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Will the Dazzling Promise Blind Us? Using Technology in the Beginning Public Speaking Course

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Technology is changing the educational landscape in higher education. Like our colleagues in other disciplines, many communication educators envision an enriched educational environment based on the use of technology. Certainly, technology can provide an immense opportunity in academic settings (Althaus, 1997; Berge, 1994; McComb, 1994; Niemi & Gooler, 1987; Wagner, Heye, & Tsai, 1996). Johnston (1996) suggested that technology is a resource for expanding and creating new options for education because it can access individual learning styles and needs. Moreover, Chesebro and Bertelsen (1996) asserted that:

> [t]eachers of communication need to reconsider the kind of commitment and the scope of the commitment they have made in terms of communication technologies. Foremost among these decisions have been two decisions that warrant attention: (1) the decision to focus on the content or ideas expressed in any given media system; and (2) the decision to focus on a single mode of communication intrinsically without adopting a corresponding comparative media or

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technological base when characterizing a mode of communication. (p. 171)

Because proponents of technology promise it will improve instruction, many beginning public speaking instructors are convinced that they must use or consider using various types of technology when delivering the basic course. However, in an attempt to adapt to dazzling state-of-the-art technology, we may become blinded by our limitations; specifically, we may fail to understand fully the medium we employ and our effectiveness when using that medium. As Pallas (1986) noted, "technology needs to be state of the mind, not state of the art" (p. 5).

This essay provides an overview of some of the uses of technology in the basic public speaking course. It also presents some of the challenges and considers one process instructors may consider when deciding whether or not to incorporate technology into basic public speaking instruction.

USES OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE BASIC COURSE

Effective oral communication skills training is paramount for achieving personal and professional success. For example, Oblinger and Rush (1997) reported, when asked to rank on a scale of 1 to 5 the factors they use in making hiring decisions, employers ranked the applicant's attitude first (4.6) and the applicant's communication skills second (4.2). Thus, a primary goal of communication educators has been to discover innovative and effective methods of sharing course concepts that allow students to identify appropriate oral communication skills most effectively in various communica-

tion contexts (see, for example, Cronin & Kennan, 1994; Ford & Wolvin, 1993; Yoder & Wallace, 1995). Because of technological advances, new and fundamentally different options for teaching and learning exist (Massey, 1997). Thus, basic course instructors have explored these options in terms of computer and video technologies.

Computer Instruction

Technological competency is required in our society. Logan (1995) believed that the steady invasion of computers into schools and workplaces results in transformations in both domains. Thus, this technology challenges us to evaluate the organization of our educational system and workplace environments. Furthermore, Haynes (1990) contended that ". . . [m]edia systems and pedagogy affect each other, that electronic media increasingly dominate our society, and that pedagogy, especially communication pedagogy, must respond" (p. 90).

One method of response is Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI) which is often used as a generic term that refers to a variety of computer uses. According to Kuehn (1994), Computer-Assisted Instruction "will increase its presence in education on college and university campuses" (p. 181). Advocates believe that CAI can "be used to enhance communication among teachers and students from the perspective of a pedagogy that seeks to increase student responsibility and autonomy" (McComb, 1994, p. 159). Beginning public speaking course instructors can use the computer to share information through electronic mail, to design self-paced presentational software, or to incorporate graphic presentational software into the basic course classroom.

Electronic Mail

One application of CAI in basic course instruction includes having students communicate with the instructor through e-mail. Faculty and student e-mail adds a new dimension to academic communication (Guernesy, 1997a). Today, e-mail is used in almost a third of college courses (Guernesy, 1997b). At any given time or during electronic office hours, e-mail provides students with direct access to the instructor. Through attachments, instructors can also share with students a variety of course information, such as lecture notes, outlines, assignments, and speaking schedules.

Students are also able to communicate with each other concerning course-related issues and questions, and use this medium to conduct audience analysis. Thus, "students and professors located remotely from each other may successfully explore, experience, and better understand each other" (Bailey & Cotlar, 1994, p. 186). For example, distance and time barriers are broken because the walls of the traditional classroom are expanded. Moreover, all course information can be easily saved through computer files (McComb, 1994).

