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## **Epistemic Agency in Communication Science Writing: Challenges Posed by Practitioner Sources**

**Abstract:** Most scholars who approach communication practices in their writing will encounter popularization materials created by practitioners in the field of advertising, public relations, or journalism, and will often consider using them as sources for their academic works. Such materials often include autobiographical accounts of these professionals, case studies of work done by them for clients, or their personal views on what excellence should mean in the areas of communication in which they have developed their own careers. Yet, being published in non-scholarly contexts and not having undergone any form of peer review, this category of sources may have serious weaknesses from an epistemic standpoint: many of them are based on anecdotal evidence instead of systematic research, while others can be focused only on the client who pays for a campaign and not on the audience who sees the material, and therefore circulate (and thus validate) a form of moral disengagement in what regards the responsibility towards the public. How should these sources be integrated in students’ academic papers? To answer this question, I bring the concept of *epistemic agency* in the center of the source integration process. Epistemic agency can work as a framework within which these sources can be provisionally accepted, but further worked on. The information in the source therefore becomes a starting point, from which the scholar can further develop original methods to investigate the transferability of that particular insight shared by a practitioner to other contexts and situations.

**Keywords:** epistemic agency, source integration in academic writing, practitioner bias, credibility excess.

## 1. Introduction

*‘When I make a decision about the sources I use in my research paper, I check first whether they are written by practitioners or are mere opinions of outsiders.’*

*‘To me, it is very important to see if the source is a practitioner, someone whose advice can be informative for real life.’*

*‘As I have direct experience as a PR specialist, sometimes it is hard to understand why I need other scholarly sources for my thesis. Direct experience should be a good enough replacement for bibliography. I do know what I am talking about, I got things to share’.*

*(Students describing their choice of sources for academic papers)*

The confessions in the quotes placed at the beginning do not belong to outliers. Having received many similar answers in various series of interviews that have been conducted during the past two years as part of a larger research project (Grancea 2021), it soon became clear that practitioner sources were heavily used in the documentation process of Communication Science students and were treated as strong arguments based on authority (Walton 1997). Practitioners seemed to benefit from an authority derived solely from their belonging to the professional group of advertisers, public relation specialists, or (social) media content creators. These premises are largely implicit and, as matter of fact, would be quite difficult to maintain if they were to be made explicit and justified. The mindset can be summed up in four propositions:

- (P1) ‘practitioner equals expert’;
- (P2) ‘expert words are certainties to be embraced wholeheartedly’;
- (P3) ‘one expert advice reflects common ground in the field’
- (P4) ‘non-practitioner contribution is mere opinion’.

In the midst of an era in which analysts of Western culture announce a widespread loss of trust in experts and their abilities to inform personal and societal decisions (Nichols 2017), it may be surprising to find students who put excessive trust in a category of sources. In the following, the causes, the symptoms, and the implications of this epistemic pathology will be traced.

## 2. The ills of practitioner credibility excess

Credibility excess, defined as the tendency to disproportionately place one's trust in a source based on that source's belonging to a certain group (Fricker 2007, Medina 2011, Huda 2019, Davis 2020, Alfano 2021), is considered a vice because features that make the group trustworthy in the eyes of the receiver may be in fact epistemically irrelevant for judging the plausibility of individual ideas issues inside that group. The illusion of epistemic homogeneity inside certain communities, as well as the tendency to idealize the epistemic goods collectively possessed by certain groups partly explain this tendency.

In the case of communication practitioners, there are students who seem to believe in such homogeneity of the views inside the professions belonging to the creative industry. If a practitioner publishes something about the benefits of the use of a certain strategy or tactic, many students reading that material are instantly willing to attribute it the epistemic weight of a law of physics. Sometimes, their embracing a practitioner idea goes even further, building on that thought entire conceptual architectures that later become their theses, their professional creeds, or their premises for serious debates with people outside the profession. Sometimes, these ideas become slogans of generations after generations, being treated as common sense knowledge that nobody questions. *Sex sells, fear works better in social ads than guilt, 5-word headlines retain more consumers* are just a few examples.

