn goes on.

DRR: Like in the big Open Dialog project (Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Prendergast, 1997). Researchers found open dialog, as opposed to the typical teacher-structured discussion —interrogation, response, evaluation—was highly correlated with learning, even though the average class engaged in less than one minute of it a day.

DAV: Good class discussion and learning are aligned. No doubt about that. And for learning literature, apparently open discussion is better than recitation, and I would guess it is better than lecture also. What we say is that a competent communicator is one who is able to identify his/her goals, has the ability to assess a situation, and can respond to the needs of a situation as a result of his/her knowledge about communication. Another way to explain this process is to apply the "tool kit" metaphor. The competent communicator has enough communication tools in the kit that he or she is able to select the best one for the needs of the circumstance based on his/her goals. It's a synergism of knowledge and critical thinking. And I see that as consistent with a more broad definition of learning, that individuals do not simply "have" knowledge but that they are able to "use" or "manage" that knowledge.

So, in a broader sense, are there particular ways that writing can, in context, support learning?

DRR: Writing to learn theory has pointed to several ways writing supports learning in contrast to face-to-face (usually oral) communication—not that writing can't be face-to-face, as with passing notes in class. But writing can materially cross time and

space. Documents are, in the phrase of Bruno Latour, "immutable mobiles" (1990), allowing a kind of reflection, and recursive composition, that is impossible with oral communication (unless it's recorded on some material—tape, silicon—and materially manipulated). One can construct a text spatially and move words and other signs around on it. As C. Day Lewis is reported to have said, "How do I know what I mean until I see what I say?" And writing can stay forever, given the right technology (ignoring shredders and acid paper and fire and so on). So it has more potential to influence—for better or worse.

So, let me ask you the same question. What are the particular ways that speaking can support learning?

DAV: With oral face-to-face, you have to think on your feet. Lying is harder. That supports learning. And you can more quickly with speaking establish a relationship, create common meaning, than with a written exchange over time. Modern science started with scientists visiting each other's labs to witness experiments and talk, face-to-face. But as scientific study grew, a written record became necessary. Still, I could paraphrase C. Day Lewis, "How do I know what I mean until I hear what I say?" The act of talking can be a powerful way to learn. Discussion is a way of co-constructing knowledge and understanding. It is ancient dialectic, as with Plato.

DRR: I'm not clear on what the difference between CXC and CID is.

DAV: The field is now known as Communication, formerly known as Speech or Speech Communication and includes Communication Studies and Rhetoric. CXC or communication across the curriculum is the name given to programs that serve students and faculty in other disciplines with communication activities. CID refers to communication in the disciplines and is the research term for individuals who study the communication traditions in other disciplines.

DRR: So what shall I say you teach?

DAV: Communication.

DRR: But written communication is communication.

DAV: Let's just call my field Communication (capital C) and yours Writing (capital W). Communication, as I mentioned, includes research on nonverbal (non-oral) communication. But we can agree that at some level it's all rhetorical.

DRR: Indeed! But we've immediately got complex categories and territories to understand—and perhaps negotiate.

DAV: As you know, the Communication discipline has been based on something we call "the basic course," which would be the counterpart to your First Year Composition (FYC). The basic course for many years was a traditional public speaking course required of most undergraduate students. The traditional public speaking basic course usually means that students give three to five major speeches during the term. A survey of the textbooks for this course over the years shows remarkable stability in the concept of the public speaking basic course. But in the 1970's, another type of basic course was added in some institutions, known as "the hybrid course." In addition to public speaking, it also contains instruction in interpersonal communication and sometimes small group work—all of which is useful in CXC/CID. And since the late 1980s, we've had Communication Centers, where students (and faculty and others) can film their speeches and receive feedback, usually from a peer tutor (Yook & Atkins-Sayre, 2012).

DRR: I didn't know that the basic course came in two types, the traditional and the hybrid. In Writing, textbooks also show remarkable continuity in composition courses. But I suppose the biggest change in writing instruction since the 1970s is the process movement, where we began teaching and researching the processes of writing as well as the products. That had big implications for WAC/WID practice and research, because we're not just about the form of writing, which is what concerns most applied linguists, but also its relation to the knowledge—and know-how—of the disciplines, and the informal writing that goes on, or can.

By the way, would you say writing is taught in Communication courses?

Writing to Speak

DAV: Communication teachers do require a lot of writing, but whether writing is explicitly taught in a communication classroom, I'm not sure. In my own classes, the extent of my writing to speak action would be spending time in the classroom explaining the requirements and the "why" of my written assignments: "I'd like you to describe _____ because ____." As you said earlier, a central goal of writing is to evaluate learning. Much of this is practical. Writing is more efficient for gathering assessment data—and makes it less likely that nerves or a bad day will skew performance, in comparison to speaking.

