COMMUNICATION TEACHING: LABOUR IN SILENCE AND CRITIQUE

Introduction to the Special Issue

This special issue is the result of a year long process of discussion and consultation among members of the Canadian Communication Association. It began with the observation that most of us are in academic employ and thus work in teaching. While the activity of teaching is the practice we most commonly engage in, we rarely ever discuss it -- at least not in public and within the institutional setting of the annual conference; nor do we devote much space in our two Canadian journals to it. Our conferences and publications are almost entirely occupied by reports about our other shared activity -- research. The absence of discussion, debate and exchanges makes teaching a practice performed in silence.

The silence about teaching is structured in a peculiar way. We explain our teaching to our students and seek their assent. We report and document our teaching to institutional offices and committees superior to us and seek their positive judgement. Thus, the silence is by no means total. Rather, it is structured. Discourses about teaching develop largely within and through the hierarchical bureaucratic organization of the university. But our peers know little about our teaching, save through their participation in the operation of the institutions. This silence about the major part of our work seems to me a peculiar characteristic of the academic profession. Occasions and places for talking about our teaching remains the exception, and they pale in comparison to what we make available to ourselves for talk about research.

The activity of teaching is conducted within and due to public institutions openly and freely subscribed to by our students, but it is also privatized as the individual performance of each of us. Academic freedom and reticence are here dialectically linked. But this privatization of teaching is also institutionally arranged and re-enforced. Teaching evaluations and the promotion mechanisms within the university are designed to make our part in the collective work of the university private to us. We are assessed individually in our teaching experience, and the results of these processes are instrumental to our success or failure. These mechanisms construct us as professionals with institutional careers.

Despite the centrality of teaching to our working lives we are generally never trained in it. There is no single course, tutorial, or workshop in any graduate school, of which I am aware, where university teaching can be learned, exercised, or discussed. We develop our teaching on our own, through osmosis in the institution, through self-training, and through avoiding the mistakes we have seen our own professors commit. Thus, we likely reproduce the institutional apparatus
in an uncunning way. There are no places in our institutional careers where we have room to even develop modest reformist goals or strategies.

While not all of us do research, all of us teach. But professionally we are organized as researchers not as teachers. Some of us even consider the second a rather offensive idea. We are wage earning instructional employees in the educational state apparatus, but our self-concept, occupational prestige and internal hierarchies are determined by our research activity and our writing ability. Teaching and lecturing are in this sense our silent labours.

In this context I issued a call "Teaching As Work" in which I proposed to hold a workshop on critical communication education at the 1984 Canadian Communication Association meeting at Guelph. The aim was to start co-operation and exchange on the activity of teaching and problems arising from it. At the workshop five people presented one of their courses and discussed how the course content illustrated a concept of critical communications, how their course related to empirical/historical material, and what particular teaching methods or devices they had found particularly helpful in their work. The workshop was one of the best attended sessions of that year's general meeting, and those who participated showed interest in continuing the exchange. This special issue of the Canadian Journal of Communication is the next step in a continuing process.

The papers included in this issue have been in part solicited by myself from participants in the Guelph workshop and in part submitted in response to a widely published call for papers. I want to thank all who sent in contributions. While some might not be published here, they form the body of discussion which will go on. All articles were anonymously reviewed, and I want to thank the reviewers for freely giving their time.

The articles in this issue can be organized roughly into three sections. The first three articles by Straw, Shepherd, and Saunders deal with the institutional as well as theoretical contexts which allow for certain subject matters to be taught. Straw outlines the conditions for teaching critical media analysis to undergraduates in an English department. In so doing, he covers part of the ground out which teaching programs in Canadian universities have emerged. Shepherd discusses the institutional and theoretical changes required for popular music to enter into academic teaching as a legitimate and properly understood cultural process. While music practices, listening, performing, playing, amount to one of the most general communication activities in our society, they have remained hitherto at the margin of research and teaching interests in communication studies. In this sense, Shepherd's contribution is a particularly timely one. Saunders' paper is essential to the project of this special issue. Critical teaching has to address the major axis of discrimination, inequality and injustice in society. As we have slowly come to re-
alize, gender is such an axis. Saunders presents the politics of a course on media and gender, and discusses the range of feminist debate on the issue.