Often unaware of the complexity and heterogeneity of communication practices and of the larger social world they are constitutive of (Searle 2010, Charmaz 2014, Dumitrescu 2015, David 2019), students are rather enthusiastic to develop a set of tools and labels about how things are, thinking that things are this way in sufficiently numerous cases to allow for generalizability. However, the practitioner's experience with that strategy or tactic may have been a rather particular one, with limited transferability to other cases. Many factors may have mattered for the success of the campaign that the practitioner was talking about. Certain conditions in which the campaign was employed may have been favourable to implementing that strategy. These conditions may be common or completely exceptional, they may be culture-specific or universal, and so on. These details may matter more than we are willing to admit in the realm of communication science.

It is worth noticing here that many professionals tend to be highly aware of the contextual character of any assertion, and of the limited degree of generality that their profession, by its nature, allows. Most are

rather humble in what regards the scientific character or generalizable status of what they say. In fact, an overwhelming majority of the accomplished practitioners do not say anything to the wide public, do not make tutorials, do not publish books or articles, do not keep a vlog and do not make YouTube series, do not teach.

Unfortunately, this thought does not get mentioned loud enough in any of the talks about the necessary collaboration between the academia and the practitioner world. Current institutional standards require practitioners on board of any bachelor or master program, many professors rely on practitioner books when developing their courses, most student associations invite practitioners to develop workshops and informal learning experience. Practitioners. No mention regarding standards imposed for the professional experience these practitioners may have. How well have they done in their own career? How are their clients now, how is their audience, how are the people who were touched by their communication materials? Can they take the conclusions of their own experiences to a higher level of abstraction? Can they take a larger view on their work, seeing it from the point of view of the various social actors that may have been influenced or affected by it? These are important questions that need clear answers before treating practitioners as reliable sources of information and know-how.

A possible objection to the use of these questions would be that practice in itself make people better and better at what they do. But for practice to be a point of improvement it needs to be adequately assessed and constantly guided by a higher epistemic authority. Here, the creative industry is so heterogeneous and criteria for excellence rather loose and boss-dependent, that one cannot guarantee that such feedback is actually operating at full potential in all cases. As an industry with no entry barriers, we also have practitioners who have just created their own advertising or PR agencies with no credentials and no experience, and they will be the creative directors offering feedback to practitioners. Accidentally, they may be geniuses. But typical work conditions in the communication industry are such that in many cases it is the client feedback or the agency manager feedback that lowers the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic quality of the work that ultimately gets approval for production and media distribution (David 2019, 19-21).

All in all, practitioner credibility excess can be a serious problem for students, because they would risk taking up second-rate information or unapplicable advice. But there are losses on other levels, too: students may fail to develop themselves as fully-responsible epistemic subjects. They

would tend to remain on a rather naive level that would make them prone to surrender too easily to conclusions based on kitsch ideas that oversimplify complex issues and prettify the problematic (Linstead 2002, 664-665).

How can it be that this attitude flourishes in an academic world, where so much emphasis is placed on critical thinking and thorough conceptual analysis? Why is it that, when it comes to practitioner contributions, so many of the usual criteria are simply suspended?

### **3. What causes practitioner credibility excess?**

In trying to understand the devotion that the academia shows towards practitioners, there are a few possible causes to take into consideration.

One possible explanation for students' habit of total surrender to practitioners' ideas and recommendations is provided by the mimetic tendency that they understandably have towards practitioners, based on the desire to be with them, to be like them, to be their equals and sometimes their rivals. Communication professions have a glamour of their own: in certain people's eyes, copywriters, art directors, and PR specialists are almost in the same line with stars and influencers. Many students aspire to be integrated into the networks of successful professionals before finishing their studies (Moraru 2021, 397-400). They make efforts to imitate the language of practitioners, their patterns of virtue signaling, their style, their outlook on various social topics. Part of this effort may be done consciously, with the pragmatic purpose of having a good job after finishing the studies, but part of it may have an unconscious component, with roots in mimetic rivalry (Oughourlian 2010, 105-115). Students may mould their identity to this group to the point that they find the desires, the tastes, the approach to social reality that they have borrowed from these practitioners to feel so natural as if they are their own. What may be operating underneath this apparent benign professional identity development (Schauster et. al 2021, 178-179) is in fact what Jean Michel Oughourlian describes as the development of a fake self, a fabricated identity that tends to leave behind many of the personal values or needs and instead embrace those of the Model, that are so much more desired only because they belong to the Model that the subject has entered a rivalrous relationship with (Oughourlian 2010, 111-113, 135-136). Students may become so absorbed into the process of making themselves desirable for the creative

industry and capable of competing with the practitioners, that other considerations will be largely ignored. Their desire to be well-suited in this professional world may even trump considerations regarding truth, grounding, depth of understanding, or social responsibility towards various stakeholders with whom a communicator may have to interact. To summarize this alternative explanation, we would have to say that maybe it is not that practitioners are perceived to be holders of truth or responsibility, but rather it is that their views are perceived as more important than truth and responsibility. Embracing their views has immediate and clear incentives from an emotional point of view.