McComb (1994) also observed, CAI "inherently puts teachers and students on a more equal basis, because [unlike the traditional classroom setting,] all participants have equal access to and control of the . . . environment" (p. 165). Indeed, this type of interaction has implications for those who experience reticence or communication apprehension (see, Donovan, 1995). Furthermore, by using the computer, students interact with each other without focusing on cultural and gender cues. Bailey and Cotlar (1994) contended that "minority biases and gender barriers can be dissolved or at least minimized with electronic communication" (p. 191).

Thus, CAI may help some students feel more comfortable contributing to discussions. Those students who typically remain silent during class sessions or who engage in minimal participation may increase their interactions with the instructor and their classmates, thereby developing more positive attitudes concerning work and learning (Logan, 1995).

Self-Paced Software

Instructional technology involves new methods, materials, and some equipment. Before the advent of computer technology, instructors shared course information through a variety of audio-visual equipment, such as public address systems, record players, tape recorders, projection devices, still transparencies, opaque material, and televisions and VCRs. Computer technology provides additional options. One technique includes packaging material relevant to a basic course concept or concepts together in the form of instructional software (Buckrop, 1997). Rather than relying on the traditional lecture approach, instructors present basic course information via computer software. Students engage in "individual exploration" (Oblinger & Rush, 1997) in class, at home, or in computer laboratories with access to the information. This software can be basic, focusing on presenting key course concepts, or interactive, allowing student to review course concepts by selecting the answers to various questions, such as audience analysis or problem solving.

Presentational Software

Another instructional option for basic course instructors involves graphic presentational software. This software allows both instructors and students to create presentations at home or in the computer laboratory and to share information during class sessions. Instructors can present public speaking theory through graphic images, clipart, drawings, and sound bites or auditory aids. Instructors can also introduce students to or reinforce theories of public speaking using this technology. Specifically, as students create media presentations to enhance their speech content, they can discover the mechanics of introducing, developing, and concluding a speech. Moreover, while using the software to share speech outlines, main points, or visual aids during class presentations, students provide their classmates with multiple examples of theory in practice (Bodary, 1997).

VIDEO TECHNOLOGY

Over the years, using video has been popular in basic public speaking courses. Instructors have used video to provide feedback, teach through example, and allow students to incorporate video clips as visual aids during their speech performance (Reppert, 1995). However, video has been used primarily to allow students to view their presentations thus gaining a clearer understanding of instructor feedback.

Studies have examined video's effectiveness in improving public speeches. For example, Frandsen, Larson, and Knapp (1967) contended that students agree with the instructor's critique when they receive instructor comments after reviewing their videotaped speeches.

McCroskey and Lashbrook (1970) discovered that the use of videotape combined with instructor feedback helps students   meet course goals better than using video without criticism or receiving criticism without the use of video. Research has also examined if self-directed viewing by students of their own videotaped speeches has a significant effect on their reported level of communication competence and apprehension (Hinton & Kramer, 1998). One conclusion drawn from this study indicated that "the self-directed use of videotaped feedback helps those who view themselves with the lowest level of competency to gain the most confidence" (p. 160).

Instructors who use video as a teaching tool may succeed at: (1) helping students focus attention on details, especially sequence of events; (2) improving cognitive learning; (3) increasing affective learning, and (4) decreasing levels of communication apprehension, (Fisher, 1997; Hinton & Kramer, 1998; Jensen, 1997; Lamoureaux, 1997). Thus, data indicate that videotape can have a positive impact on the student's perceptions of speech content and the oral communication process.