Oral activities or exercises are a part of the knowledge acquisition process in some classrooms but rarely do the students' grades depend entirely on these. For example, in a public speaking class the outline probably counts toward the grade as well as the speech. So the display of knowledge on paper coupled with the possibility that they

do or do not do something they should when speaking assumes a more complete picture of the students' abilities. I think the same could be said for the balance of written and communication activities in an interpersonal or other non-presentation class.

It almost seems that in the Communication discipline—as well as others—what is spoken counts less.

DRR: Ah, yes. Writing is more highly valued in the culture than speaking, more "real" in some senses but not in others. In some cultures university students have high stakes oral examinations (Italy, for example), "in vivo," because then their professors can probe their knowledge in dialogue. That was true in the US until the 1870s, when written exams became the norm and—not coincidentally—written composition began to be taught.

But do communication teachers use writing for learning in addition to writing for assessing learning?

DAV: One practice in communication classes is for students to write a series of fairly brief (two-page) papers in which they apply disciplinary concepts to their personal experiences. In addition to "learning the material" and practicing its application, the papers encourage thinking and students' identification as a communication scholar.

DRR: Doing brief and informal writing repeatedly, over a period of time, tied to the activity of the class, is really central to WAC/WID approaches, as is writing for reflection, as your writing activity does (Bean, 2011). And actually quite a number of writing-to-learn activities that are common in WAC/WID practice are, in a sense, writing-to-speak activities, like a written response to a question about the reading or an answer to a question posed the previous class period. These are ways of preparing students for the classroom discussion to come. The same might be said for a brief written brainstorming activity before a discussion. One might also have students write down their goals for a group project and then share those in a first group meeting as a way to clarify and/or resolve differences before beginning work.

But what about formal writing to speak? You mentioned outlines.

DAV: As a founder of the field of Communication, James Winans quipped, "A speech is not an essay standing on its hind legs." But in public speaking classes, emphasis is given to the construction of outlines as a means of clarifying the main points the speaker wishes to make, ensuring that main points are developed in consistent fashion. And in interpersonal and group communication, writing is a way of structuring as well, and a way of learning together. In a committee meeting or job performance

interview people can't always present themselves spontaneously without embarrassment, but they can anticipate and compose some talking points or notes. Meeting notes and minutes structure future meetings. And all of these techniques can apply to working in disciplinary classrooms, especially in the applied sciences.

DRR: I'm thinking historically now. For the first twenty-two centuries after the Greeks founded rhetoric, writing was used mostly as preparation for speaking. Writing was a heuristic device. It's part of finding something to say and organizing it. You make notes of various kinds, and organize them into an outline, then you write your speech out and memorize it. The canon of delivery! That's the classical model, right? Up until the 1870s in US colleges, writing was mostly for preparing to speak, an incidental and invisible part of the rhetorical curriculum. My point is that writing to speak was the story of rhetoric for all those years. So we're in a different world now. A world of new media mixing the modes. And in this age of electronic recording, all or almost all of the material affordances of written communication are available to recorded spoken or video. A politician's every recorded word crosses time and space, is analyzed, and he or she is made to account for it.

Do you see this affecting Communication pedagogy? For example, students videotaping themselves beyond their public speaking?

DAV: Yes, videotaping is used but can be beneficial across the board, not only in public speaking. You videotape two people talking to each other or a group working and when the participants view themselves, their view of what happened during the interaction is often different from what they thought was happening when they were participating. It's a great way to learn. But the other goal besides the reflective experience is to figure out a way to help students see the importance of having a kind of out-of-body experience whenever they engage in communication—they need to become their own camera. Sometimes people don't realize they just talked for fifteen minutes about something that had nothing to do with the meeting or they didn't see the dismayed or supportive facial expressions of their colleagues when they proposed a motion. One goal of communication is to help people narrow the distance between the way they see themselves and the way others see them. Communicating with a wide lens and big ears is really important to achieve that goal.

Speaking to Write

DAV: So, how about speaking to write?

DRR: Speaking to write? Well, James Britton theorized writing-to-learn and writing across the curriculum in the 1970s, and he was very much interested in what

he called "talk," something like open dialogue (1975). But although that became an important concept in UK secondary school teaching, that wasn't specifically developed in US composition, perhaps because of the writing/speaking divide we've been exploring.

However, there's a fairly long and strong tradition in composition, going back to the 1980s, certainly to Kenneth Bruffee (Kail, 2008), of small group discussion to aid in generating ideas. But that's been theorized not in terms of Communication but in terms of collaborative learning. In fact, Bruffee's major work is called "Collaboration and the Conversation of Mankind" (1984). The idea is that collaboration, oral and written, and oral is key in his view, can improve writing and learning.