Another possible explanation is that practitioner sources are considerably more accessible, more charming, and more spectacular in style than the academic works students normally must read. Being written by communication specialists, many of them have a clear-cut organisation, a lot of fascinating case studies, and a general taste for good writing. They tell stories of success with many details that are exciting to follow. Often, they draw more courageous conclusions than most scholarly works and thus create the impression of a more comprehensive explanation of certain communication phenomena (see, for example, Newman 2006 or Fallon 2008). Such a captivating picture would be difficult to resist by young, unexperienced scholars.

Resistance is made even more difficult by the limited possibilities students would have for fact-checking: inside information about the work done by PR and advertising agencies is usually confidential. Outsiders will generally not know what the objectives of a business client were for a certain campaign, what a political client intended to leave out of his communication content (and thus draw attention away from), or what degree of spin doctoring was at play in what appeared to be a charity campaign supported by an influencer. Manifest content and back-stage intentions can be fundamentally distinct in communication practices. Sometimes, it would take years of professional digging by experienced researchers to uncover the differences between what an agency claims to have done in a communication campaign and what its real objectives and less visible actions were (Herman and Chomsky 1994).

In the regular critical thinking mindset that is promoted in the academia, a way out of credibility excess is to adopt a *they say/I say* approach to the information presented: one takes such-and-such content from an author, and then questions it, criticizes it, compares it to alternative interpretations, trying to bring legitimate objections to it, understand its limits, or further build on it (Graff and Birkenstein 2015,

157-164). This methodology can sound appealing in theory, but it ignores the real possibilities of many students. Inventing a place of epistemic equality from which the student can just reply to other established authors is pedagogically utopic if not outright irresponsible. The distance between a student's level of knowledge and such requirements will most likely be resolved either by fleeing from the job (giving up writing or just taking up some comment from the web and presenting it as if it is one's own, after a bit of paraphrasing), or by developing an artificially-inflated epistemic self, one that would simply assume a set of competencies one does not possess. Both solutions can end up blocking the epistemic evolution of the student, one by causing a self-credibility deficit, and the other one by causing of self-credibility excess. Both epistemic vices can have long-term consequences: self-credibility deficit can lead to increased vulnerability to propaganda and reluctance to share one's personal values and perspectives; at the opposite end of the spectrum, self-credibility excess can make one live in a distorted reality, where any expertise is just a matter of opinion, and one's own subjective evaluation is by default worthy of the same epistemic weight as any expert's (Nichols 2019, 256-260).

Is there any middle ground in this complex picture? To embark on the search for such middle ground, we must first give up the long-circulated binary classification mindset, according to which the contribution of any source must be fact-checked, and one must decide whether it is true or false, acceptable or not, sound or not. In the domain of Communication Science writing, provisional acceptance of a practitioner source and preoccupation for giving it a good use would be a much more realistic goal.

Secondly, we must renounce the narrow conceptions we currently have about what students' personal contribution to a thesis could mean. We tend to indicate only conceptual moves that belong to the space of deductive argumentation and are placed on a high level of generality. But communication practices are heterogeneous, human-made, culture-embedded, often based on abductive reasoning and localized guesswork. Many of the assertions that can be made about them are particular and refer to specific situations. This does not make them useless. It just makes personal contribution so much more necessary, in the sense of supplementing practitioner perspectives with personal insights based on one's own experiences and with research regarding the transferability of that information to other domains, cultural spaces, or product categories. To conceptualize personal contribution within this different conceptual

framework, one needs to grasp the forms that epistemic agency can take in communication science.