Computers and Video

Computer technology has now made it possible to combine computers with video. Russell (1993) reported that "[w]ith the aid of the computer, an instructor can develop theory-based comments. Comments can be written on an interpersonal level that address the strengths and weaknesses of an observable skill with recommendations for improvement" (p. 4). Russell also indicated that although several studies have "investigated computer-managed instruction and feedback in speech performance . . . . [n]one have investigated whether com-

puterized feedback improves student speaking perform-
ance to a greater extent than does the traditional
handwritten method" (p. 4). Thus the purpose of this
1993 study is to address the effect of computer-gener-
ated instructional feedback and videotape as compared
to handwritten feedback on public speaking perform-
ance. In this study, students were evaluated on "total"
speech performance and on organization, development,
style, vocal quality, and gestural quality. Russell (1993)
reported that "the treatments used . . . were effective in
improving speech skill performance" (p. 14). Further-
more, although one conclusion of this study is that there
was no significant difference between computer-gener-
ated and handwritten treatment groups on their "total"
speech performance, Russell contended that computer-
generated feedback benefits students as much or more
than the handwritten method. Moreover, computer-gen-
erated feedback "provides a more manageable, consis-
tent, and efficient method for delivering theory based
feedback" (p. 16).

Interactive Video Instruction

Interactive Video Instruction (IVI) uses modules to
share basic public speaking theory. Students interact by
way of a computer with a combination of "video tex-
tural" information, such as videotape, video disk, film,
slide, and graphic material. Students view modules,
such as constructing conventional and speaking out-
lines, organizing ideas, using supporting materials, im-
proving listening skills, developing introductions and
conclusions, and managing speech fright, and respond to
them. Based on the students' response, the appropriate
medium or media are provided (Cronin, 1994; Cronin,
Grice, & Olsen, 1994; Cronin & Kennan, 1994). The

primary purpose of IVI is to move "cognitive instruction from the classroom into a self-paced learning laboratory" (Cronin & Kennan, 1994, p. 1).

Another purpose of IVI is to respond to the lack of sufficient basic course class time. Gibson, Hanna, and Huddleston (1985) reported that, although basic course instructors are generally satisfied with course content and approach, they list inadequate time to cover course content as one of their primary concerns. Further, Mino and Butler (1995) contended that few basic course instructors spend adequate time developing students' performance skills. Using IVI allows students to learn and practice the skills that are essential to classroom performances thus allowing more time for performance, feedback, evaluation, and discussion (Cronin & Kennan, 1994).

Cronin and Kennan (1994) believed that IVI can expand instructional opportunities and can provide oral communication training in contexts that are not available in traditional instructional settings. Moreover, these authors report that IVI "may be relevant to public speaking instruction" (p. 5). They provide three conclusions to support this contention: (1) IVI appears to result in increased learning over linear video instruction; (2) students react positively to IVI; and (3) through IVI, cognitive learning is enhanced. In addition, among its many other advantages, IVI can be adapted to the instructor's individual needs. Further, instructors who miss class can assign students to use IVI in their absence. Students who are absent can use IVI to help them with missed materials. Moreover, most large lecture classes in public speaking can be supplemented through IVI.

CHALLENGES

Although technology has the potential to provide instructional advantages, challenges also exist. These include cost, training, and outcomes. In 1994, higher education spent 6 billion dollars on technology (Geoghagen, 1995). Certainly this figure has increased significantly since that time. Thus, the first challenge for basic public speaking instructors is a financial one. Although instructors can educate themselves, assisting faculty to integrate technology into instruction and providing adequate support are crucial (Guernesy, 1997b). Too often, instructors' attempts to integrate technology into their classroom without the appropriate training results in focusing on the technology first. Thus, student learning needs become a secondary consideration. As Sell (1996) suggested, successful technological applications must begin with the goal of adapting the technology to the learners rather than adapting learning to the technology.

In order to accomplish this task, it is necessary to provide workshops, seminars, demonstrations, and travel resources that allow faculty opportunities to examine and exchange viewpoints concerning technology. Moreover, time and support are needed for faculty to evaluate their current teaching approaches and to develop new instructional approaches that adapt technology to student learning needs. In addition, quality technical support for courses that include technology must be provided. Thus, obtaining funding to "wire" a college or university to provide electronic mail, self-paced and graphic presentational software, and video-computer capacity for Interactive Video Instruction, and training instructors to use each effectively become primary considerations.

