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Scholarship of Integration: Pushing, Blurring, and Connecting Theoretical Perspectives

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IN 1990, Ernest L. Boyer and his colleagues concluded that current reward systems do not reflect accurately the diverse roles of faculty, and they challenged universities to “define the work of faculty in ways that enrich, rather than restrict, the quality of campus life” (Boyer, 1990, p. 1). They attempted to redefine scholarship in the academy to reflect these diverse faculty work roles better.

In the past, faculty have been evaluated on their scholarship of discovery for promotion and tenure decisions. But Boyer and his colleagues proposed a new definition of a scholar: “a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching” (1990, p. 24). Boyer argued that all are important functions and roles for the professoriate, and that all should be considered in the evaluation of faculty roles and responsibilities.

In this article, I explore the function of the scholarship of integration to the field of communication studies by addressing the following questions: What is the scholarship of integration? What activities constitute the “scholarship of integration?” What examples do we have as models of the scholarship of integration in our field? How can we evaluate/assess this scholarship?

THE SCHOLARSHIP OF INTEGRATION

The scholarship of integration is defined as “disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research . . . interpretation, fitting one’s own research—or the research of others—into larger intellectual patterns” (Boyer, 1990, p. 19). Thus, the scholarship of integration attempts to synthesize what is known and interpret it in new ways by redefining it. It pushes the boundaries of the discipline by analyzing the effects of cutting edge research and its value to the discipline. It sometimes means blurring the established intellectual boundaries of the field pushing those in the field to “color outside the lines.” It also involves multidisciplinary efforts. In the past, multidisciplinary research was perceived by faculty as “soft research” and not really scholarship at all. As reported by Boyer (1990), now the vast majority of faculty, regardless of the

type of institution to which they belong, disagree with the perception that multidisciplinary research is “soft research” (p. 19).

Many herald the scholarship of discovery as innovative research, however, the scholar who integrates research literature findings, interprets these findings in new and exciting ways, tests and questions old assumptions, shakes up the status quo, and provides connections that otherwise might not have been made because the findings were read and interpreted in isolation from other findings, can be the true innovator in the field. By pushing the intellectual boundaries and providing meaning to research findings, this scholar can push discovery researchers into going places they otherwise would not go.

Faculty pursuing integration research attempt to push, blur, and provide connections between theories and research findings by:

- Making connections across the disciplines and within subareas of a discipline
- Synthesizing scholarship through literature reviews
- Visualizing research data through models and paradigms
- Giving meaning to isolated facts
- Conducting meta-analyses
- Providing new meaning or interpretations to discovery research

Scholarship of Integration in Communication Studies

Because the study of communication in the 20th century has been multidisciplinary, scholars have long relied on the scholarship of integration to push the boundaries of our field. In fact, this reliance on theories and paradigms from other disciplines caused some communication researchers to ask what made our discipline unique from others (see Bochner & Eisenberg, 1985). Furthermore, it led some to conclude that this multidisciplinary approach to the study of communication contributed to a void in any true communication based theory development and research. To legitimize our field to ourselves and others, communication scholars turned to their distinct areas of study.

Communication scholars were generally divided between the humanistic study (rhetoric) and the scientific study of communication. Further refinement in each area resulted in a further division of the field (i.e., mass communication, interpersonal, organizational, language and symbolic codes, public communication). This resulted in a fragmentation of our field (Wiemann, Hawkins, & Pingree, 1988). This fragmentation led scholars to entrench themselves in theoretical camps hoping to find the “right” answers that could be used to legitimize the field. As a result, past communication scholars would debate the utility of one perspective over another. Thus, researchers would only read the studies or articles that supported their perspective on communication or advanced their “cause.”

Although not his original intent, Fisher’s (1978) book, *Perspectives on Human Communication*, added the labels that could be used further to isolate communication research findings. During the 1980s, a common question asked at employment interviews was “What communication perspective do you use to guide your research?” The goal, of course, was to hire those with similar views/perspectives about the study of communication. It provided for harmony in the department, but it also yielded a further division among those with diverse views. A reaction to deal with the ferment in the field was seen in the special issue of the *Journal of Communication* (1983). Many scholars realized that this artificial separation among our divisions or areas of study served to limit us and our field (Wiemann, Hawkins, & Pingree, 1988).

There has been some effort to get scholars from various divisions in both the National Communication Association (NCA) and the International Communication Association (ICA)

to blur the boundaries that so artificially represent our discipline-specific areas of study. One such area is in the mass and interpersonal communication literature. In 1985, Rubin and Rubin argued that the artificial division of interpersonal and mass communication was unnecessary and proposed an alternative view of communication: that mass and interpersonal communication processes should not be viewed as alternatives to one another, but co-equals. This article challenged communication scholars to determine what mass communication and interpersonal communication have in common with one another. This idea was further refined with the publication of the Sage annual review book, *Advancing Communication Science: Merging Mass and Interpersonal Communication* (Hawkins, Wiemann, & Pingree, 1988). Since then, numerous articles and convention programs have attempted to blur the boundaries of those divisions by examining the connections between the two of them (e.g., Barbato & Perse, 1992; Martin & Anderson, 1995; Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988).

