

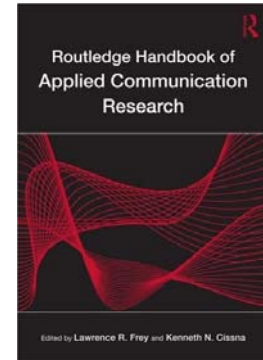
Lawrence R. Frey and Kenneth N. Cissna (Eds.), **Routledge Handbook of Applied Communication Research**, New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009, 712 pp., \$80.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by

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Inspired by four decades of scholarship to which the descriptive term “applied communication research” has become inextricably attached, leading exponents and exemplars of this body of work Lawrence R. Frey and Kenneth N. Cissna have edited an impressive volume of original essays that explore the foundations of applied communication research, its methods, the issues it has posed, the contexts in which scholars have addressed these issues, and some of its most successful research programs. The *Routledge Handbook of Applied Communication Research* is a resource with which those involved in applied communication research can ill afford to be unfamiliar. Moreover, it also should prove to be enlightening to others who see their scholarly interests lying in fundamentally different domains. In many instances, upon reading its contents, they might well discover themselves to have more in common with those in applied communication research than they probably would currently suspect.



Part I, “Foundations of Applied Communication Research,” comprises three chapters. In the first, Kenneth Cissna, William Eadie, and Mark Hickson provide an historical overview of the development of applied communication research as a definable area of study within the discipline. In Chapter 2, Lawrence Frey and Sunwolf review the debates that surfaced as the area of study began to take shape and achieve definition. One of these centered on the theory-versus-practice distinction that had long been in evidence in one form or another as the discipline itself continued to struggle with the question of what should constitute its central concerns and related forms of professional activity. In the final chapter of Part I, Kevin Barge and Robert Craig tackle this controversy in a more focused way and attempt to end what they perceive to be the perpetuation of a dichotomy that has ceased to be of value, if ever it had been.

The four chapters in Part II, “Methods of Applied Communication Research,” serve to establish that applied communication research is as amenable to conventional modes of data acquisition and analysis as any other area of study. This is clearly evident in the discussion by Jim Query and his associates (Chapter 4) of the applicability of a variety of quantitative methods that those doing applied communication research have employed and continue to utilize in their projects, as well as in Celeste Condit and Benjamin Bates’ illustrations (Chapter 5) of how different forms of rhetorical analysis apply, Laura Ellingson’s examination (Chapter 6) of the utility of ethnography, and Karen Tracy and Julian Mirivel’s (Chapter 7) consideration of the appropriateness of discourse analysis in many spheres of interest germane to the area of study.

Expansion of the matters, particularly of a social nature, that those doing research have increasingly begun to address is the focus of Part III, “Issues in Applied Communication Research.”

Chapter 8, Patrice Buzzanell and others consider gender as a subject receiving growing attention in applied communication research. So, too, are race (Nicotera et al., Chapter 9), communication technology (Lievrouw, Chapter 10), globalization (Parrish-Sprowl, Chapter 11), and ethics (Seeger et al., Chapter 12), at both an organizational societal level and also in terms of the research practices (as well as interventions) in which those doing applied communication research engage.

Part III of the *Handbook* begins to expose readers to the breadth and diversity of interests that have developed since the early 1970s, but not nearly so comprehensively as the nine chapters constituting Part IV, "Contexts of Applied Communication Research." My rapid run-through of this section of the book cannot do justice to the extensiveness of the information it embraces. Instead, I have had to settle for an outcome far less ambitious, namely that I shall succeed in whetting the appetites of those who would like to learn substantially more by acquiring a copy of the *Handbook* and reading the fully elaborated versions of the chapters.

In Chapter 13, Thomas Socha equips us with a sense of how studies of familial communication can be of applied value in creating improvements in family members' lives and their relationships to one another. Seibold, Lemus, Ballard, and Myers, in Chapter 14, introduce us to four subsets of research activity in organizations—socialization, culture, diffusion of innovations, and communication and change—for which there is a substantial literature and both implicit and explicit promise for the development of interventions that can improve organizational life and the performance of members. Chapter 15, by Eric Eisenberg and Beth Eschenfelder, overlaps with Chapter 14 to an extent, but relates exclusively to nonprofit organizations, with an emphasis on their successful management. Gary Kreps and Ellen Bonaguro, in Chapter 16, present a useful overview of applied research in health-related contexts and what it suggests that health professionals, among others, might do to improve citizens' well-being on a number of fronts. The subject matter of Chapter 17, by Katherine Miller and Jennifer Considine, parallels that of Chapter 16 in roughly the same way that Chapter 15 does Chapter 14. In this instance, however, helping professions are the subject, and the accent is on the interpersonal relationships that care providers and care recipients develop in group, organizational, and institutional settings. Chapter 18, by Jon Nussbaum and Jennifer Ohs, has connections with parts of both Chapter 16 and 17, and even Chapter 13, but it is also unique in its primary concern with communication, the process of aging, and the reciprocal relationship between the two. Chapter 19 shifts the context rather dramatically to the political arena as Lynda Lee Kai, Mitchell McKinney, and John Tedesco survey applied scholarship in five categories of activity—public speaking, campaign debates, advertising, news, and uses of technology—all of which they typify with references to current research and changes in related practices over time. Ann Darling and Liz Leckie, in Chapter 20, review aspects of scholarly inquiries in communication education relating to pedagogical developments, in-service training and deliberative education, and schools as communities that emerge from applied communication. In the final chapter (21) in Part IV, Lawrence Kincaid and María Figuero take up communication as a facet of development and instrument for stimulating social change, largely in, but not exclusively, the Third World.