At the same time, students should be technologically competent. The number of institutions that require students to demonstrate basic computer skills has climbed to more than 40% (Guernesy, 1997b). However, public speaking course instructors cannot assume that students who enroll in their classes are technologically literate. Unless the institution requires students to pass a test before issuing an e-mail account or insists that students successfully complete courses centering on technological applications before enrolling in courses that require technological competence, the instructor who wants to use technology must schedule the time and have the personnel to train students to use that technology.

Requiring that students use the technology effectively for any course is a challenge. Students may be uncomfortable about or unwilling to use the technology. They may have a difficult time accessing computer laboratories which, at most colleges or universities, are open at specific hours based more on institutional convenience rather than student need. Moreover, the idea that requiring students to use technology effectively will result in additional learning can be countered by the "paralysis by overload" theory (Sell, 1996) where more information to process may result in less learning.

In addition to financial and training considerations, the amount of time it takes for instructors and students to use the technology effectively creates an additional challenge. Instructors who share course information via computer must invest significant time inputting and updating this information. Instructors and students who engage in communication through electronic mail must send and respond to messages consistently. Further, instructors must monitor the computer laboratory frequently to ensure that all equipment is operating as it should. Students must spend additional out-of-class

time working on course assignments, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the technology. Moreover, enthusiastic students may overload the electronic mailboxes of their instructors and their classmates by dominating e-mail conversations, or may monopolize computer equipment.

Another challenge is interpreting the results of studies that test the effectiveness of various technologies. For example, although Hinton and Kramer's (1998) study reported that self- directed video tape benefits students in some settings, it has a limited impact on "student reports of their communication competence and apprehension across settings" (p. 160). Therefore, these authors believed that further examination of video technology is necessary. Further, even though Russell (1993) believed that computer-generated feedback may be more effective than handwritten feedback, he also contends that more research needs to be conducted "to determine the efficiency of the method" (p. 17). Because research findings generally produce mixed results, basic course instructors should clearly define their instructional goals and carefully consider a variety of scholarly perspectives before incorporating technology into the basic course classroom.

The greatest challenge, however, involves how to use technology most effectively while teaching the basic public speaking course, a course designed to help students practice, evaluate, and improve their oral communication skills. Effective oral communication requires understanding fully and incorporating effectively both the verbal *and* the nonverbal within a communication context. Technology, particularly electronic mail, does not allow students to assess or respond to nonverbal cues which are a critical aspect of oral communication. In addition, multimedia presentations or interactive video may shift students' attention to the

power of the electronic media rather than the power of face-to-face explanation and interaction. After extensively examining the features of oral, literate, and electronic cultures, Chesebro and Bertelsen (1996) concluded that "public speaking courses should fall within the domain of an oral culture, with the focus of these courses directed toward teaching students how to function within a context in which verbal and nonverbal dimensions merge speaker, audience, and cultural system into a single, seamless, and cohesive social unity" (p. 171).

The challenge, then, becomes adapting technology to improve students' understanding of skills used in an oral context. Literacy certainly plays an important role in the development of oral communication skills. Through reading assignments, students are provided with information that helps them prepare to deliver their speeches. Thus, for those engaged by technology, the assumption may be that technology, like literacy, must play a role in delivering basic public speaking instruction. However, Ely (1995) warned, "when technology makes it possible for people to do something, people do it, not always because it is necessary but because it is possible" (p. 2).

The communication discipline, however, has not engaged in extensive research into the uses and effectiveness of various technologies. For example, Kuehn (1994) asserted that "communication specialists . . . have not yet demonstrated the vigor of other disciplines when it comes to research in computerized instruction" (p. 171). The communication discipline's primary focus is human communication in a variety of oral contexts. Because of this focus, our discipline must examine, more thoroughly than most, its research direction concerning the application of technology and, at the same time, focus primarily on the development of effective oral communi-

cation skills. Moreover, because research reporting technology's role and application in improving basic course instruction is limited or has produced mixed results, instructors should continue to explore under what conditions and in which contexts technology is most effective in delivering the basic public speaking course, assess the possibilities of using the technology effectively, address the challenges, and, subsequently, define that technology's role.