#### 4. Understanding epistemic agency

**Epistemic agency** is a term proposed by Professor Catherine Elgin of Harvard University describing epistemic subjects' ability and disposition to develop original methods of inquiry into a given topic and to set the rules that should bind their inquiry (Elgin 2013). Epistemic agency does not ignore the standards of the epistemic community, but dares to extend or revise them when necessary:

To respect the standards of a community is to be responsive to them. This [...] requires either satisfying them or having and being able to articulate a cogent reason to revise or reject them. (Elgin 2013, 146)

Educating for epistemic agency means encouraging students to think in an autonomous and original manner about possible ways to pursue truth in a specialized area of inquiry. Moreover, it means requiring them to have the courage and persistence to take their view and their initiative further than a mere comment on available knowledge. After being made familiar with the standards of an epistemic community, with what counts as evidence, with what counts as reliable methods to amass evidence, and with what kind of conclusions can be derived based on what kind of evidence, students should be encouraged to develop their own path of pursuing answers to the research questions they feel are important. According to Catherine Elgin, revising available standards, rules, and methods is an available option for any epistemic agent, and students should be taught to take responsibility for all epistemic choices they make in their writing.

Epistemic agency means autonomy at every step of the research process. It helps develop autonomous epistemic subjects who take responsibility for their decisions regarding what to include and what not to include in their system of beliefs. In Catherine Elgin's view, epistemic agency is not a character trait, or a disposition reserved for a select few or for advanced professionals. It is more of a mindset. An attitude. An orientation. The following excerpts summarize this view:

What makes the epistemic agent responsible for his beliefs is that he takes responsibility for them (2013, 142)



The epistemic agent confers epistemic authority on those she counts as experts; and she retains the right to revoke it. (2013, 148).

The essential result envisaged by education for epistemic agency is that people become autonomous subjects who take full responsibility for the sources they choose to trust and for their knowledge-acquiring practices. Epistemic agency means making conscious efforts to improve one's own understanding of what is going on in any given field, what is worth knowing, and – most importantly – how that which needs to be known could be gradually explored. And this can mean different things in different moments of one's exploratory process: for the beginners, it may allow for a reduced scope of conceptual moves that remain quite far from reaching clear results, while for the more advanced, truth-conducive innovation can be envisaged. Goal setting should be adapted to the possibilities and the resources of each epistemic subject, but agency should not be left out. No matter how small, steps done in the spirit of epistemic agency are necessary for the subject to emerge as a fully responsible author whose work has a rationale for being other than reproducing already available material.

Epistemic agency cultivates an open mind and an active spirit, one that motivates personal contribution to academic writing in the widest possible sense, but not in the *wildest* possible sense. There are serious constraints on the quality of the input and the methodology chosen to manifest this personal contribution:

Commitments bind: they constrain what is permissible to do and how it is permissible to do it [...] But epistemic agents should be bound only by commitments that they can reflectively endorse. So the epistemic agent takes it as a criterion on the commitments that she can reflectively endorse that similarly situated epistemic agents should be able to reflectively endorse them as well. (144)

By working within an epistemic agency paradigm, students would not only become more aware of their own possibilities to explore a topic, but they would also understand that they cannot dive equally deep in all topics, and therefore a more reserved attitude can be taken towards the fields that they cannot look very deeply into, fields whose standards they do not understand and within which they cannot take any epistemic commitments.

While cultivating epistemic agency, students can simultaneously become aware of the fact that they actually have possibilities for truth-inquiry that extend way beyond the mainstream ones, but – at the same

time – that their own possibilities to devise rules, methods, and standards that they can reflectively endorse are limited. Epistemic agency is not an *anything goes* mindset. Epistemic agency means freedom within the logic of the epistemic community one wants to be a part of. Sometimes, suspension of belief and provisional assumption of ignorance may be the most responsible solutions at particular moments in time (Peels and Pritchard 2021, 7951), provided that they are followed by efforts to regain better footing into the research terrain either by narrowing down the scope of the inquiry, or by consulting more trustworthy sources who have mapped conceptual territory in the desired direction (Elgin 2013, 149). But even making a conscious decision about the need to narrow down one's area of inquiry is a proof of the aforementioned responsibility that characterizes epistemic subjects who have agency.

### **5. Epistemic agency towards practitioner sources**

Epistemic agency in the use of communication practitioner sources could mean that, once accepted as useful material, the source will be worked with, not taken for granted, not parroted back, not quoted mechanically.

One possible step that would be within the epistemic reach of beginners would be to frame the issue that is discussed against a different background. One's own, to begin with. A group of interviewees', to continue with. Other stakeholders' whose reactions can be identified online or in the work undertaken by other researchers. All these different perspectives on the communication material, tactic, strategy, or type of work may help gain insight into different aspects of it than the ones foregrounded by the professional who initially presented it.