Whereas Part IV gives the reader some sense of the scope of applied communication research, Part V, "Exemplary Programs of Applied Communication Research," helps the reader to develop an appreciation of the depth and extensiveness of inquiry reflected in extant lines of research. To this end,

Frey and Cissna have singled out for special attention four prominent programs in which the parties involved persisted over sustained periods of time, during which they were able to identify and assess incremental gains in knowledge, as well as the impact of the interventions they were able to design and implement as a result of their early work.

Chapter 22 is a partial, but nonetheless substantial, reconstruction of the four stages of Michael Hecht and Michelle Miller-Day's development of an educational program that helps young people confronted with opportunities to consume various types of drugs to select resistance strategies (if they are so inclined) that can enable them to achieve that objective. The authors provide readers with a nicely detailed overview of what every stage of the project entailed and how each stage informed the progression. Chapter 23 provides a similar account of a long-lasting applied communication research project involving the development of a group-decision support system of which Marshall Scott Poole and Gerard DeSanctis are the original architects and for which they continue to be the driving forces. As in the case of the drug resistance strategies project, Poole and DeSanctis methodically move through a series of studies—in this case, centering on the GDSS software they developed in terms of improvements in both process and outcomes—while making refinements and other improvements that lead to documentable gains in the performance of decision-making and problem-solving groups *in situ*. Kim Witte and Anthony Roberto take an extensive look at two projects of an applied communication nature in which they were involved in Chapter 24. Both deal with the appropriate strategic uses of fear appeals as instruments for exercising social influence. One project concerns reduction in the rate of growth in HIV and AIDS in Ethiopia; the other is a campaign to convince gun owners in a region of Michigan to use trigger locks as a means for reducing accidental shootings. Their work gives rise to approaches to message design that has positive payoffs in both projects. As had Hecht and Miller-Day in drawing on "Social Identity Theory," and Poole and DeSanctis in employing "Adaptive Structuration Theory," Witte and Roberto ground their research in a theoretical perspective (the "Extended Parallel Process Model") not specifically designed for investigating the matters of interest, but nevertheless appropriate and also further demonstrative of the fact that applied communication research need not be theoretical and often is not. In the final chapter (25), Kimberly Pearce, Shawn Spano, and Barnett Pearce describe a project they have been pursuing for some time, and for which they created a non-profit organization to which they refer to as the "Public Dialogue Consortium." The purpose is to promote civic engagement via a dialogical approach in the tradition of Martin's Buber's notions concerning dialogic communication. The consortium has a broad-based clientele and appears to be showing outcomes that continue to establish the credibility of the approach those involved have adopted. At the base of this approach is the Coordinated Management of Meaning Perspective that Barnett Pearce was instrumental in developing and that is revealing considerable merit as a foundation for the practices the proponents of civic engagement as dialogue, rather than as discussion, endorse.

The *Routledge Handbook of Applied Communication Research*, in my view, is a welcome addition to the literature concerning human communication in general, but also clearly to applied communication research in particular. It has many virtues and no substantive deficiencies that I was able to detect in digesting the contents.

Among other things, the volume has a coherent and logical organizational structure. It moves one progressively from the origins and development of the area of study . . . to the approaches to inquiry that scholars have adopted . . . to the social issues to which they have directed their attention . . . and to the contexts in which they have addressed their concerns. Finally, its structure also demonstrates the depth of understanding to which this area of study can lead, and it clarifies the potential of each area for making more constructive uses of our capacity as symbol users to positively impact the lives and well-being of one another.

Adding to its organizational coherence is the structure of chapters whose principal purpose is to review and synthesize focused bodies of work. In these cases, the contributors further engage in identifying agendas that others are free to pursue. This structure is evident in almost every chapter beginning with Part II and continuing through Part V.

It would be unfortunate indeed if anyone were to overlook the *Handbook* as an excellent reference work. The overviews and extensive sets of references in every chapter should be of interest as a starting point to anyone doing some form of applied communication research. Any such resource, of course, can become dated more quickly than any of us would like. However, the volume's current contents can still offset many of the disadvantages of having to start at ground zero or with search engines that may turn up a large amount of source material, but not in a form that makes updating both reasonably simple and efficient.

The *Handbook* additionally presents a balanced view of what we know versus what we do not, what are defensible versus questionable claims concerning the impacts of communicative behavior in social affairs, and what may be productive avenues of further inquiry versus potential dead-ends. None of the contributors has been at all reluctant to point to limitations—conceptual, theoretical, or methodological—in bringing the inventory of knowledge to which applied communication research has led to his or her readers' attention. This is no small feat, in that a good part of the material is an outgrowth of work in which the contributors have participated and, hence, are presumably emotionally invested, and at a time when scholarly detachment is a quality that those who espouse extremes in subjectivism often eschew.

Finally, the quality of writing appearing in the *Handbook* is exemplary. This is especially impressive in view of the massive amount of information the contributors assembled in preparing their respective chapters. The editors and staff at Routledge have clearly opted to edit, rather than let mediocre prose pass on the grounds that substantive merit is what counts. It does count, in fact, quite a bit, but not if a document is unreadable, suffers from serious deficiencies in style, or is otherwise inaccessible to those who are eager to learn more about how communication functions and how to maximize its potential for serving constructive ends.