Thus far, it appears one of the major roles of technology in the basic course may lie in its capacity to share theory in a format other than the traditional lecture. In fact, because the lecture requires class time that could be used by students to practice, evaluate, and improve their oral communication skills, this format is perceived by some communication educators as an ineffective method of delivering basic course instruction (Cronin & Glenn, 1991; Cronin & Kennan, 1994; Mino & Butler, 1995). However, additional research is needed to support this contention.

Thus, before using technology blindly, a primary challenge for basic course instructors is to define effective uses of technology while still maintaining the integrity of beginning public speaking instruction. In other words, "technology should not be avoided" rather instructors should "constantly assess their effectiveness and adapt [technology] to the changing needs of the students" (Hugenberg & Yoder, 1991, pp. 276-277). In order to accomplish this goal, instructors should need to view the implementation of technology as a process of exploration and discovery.

THE EXPLORATION
AND DISCOVERY PROCESS

Based on the opportunities and challenges provided by various electronic media, educators have asked many significant questions concerning the effective implementation of technology in the academic setting. However, the communication discipline has only recently begun to explore the role of technology and its impact on oral communication instruction. Specifically, one of the goals of the National Communication Association (NCA) is to assist its members as they use technology in the communication classroom. In order to accomplish this task, NCA has assembled a Task Force whose charge is to explore the uses of technology in the communication classroom and has conducted a pilot survey focusing on the application of "educational technology" (National Communication Association, 1998, p. 5).

NCA's Task Force represented the first stage in an exploration and discovery process that is necessary to define technology's role in the communication classroom. Researchers who study technology in the academic setting imply that educators need to explore several stages and ask a variety of questions before implementing and defining the effectiveness of technology in the classroom (see, for example, Dryli, 1994; Elmer-DeWitt, 1991; Wagner, Heye, & Tsai, 1996).

Because the implementation of technology in the communication classroom has yet to be examined extensively, one exploration and discovery process for basic course instructors may be particularly relevant. This process includes three stages: (1) a preliminary stage; (2) an implementation stage; and (3) an assessment stage. These stages and the questions associated with each may help instructors who want to use technology

as an instructional tool assess the technological capabilities of their institutions, evaluate their teaching proficiency, and define their instructional goals.

The Preliminary State

The preliminary stage involves exploring the possibilities of using technology as a means of instruction. This stage includes assessing the technological capabilities of the institution and determining costs.

Assessing Technological Capabilities. The instructor who is interested in implementing technology should discover the types of technology that are available at his or her institution. In other words, does the institution provide the instructional resources that are necessary for alternate forms of teaching? For example, is the institution "wired" for technology? What type of technologies are available? Are there classrooms that are designed specifically for the use of various technologies? Do regular classrooms have technological capabilities? If not, could computer laboratories serve as classrooms? How many students do the facilities accommodate? Moreover, if the institution has access to technology, what is the quality of the instructional materials and programs that have been delivered through technological means?

Another factor to consider is the quality of the technological support that is available at the institution. For example, what type of technological support staff is available? At some institutions, there is a main computer or technology center with a director and support staff who are responsible for helping faculty implement technology; at other institutions technological support staff is limited or unavailable. If support staff are avail-

able, how technologically proficient are they? Do these staff members train instructors and students in technological applications? How effective are these staff members when training instructors or students to use the available technology? Before technology can be effectively incorporated into the classroom, the instructor must be proficient in using it.

Another important consideration is student knowledge. If the students do not possess technological skills, does the instructor have sufficient time to teach students to use the technology effectively, to incorporate the technology into instruction efficaciously, and still have time to cover the appropriate course material? (see, for example, Pallas, 1986). In other words, is the activity worth doing through technology if the technology requires a focus on learning how to use the technology rather than enhancing instruction? As Niemi and Gooler (1987) observed, "unless the learner is comfortable with the technology there is little likelihood that he or she will be able to take full advantage of [it]" (p. 107).