There has also been the realization that adapting theory or research paradigms from other disciplines or fields does not make our field weak or fragmented necessarily, but challenges us to reexamine past assumptions and research findings. To find answers to our complex problems, many scholars have turned to theories from other disciplines. For example, the application of Anthony Giddens's Structuration Theory and Stuart Hall's Marxist Cultural Theory has led scholars to rethink old assumptions about studying communication. This in turn led to discovery research and new communication theories and research paradigms.

Another example that has led to an appreciation of integration scholarship as important scholarship can be seen in the changes in our profession's editorial policies. For example, in 1993 the International Communication Association changed its editorial mission for the *Communication Yearbook*. This mission became a reality under the editorship of Brant Burleson in 1996. Since then, the yearbook has been dedicated to publishing "comprehensive, critical surveys of literature . . . on specific, well-defined topics" (Burleson, 1996, p. x). Its main purpose has been to help synthesize and integrate the literature in selected areas of study. Editors of journals have also devoted space to state-of-the-art articles in various fields. For example, Cragan and Wright (1980, 1990) have written two articles synthesizing and critiquing a decade of small group communication research. Many of these articles serve as traditional readings for both graduate and undergraduate students. These articles synthesize and interpret large bodies of literature and serve to set out areas yet to be explored by communication researchers.

The publication of handbooks and scholarly books provide additional examples of the scholarship of integration in the field of communication studies. Examples of this scholarship include: Arnold and Bowers' (1984) *Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory*; Asante and Gudykunst's *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication*; Berger and Chaffee's (1987) *Handbook of Communication Science*; Jablin, Putnam, Roberts, and Porter's (1987) *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*; and Nussbaum and Coupland's *Communication and Aging Research*. Scholarly books that attempt to make connections and blur boundaries include: *Progress in Communication Science* series, *Rethinking Communication Volumes I and II*; and *Group Communication in Context* to name a few. These books serve not only to summarize and synthesize the research literature in a special area of communication, but also to forge connections and push scholarship into new research directions.

Although some would place textbooks as representative works of the scholarship of teaching, classroom textbooks can serve as examples of the scholarship of integration and should be considered as important areas of scholarship. The classroom textbook can serve as a tool to "interpret, draw together, and bring new insight to bear on original research" (Boyer, 1990, p. 19). These type of classroom textbooks serve to synthesize and interpret

the literature in the field of communication studies to young scholars and nonacademic practitioners. Examples of such integration scholarship in the field include: Joseph DeVito's (1997) *The Interpersonal Communication Book*; Gorden, Nagel, Myers, and Barbato's (1996) *The Team Trainer: Winning Tools and Tactics for Successful Workouts*; Infante, Rancer, and Womack's (1997) *Building Communication Theory*; and Stephen Littlejohn's (1999) *Theories of Human Communication*. These textbooks provide not only a synthesis of key communication theories and studies but they also provide a way of thinking and interpreting it. These books are written for a broader audience than scholarly books and serve as important sources of information for practitioners and laypersons.

Program planners for our annual professional conventions have provided opportunities for the scholarship of integration in our field and the cross pollination of ideas from one division to another. These programs serve to blur the boundaries and push us to make connections leading to discovery research. Such convention themes as the following illustrate this: "Beyond Polemics: Paradigm Dialogues," "Theory, Research, and Practice: Interrelated and Interdependent," "Communication and Contradiction: Embracing Differences through Discourse," "Coloring Outside the Lines." Also sessions like "Sharing the Wealth" or "At the Helm" have given those attending the convention the opportunity to hear and obtain state-of-the-art reviews from leading scholars in the field.

The above are just a few examples that illustrate the types of scholarly works involved in the scholarship of integration in the field of communication studies. It is important and vital work for our field. In addition to these traditional types of scholarly activities (journal articles, scholarly books, textbooks, convention presentations), a consideration for other types of work related to the scholarship of integration is warranted.

ACTIVITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE SCHOLARSHIP OF INTEGRATION

Before his death in 1995, Ernest Boyer wrote "the majority of campuses in America have, during the last several years, revised or begun the process of revising their standards for tenure and promotion" (in Glassick, Huber, & Maeroff, 1997, p. 3). In doing so, faculty have to determine what counts as scholarship. Although most departments, schools, and colleges at my university, Kent State University, have attempted to define scholarship more broadly, the difficulty arises when we begin to determine what *should count* as scholarly works for retention, promotion, and tenure. Regarding the scholarship of integration, the following might be accepted university-wide: articles in refereed journals; books or chapters in books that synthesize research or integrate research into a new theoretical perspective or paradigm; refereed conference papers; invited presentations; and research grants. In the following table, I extend this list when evaluating the scholarship of integration in communication studies. The important work of sharing ideas and pushing intellectual boundaries may come in different forms. When we "count" scholarly work we need to consider more than just what is in print. Boyer and his colleagues suggested that the control of what counts as scholarship should be in the assessment of it.