And before that, a central tenet of the whole turn towards process, the writing process movement, was revision based on feedback from peers, of peer-to-peer and small group revision feedback. It might be called "speaking to revise," though I don't know that it ever has been.

And before that, writing centers were and are very much based on a pedagogy of face-to-face interpersonal oral communication. But again, I don't know of anyone calling it "speaking to write."

What do you think we writers could learn from Communication that might improve our speaking-to-write?

DAV: A writing instructor who implemented group activities could learn and apply Communication theory to social and task functions of a group. And types of groups. And member roles.

And Communication research has developed several systematic heuristics sequences that might be applicable to working groups in writing classes. There's "functional perspective of group decision making" developed by Gouran & Hirokawa (1983) and classical stasis theory developed by Infante (1988). Using any of these structures might initially seem awkward when applied to a writing assignment, but I can see that any of them could be used to guide the discussion so the author of the assignment would have some ideas about what to do next.

CID/WID Research

DRR: WID has been about research writing in the disciplines, scientific writing, mostly, though the research writing in most of the humanities has been analyzed,

too, because research writing is so powerful in our society. It's the way new knowledge is officially made. By being put into writing.

DAV: I agree that written publication makes knowledge official. But generating knowledge is very much dependent on oral communication. Long before the publication process, even before the first draft, there is group process in the labs. Beyond the group dynamics of the lab, there are oral presentations, oral feedback, hall talk, and so on.

DRR: I see that. But do the genres of group, interpersonal, and presentational communication differ among disciplines?

DAV: Indeed! In some disciplines and professions, a discipline-specific oral communication genre is at the very center of its practice, of its value. Design presentations, called "critiques" or "crits," are the fundamental pedagogy in the field, with rather little writing (Dannels, 2005; Dannels, Gaffney, & Martin, 2008).

In Dietetics, interpersonal communication is key during the dietician-client interview, the rather formalized genre that is at the heart of their work (Vrchota, 2011), along with the genre of consultation with the medical doctors. Within both genres, a knowledge of questioning skills, the ability to listen to what is not said, establishing trust, and asserting expertise are important features, which can be taught.

DRR: Clearly there are different oral genres that CID—and WID for that matter—must understand. But you must admit that the research article and its shorter cousin the grant proposal are terribly important genres for scientists and engineers. There writing is dominant, the key to success.

DAV: Yes, and surveys show that working engineers do a great deal of writing on the job, but relatively little writing of research articles. And surveys of professional engineers show that they spend a great deal of their time in meetings, in group work, often in sales, but rather little in preparing and giving formal presentations. Yet most of the CID research in engineering is on presentations. Often professional education efforts privilege the priorities of the academy and so their value in terms of professional preparation is lessened.

DRR: What are the methods most commonly used in CID research?

DAV: Pretty much what you've said. Ethnographic observation, case study. And the data is mostly oral, though we look at documents too (meeting notes, syllabi, etc.). We are looking at different disciplinary cultures. And that provides challenges in our "home culture." When CXC programs were young, there was concern in the

Communication discipline that if faculty in other disciplines taught communication, that the Communication discipline would become obsolete.

DRR: Ah, some Writing people were, and perhaps still are, worried about losing their bread and butter course, too. They worried that WAC would bring about the "abolition" (that's actually the term the critics used) of FYC. But that has never happened that I know of.

DAV: There was also concern that disciplinary faculty who taught Communication would teach skills without theory, thus "watering down" the communication discipline.

DRR: And similarly, there was and is a fear in some quarters in Writing that our expertise would not be valued or would be taught in a reductive and unprincipled way in the disciplines. But that fear is, I think, largely based on an incorrect view that our expertise is a set of techniques to be given to the "natives" in other cultures, rather than the expertise of a consultant, who looks for ways to bring a new perspective, a critical perspective, to what is already going on.

DAV: The broader culture of the academy is very territorial. Maybe that's why writing centers and communication centers are so popular. They are useful without being threatening.

Conclusion

DRR: So I take from our dialogue that there are things we can do together for students in higher education. I'm beginning to see how writing and speaking support learning together. I think that must be happening now in the combined communication and writing centers (Maugh, 2012), where the two traditions are exploring new possibilities. Communication Centers number in the dozens whereas Writing Centers number in the hundreds, maybe thousands by now. I hope an ongoing dialogue between the International Writing Center Association and the National Association of Communication Centers will produce a deeper understanding of WAC/WID/CXC/CID.

One of the things we haven't explored here is how changes in technology are breaking down the barriers between writing and speaking. There are online Communication Centers as well as online Writing Centers, for example, and both written and oral long-distance technology that is being used.

DAV: We've also come across things we can do together for the study and practice of communication in the disciplines and professions. WID and CID are by their very nature working on the boundaries of the disciplines. So maybe we have less turf to protect than we thought and can be more willing to take risks and learn from each other.

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