Determining Costs. Administrators of institutions that have technological capabilities must be willing to provide faculty members with the funding, the time, and the freedom to assess current methods of instruction and develop new instructional approaches that adapt technology to student learning needs (Elmer-DeWitt, 1991; Sell, 1996). Therefore, the instructor must discover if training programs, release time, sabbatical leaves, or institutional grants are available to design an instructional unit or units using specific technology.

If the institution does not have access to the technology or provides little or no support, instructors must determine the costs and discover methods of funding both the technology used and the training involved. For

example, creating interactive video software to present theory can be expensive and time consuming. Cronin and Kennan (1994) described the initial cost of and time involved in creating Interactive Video Instruction modules. They reported:

> [t]wo grants from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia totaling over $400,000, combined with support from Radford University, enabled the development of the IVI modules . . . . The average development time for each of these modules was 1,200 hours. The design team included a producer, content experts, a graphic artist, a computer programmer, and a video producer. (p. 7)

Cronin and Kennan (1994) also provided the least expensive hardware necessary for implementing Interactive Video Instruction (pp. 10-11).

Although instructors' goals for implementing technology may be more basic, discovering the cost, the time involved, the institutional support provided for creating an instruction unit or units via technology, and planning additional funding and time to update the instructional materials are necessary before beginning a specific project.

The Implementation Stage

The implementation stage includes providing an appropriate instructional rationale and purpose for using the technology as an instructional tool.

Rationale. Dryli (1994) contended "even though applications of emerging technology defy categorization, it is useful to think of today's technology applications as originally applied to the computer when it first entered

schools: as an object of instruction, as a delivery medium for instruction or as an instructional tool" (p. 38).

Before implementing technology into the basic course the instructor must assess whether or not incorporating technology has the potential to improve, in any significant way, students' understanding or mastery of effective oral communication skills. Thus, the instructor should ask, in which content or skills development areas would students profit most when applying technology? Another important question is, can a given task or activity be done equally well using non-technical methods, such as handouts or activity sheets? Mergendoller (1997) considered the difference between "eyes-on and minds-on learning" (p. 13). He argues that "paying attention is not the same as learning . . . it is the teacher, not the media, that is fundamental in [the learning] process" (p. 13). Moreover, as Dryli (1994) observed, "[n]ew technology that mimics old technology -- films that look like 'stage plays,' educational television programming that rely on 'talking heads,' computer screens that resemble book pages is not often the best option for your classroom. Nor is software developed for one kind of computer and simply 'ported over' to a more powerful computer platform" (p. 39).

Another factor to consider involves technological problems. Technology that does not work as one expects or continually malfunctions takes the students' attention away from the task, activity, or conceptual information. Moreover, technology that is incorporated effectively at certain institutions or in certain academic contexts may fail in others.

Purpose. Those who want to use technology should explore their purpose for using the technology. Thus, instructors should assess their level of content

19

knowledge and consider their instructional experience. Often enthusiastic instructors at the beginning stages of their careers or those who are new to basic course instruction implement technology simply because it is available or they are encouraged to do so. Effective technological applications require that the instructor adapt the technology to the students' learning needs. More experienced instructors may implement technology more effectively because they may be more able to determine if technology best serves students' oral communication needs. Furthermore, experienced instructors may be able to better assess if there may be more effective approaches for delivering content or developing skills through technology than there are through conventional instructional approaches.

Moreover, because the basic public speaking course requires face-to-face communication with students, an important question that instructors need to ask is: does the technology save time that can be used for additional instructor/student interaction? At a recent National Communication Association convention, an instructor, whose presentation focused on using computer software to present basic course theory, exclaimed that this technology had provided her with a total of seven additional hours of basic course class time. When asked how she used this time, she replied, "training the graduate assistants to teach the basic course." Clearly, in this case, the technology did not best serve the needs of the undergraduate students who missed the opportunity to spend seven hours on skills development and evaluation.