Assessing the Scholarship of Integration

Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997, p. 25) suggested that all types of scholarship and scholarly activity can be assessed by addressing what they all have in common: Clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, and reflective critique. Traditionally, we have assessed the scholarship of our colleagues by examining the output or product presented for evaluation. We made judgments about which products are most preferred in our field (i.e., refereed journal articles, scholarly books, grants). However, Boyer and his colleagues are asking those in the academy to evaluate the scholarly process, thus being less judgmental about the "container" of the

scholarly work. This broader definition of scholarly works serves to “enrich and not restrict” academic worklife.

It is then up to the scholar to present his/her work in the form of a portfolio or professional file. Boyer and his colleagues suggest that this dossier might contain three areas: (a) statement of the faculty member’s goals and/or responsibilities, (b) biographical sketch, and (c) selected samples of his/her scholarly work with reflective essays. This portfolio can be peer reviewed as traditional forms of scholarship are peer reviewed using the standard criteria noted above.

The importance of peer review is the vital component in the assessment process regardless of the form in which scholarship may be shared. Professors are used to the accepted peer review process for journal articles, scholarly books, and grants. Most journals, granting boards, and editors have a list of qualified peer reviewers. These peers are used to determine the quality and scope of contribution of each scholarly work. The same type of review can and should be used to evaluate other “containers” of scholarly effort.

These six standard criteria can be used when assessing integration scholarship dossiers or portfolios (i.e., stated goals, biographical sketch, sample work with reflective essays). For example, when assessing a classroom textbook, scholarly book, or literature review article the peer reviewer must determine if the author of the book/article:

1. adequately synthesized and interpreted the literature by clearly defining the parameters given the audience composition (clear goals);
2. had the sufficient educational background to draw such conclusions (adequate preparation based on the biographical sketch);
3. effectively represented the major theories of the field (appropriate methods); demonstrated sufficient depth and breadth of knowledge to the reader/audience (significant results); and
4. presented the material in a manner that was understandable and appropriate for the reader/audience (effective presentation).

When assessing a meta-analysis article or convention paper the peer reviewer would need to follow the same assessment steps as outlined above but would also want to give special attention to the “methods” used to perform the meta-analysis. Did the scholar use the appropriate statistics and follow-up tests to draw sufficient conclusions and connections?

In the less traditional “containers” of integration scholarship the standard criteria can still be helpful in assessing the scholarly process. For example, if a faculty member has produced computer materials or videotapes as part of his/her scholarly portfolio the peer reviewer can assess its quality by examining how effectively these products meet the goals set out by the scholar. The peer reviewer can assess (a) if the goals were appropriate or adequate; (b) if the scholar had sufficient technical background to achieve the stated goals; (c) if the scholar selected the appropriate channels/technology to achieve the goals; (d) if the end product was appropriate and significant in integrating ideas or explaining the connection of theories to the users; and (e) if the overall presentation was appropriate and effective for the users or audience.

The reflective essay is an important part of the scholarly process that should be included in the scholarly portfolio and the assessment of it. In this respect, the scholarly process is a dynamic one. Reflection on the results and what they mean or do not mean, what was effective and what needs to be improved are all important parts of the scholarly process. In assessing all activities the reviewers need to provide reflective critiques that would be helpful in improving the final product regardless of its form. The scholar can use these critiques to refine and redefine further the scholarly product in order to best fulfill the goals.

If faculty can agree on the commonalities of the types of scholarships, then the evaluation will be on the process and not on the type of product presented. Thus, these criteria should be characteristic of any good convention presentation, integration or discovery journal article, computer material, scholarly book, etc.

The scholarship of integration is not new to the field of communication studies. Integration scholarship attempts to push, blur, and connect ideas. It ties together the literature in one area of study or illustrates connections with other areas. The scholarship of integration allows members of the field to assess what has been done, make interpretations about those findings, and set a course of action for the future. Integration research is essential to any developing field, but is particularly crucial for a multidisciplinary field like communication. If we are going to continue to value this type of scholarship, it must be rewarded in our personnel actions at universities throughout the country.

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SCHOLARSHIP OF INTEGRATION

Refereed journal articles synthesizing/interpreting literature in a specialized area of communication (including meta-analyses).

Scholarly books or book chapters synthesizing and integrating scholarship in a communication area or linking it to findings in another discipline.

Classroom textbooks that serve to explain original research or theories bringing new insights or perspectives to others.

Nonacademic publications in trade magazines that provide interpretations of research to non-specialists.

Videotape or computer materials to explain the synthesis or integration of theory in a classroom, workshop, or training setting.

Interdisciplinary courses or workshops.

Convention papers/panels that cut across divisions or special interest groups.

Campus-wise colloquia.

Interdisciplinary conferences.

Invited presentations/keynote addresses because of one's reputation in the scholarship of integration.

CRITERIA FOR INTEGRATION**Book or Article**

- Adequate synthesis of literature, given the audience
- Adequate educational background
- Appropriate methods and results
- Effective presentation

Meta-analysis or Convention Paper

- Thorough review
- Appropriate statistics and follow-up tests

Other Materials

- Peer review of goal attainment
- Reflective essay