Epistemic agency would therefore mean the courage and the persistence of students to develop and refine research methods that would allow them to build an inclusive framework of analysis not leaving out any of the parties involved in a communication campaign: the paying client, the shareholders, the target audience, incidental publics that would be exposed to the message, people (or social categories) represented in that message, and other people who could be (directly or indirectly) afflicted by a communication campaign.

This would be a useful exercise for their current status as students developing their epistemic agency, but also for their evolution towards becoming future professionals. The specific requirements of communication jobs are such that epistemic agency will be needed at

every step. Analysing trends, building tailored messages for specific audiences, informing the management team about stakeholder expectations and deciding the best way to address them are not jobs that can be performed well under conditions of epistemic disengagement. Being able to hedge information and to devise original methods to supplement it will be precious habits of mind for future practitioners.

An epistemic subject who intends to manifest agency in communication sciences would probably start by connecting to diverse members of the public of any social entity whose communication is under scrutiny. By asking them to share their perspective and their experience with the social entity and its communication, students would have a valuable starting point for the evaluation of real-life consequences of certain types of communication messages. In this manner students would not only gain precious insights and ground their research in real data (instead of *armchair philosophy* or *kitsch generalities*), but they would also develop simultaneously a higher and higher degree of moral awareness regarding the implications of each standpoint (Fouke 2009).

A possible objection here is that the variables that influence the impact of a communication practice would need a higher level of generality to be informative for future professionals, and that the particular, the individual, the idiosyncratic, brings a dangerous amount of subjectivity into the picture. However, making use of people's values and experiences should not be perceived as a source of undesirable bias, but a condition of possibility for something scientifically relevant to be produced: when the topic is human-related, point of view is what makes the production of useful information possible in the first place (Searle 1980, Charmaz 2014). It gives it depth and removes it from the unhealthy expectations that communication rules will work like those of physics. People are not and should not be seen as homogeneous masses, and public messages should not be crafted on consent-manufacturing technologies developed in another era, when the instrumentalization of people was considered largely legitimate. We are not there any longer, and we have no reason to long for that type of mindset, neither in communication practice, nor in the academia. It is especially in the academia that we have so much freedom from private interests, which means that the type of research that we develop should always go beyond purely functional considerations that envisage the communication process as strictly controllable mechanics (Scott 2008, 299-301).

As for the lack-of-objectivity danger, it is now widely accepted that humans do not have access to some all-encompassing and purely

objective view. All we have in the social sciences is controlled subjectivity: we must be aware of our own standpoint and of our respondents', and we must proceed carefully from one thought to another, being aware of the coordinates of our position and of their potential influence on what we see in the world.

Shared personal meanings and personal experiences can be, and in many situations are, the only valid sources for important insights in the workings of an institution and its effects on different social categories (Seltzer 2022). This approach would develop students' moral sensitivity towards the problems experienced by different stakeholders who can be affected by decisions taken in morally-disengaged contexts (Drumright and Murphy 2004, Anderson 2018, Schauster et al. 2021).

Having clarified the use of epistemic agency in the use of practitioner sources, it is worth considering here a set of structural factors that may hinder its widespread adoption. Apart from the variables that have been discussed in the first sections, regarding students' idealized view of practitioner contributions, it is also the academic environment that has an influence on how much self-efficacy students (try to) develop as epistemic agents.

It often happens for students to be encouraged to respect many heteronomous conditions of performance, many of which are perceived as formal and mysterious at best, useless and self-congratulatory for the academia, at worst. My own previous research in this area (Grancea 2021) has revealed that students do not feel encouraged to pursue truth in original manners. From the interviews I have conducted, both dimensions seemed to be at low levels in students' evaluation – both truth pursuit and freedom to do it in an original manner were thought to lose terrain in front of other criteria for performance, such as number of sources, impersonal tone, adequate level of the analysis. A few confessions are worth quoting here to support this point, coming from graduate students I interviewed during the spring semester of 2022 about their experience with the Bachelor Thesis:

*I would say that for me, the more rules regarding form there were, the less enthusiasm for epistemic agency remained in my heart. I would like supervisors to give us more freedom regarding the tone and the methods, when the whole thing is just starting to make some sense. To this day I do not understand: how can you tell me I need an academic voice, and then tell me exactly how that voice is supposed to sound to be believable? How is that my voice then? (R.D.)*