Another consideration for instructors is the level of success they experience in the basic public speaking course. Instructors should evaluate the effectiveness of current teaching methods by defining existing strengths and improving weaknesses before considering using

technology in the classroom. As Richmond (1998) observed, weaknesses in instruction cannot be hidden or improved through technology.

The Assessment Stage

The assessment stage not only involves evaluating the effectiveness of technology in improving student performance in the basic course classroom but it also includes sharing this information in clear and meaningful ways.

Evaluating Effectiveness. Ely (1995) believed that because "[i]mmediate feedback, instant gratification, and confirmation without delay are the order of the day . . . it is natural, therefore, that we should turn to technology to answer the questions and solve the problems of teaching and learning . . . (p. 12). However, as Mergendoller (1997) argued, although technology "expedites our ability to access, share, manipulate, and display information, it provides little or no guidance regarding the quality, relevance, or timeliness of the information it processes. Teachers must take this responsibility . . ." (p. 14).

Thus, after implementing technology, instructors should answer carefully several questions concerning the quality and effectiveness of the technology used. For example, based on instructional goals, what is the relevance of using the technology? How is the instructional quality of the technological application assessed? What improvements need to be made? Does technology have a significant effect on students' understanding or mastery of oral communication skills? For what specific skills, content areas, and educational levels does technology seem most effective? Which types of students seem to

profit most from using technology? Does technology improve students' attitudes toward basic course instruction? Will improved attitudes translate into better performance in other oral communication contexts? Answering these types of questions may provide instructors with some direction concerning the use of technology in the basic public speaking course. Subsequently, by sharing this information, the communication discipline may develop a clearer understanding of the role of technology in the communication classroom.

Sharing Information. Much of the literature presented in this essay provides some support for considering the implementation of technology in the basic course classroom. However, a majority of these essays focus their attention on providing descriptions of technology's advantages or disadvantages or focus primarily on the subjects, methods, and findings of empirical studies. Few present answers to questions concerning the type of training needed, the specific equipment used, or the cost of each.

In order to discover the role of technology in the basic course, communication researchers need to clearly specify the equipment needed, the training needed, and the estimated costs. This information will help instructors located at other institutions assess the possibilities of using the technology in similar ways. In other words, understanding researchers' successes when implementing technology is of limited use if those at other instructional locations cannot duplicate these successes. Therefore, when examining the role of technology in the communication classroom, educators should also consider questions of access and equity. Specifically, "to whom will technologies be accessible?" and "will technologies expand the gulf between those who have and those who have not?" (Niemi & Gooler, 1987, p. 105).

22

CONCLUSION

Instructors who want to incorporate technology while delivering the beginning public speaking course must focus, first, on student needs. Students who enroll in the basic communication course expect to participate in a learning environment that fosters a measurable improvement in their oral communication skills development not just during college but throughout their personal and professional lives. Because the basic public speaking course is, for most students, the first and only contact they have with the communication discipline (Hess & Pearson, 1992) and the only opportunity they have for mastering oral communication (Cronin & Glenn, 1991; Mino & Butler, 1995), the primary goal must focus on increasing understanding of and improving communication in oral contexts. Although technology is an important part of our instructional arsenal, it does not automatically lead to more critical thinking, a richer understanding, or improved student performances. As Sell (1996) noted, opportunities provided by new technologies, such as electronic mail, presentational software, and multimedia presentations "require considerable reflection and debate as to whether, and under which conditions, they will enhance the quality of learning and teaching" (p. 1).

Until the communication discipline addresses thoroughly the effective implementation and role of technology in the beginning public speaking course, and until institutions agree to provide the necessary support for effective implementation of electronic media, technology may become an ineffective add-on to traditional instruction, a method that leads away from rather than toward course goals and objectives, or a means by which

to entertain rather than educate. Thus, the communication discipline must extensively examine and clearly define the role of technology in the basic course so the dazzling promise does not blind us.

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24

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27

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