The articles of Jhally, Mosco, Bruck, and Raboy all focus specifically on the teaching of a particular subject matter in communication studies. Jhally speaks to one of the core mechanisms of ideological reproduction of capitalism, namely, advertising. He outlines strategies for teaching in a generally unreceptive if not hostile environment. He stresses the importance of theoretical openness and sophistication in the face of this. Mosco illustrates how a subject which is generally framed in technocratic and bureaucratic terms and perspectives can be approached critically. With Smythe, Haight, Schiller, Wasko, Mattelart, to name but a few, Mosco has produced a body of texts over the last years, which challenge the dominant discourses on communication policy and technology. In the paper included here, he outlines how one can teach telecommunications policy from a critical perspective. In my own article, I discuss the problem of teaching theory. I suggest that the four areas of political economy, ethnomethodology, semiology, and cultural studies can be taken to inform a critical paradigm in communication studies. Raboy describes a course on the Canadian other, Quebec. Taken together with his book, this article might show anglophone Canadians what there is to be included in the teaching of media development in this country.

The articles by Gilsdorf and Carney are particularly important to this special issue. Unlike the others, they focus on the 'how' of teaching, and not so much on the 'what.' Gilsdorf takes up the question of how to teach an introductory course in mass communication in a critical fashion. The problem is notorious. And many of us just wish that seniority would relieve us of this task. Gilsdorf demonstrates how the problem can be turned into an opportunity. Carney picks up where Gilsdorf leaves off, and tackles the educational 'paradigm' which underlies most if not all university education. While Gilsdorf charts a course of didactic steps, Carney suggests that these steps lead one into conflict with the dominant ideology of teaching, pedagogy. Carney uses the alternative paradigm of andragogy to discuss different strategies for organizing teaching as well as research. He rightly maintains that the processes of doing teaching and doing research have to be structured in accordance with critically designed goals and contents. Since they are not, I would add, we have to concentrate on discussing and changing them.

When the Annenberg Journal of Communication published its special issue on the "Ferment In The Field" two years ago, more than two thirds of the articles addressed themselves to the question: what does it mean to be critical? It is interesting to note that many of these attempts got bogged down in the categorical opposition between critical and administrative research. Today I think this distinction has mainly a historical usefulness. It might be helpful in understanding the work done in the context of the forties and fifties. The question of what
being critical means has to be taken up today in contemporary terms and addressing the contemporary context. In this sense I consider this special issue of the Canadian Journal of Communication to cover considerable ground. By concentrating on developing the notion of 'critical' in relation to the concrete work of teaching, the papers in this issue avoid some of the more arcane ways of cutting up the field seen in the Annenberg issue.

The issue provides sufficient material, I would think, for debate at the next annual meeting of the Canadian Communication Association in Montreal. It also points out how much more work we have to do. Two areas are of particular concern to me. One is the institutional context in which we do our teaching work. We have to do more research in this area, and learn from that done in sociology of education or dealing with the state and educational institutions. The other area concerns the experiences with critical teaching in post secondary education made in other countries. I had hoped to include a number of articles on this topic, but none of them came through. This issue deals largely with individual courses, their contents and their didactics. Among the next steps in our discussion should be the critical presentation of the different curricula which we have developed in Canada. Such a discussion would help us understand how different critical courses could interrelate and thus be more effective.

Finally, I want to thank the editor of the Canadian Journal of Communication, Eugene Tate. He made this issue possible, and has allowed me a completely free hand in its design and execution. I am grateful to him for his considered advice and generous collaboration.

Ottawa, March 1985
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