*Sometimes you just need a number of sources to make the thesis sound 'academic' enough and do your best to reach that number. So, you skim through these sources, and you write something of what you understand. For me, I understand around 50% of what I read, so I am never sure about the paraphrasing part. My supervisor says I should contribute more and supplement this information, that I should develop a voice of my own and a unitary style. However, I just take the style of each author, because I prefer to use their words, just to make sure I do not miss an important point they are making and perhaps I did not understand. (M.T.)*

*When I try to make my own contribution, I just feel I am losing the charm that the source had. This is why even paraphrasing is difficult for me. Everything in my paper starts to look clumsy and dumb when I write from my head, and not from what the author says. It is very hard to measure up to them. (F.P.)*

Are these remarks representative for an entire population? It is difficult to say at this point. Judging from my direct experience, I would tend to say that these are not isolated, nor atypical perceptions. These answers point to real problems in what regards the degree of epistemic agency we encourage in our students. Indicating a certain number of sources that a thesis needs to have and never checking how they integrate them in their own conceptual webs of meaning is a fundamental mistake we tend to make in the academia. Over-emphasizing all sorts of formal issues, from the aspect of the footnotes to the compulsory impersonal voice, may be a passion for faculty members, but it may have serious costs on the attention given to other dimensions of student work that may matter more, especially the inquiry processes that students should be able to plan, develop, improve, under our guidance. Perhaps interest for this process itself should be our priority in the years to come, if we want students to gain more epistemic agency as they work on their theses.

## **6. Concluding thoughts**

Epistemic agency, defined as autonomy and responsibility in all aspects of scientific inquiry, deserves more weight in the discussions regarding criteria for excellent work in communication science writing. Apart from the general and more obvious reasons regarding their intellectual development process, students also need epistemic agency in communication science writing because of the specific features of the jobs they are preparing for. Whether they will work as content creators,

advertisers, public relations specialists, or journalists, they will often have a substantial contribution to the framing of major issues that are brought in front of wide audiences (Anderson 2018). In many cases, they will be in the position of using information from sources and transmitting it further, with great responsibilities implied in this action. For them, using sources well now also means preparing to be responsible professionals, who pay attention to both ends of the ensuing dialogue: to the context of the initial source of the information and to the final receiver of the information. Epistemic agency will be needed in many moments of their professional endeavours, since it will seldom be obvious where truth or social justice lies, given the multiplicity of voices and interests where they will find themselves as professionals. The skills students develop now in terms of epistemic agency and the mindset they adopt in terms of stakeholder-related responsibility can heavily influence the type of professionals they become and the degree to which the actions and decisions they make as professionals contribute to a more sustainable society.

The wide variety of sources that communication science students need to use also justifies a special attention to epistemic agency. Many of these sources are practitioner-originated and thus impossible to ignore, but few of them have gone through serious peer review processes, most being published as popularization materials.

The evidence provided by practitioners in support of their claims often needs careful analysis, since sometimes practitioners may be overenthusiastic about anecdotal evidence that they have accumulated (Linstead 2002, 671-674) or may be exaggerating the range of applicability of their findings to make things sound more spectacular, either because they themselves are embracing that perspective or because the material they created is itself a content marketing effort to promote their services or their approach (Grancea 2021). Many of them are taking a managerial standpoint focused on what works for a particular brand that is promoted: what helps the client make more money or what serves the interests of the client. This is, of course, a legitimate topic in communication studies. But it is not acceptable to make it the end of the story in the account of any given case. It always needs to be nuanced, completed, thought more thoroughly. Every strategy needs to be considered from the point of view of the audience.

What practitioners say they did or advise that is further done can and should be read, understood, and integrated as a useful source in one's thesis. But it needs to remain only a starting point, on which the student should build further, searching for other examples and other points of

view to illuminate the implications of that practice, and discussing with different categories of stakeholders about their own perceptions regarding that practice. Epistemic agency would require exploring the range of applicability of any recommendation that the practitioner makes.

This paper has given sufficient reasons for students to avoid imitating and embracing fully what practitioners say. At the same time, it has shown that students are often not in an epistemic standpoint that would allow for direct contradiction or debate with the practitioner content. This is why epistemic agency provides a wider framework that gives more space for students to develop their own methods of resituating any communication practice in new axiological contexts that would further help illuminate relevant aspects of it.

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