Using Drawing in the Public Speaking Course: A Mini-Speech

Angela J. Niedermyer
University of Texas-Austin
ajniedermyer@mail.utexas.edu
G.I.F.T.S. Presentation
National Communication Association Convention
Boston, MA
November 2005

Explain Your Mood Exercise for The Basic Course, Public Speaking, At-Risk sections of Basic Course

Goal:

1. The student will grow more comfortable with public speaking.
2. Students will alter how they view public speaking.
3. To blend art and public speaking in the classroom.
4. To help students find their voices to express their feelings and emotions.

Rationale:

Previous research suggests that at-risk students' needs are different from those of students who are not at-risk. Because of increased family stress, lower socio-economic status, and possible learning disabilities of the at-risk population, higher education institutions need to ensure these students' needs to not go unmet. Gorham goes on to argue that students who suffer from Communication Apprehension benefit most from participation in a separate section of public speaking courses (Gorham, 1999).

I taught a five-week summer session of public speaking to at-risk students. I became increasingly aware that the students were unable to express their emotions. Several were dealing with anger, others with external stressors at home and many others were receiving pressure to drop out of school. The Speech with Art curriculum came out of a brainstorming session. I struggled with a method that would increase students' comfort levels with speeches when they were not yet at ease with expressing themselves.
I started slowly by having them explain to the class what their drawing was. One such assignment was to illustrate their mood. Tensions were running high--students were attempting to date one another, and when they would break off the relationship, it would cause hurt feelings and negativity to seep into the classroom.

**Explanation:**

Previous communication education research has suggested that effective classroom assessment should be ongoing. Students learn best when they are assessed several times, rather than a summative assessment during the final exam. Researchers called for increased ungraded assessments of student learning. These ungraded or formative assessments range from assessing students comprehension through classroom discussion, journaling field notes and observations, to mini-speeches (Angelo & Cross, 1993).

A week later they were "explaining" complicated drawings about people who have affected their lives, change and how it had changed them, where they wanted to be in 10 years and what steps they had to take to accomplish those dreams. The pride that each student radiated when in front of peers was astonishing. Students immediately took painstaking effort in each drawing--these creations were the vehicle to "explaining" or communication with their peers. Before the students realized it, they were delivery three-minute speeches complete with transitions, an overview and full of personal flair. They were now ready for the graded assessment.

Drawing was the best method to teach these students speech. Communication was at the heart of every students' expression--these mini speeches were able to give the students the ability to express their emotions and communicate effectively in the classroom. Although the methods discussed were used in a smaller class setting, they will also work in larger classes if given a semester.

**Time for Activity:**
Time needs depends on the class size. 10 students 45-50 minutes. 10-24 students 1.5 hours.

**Resources Needed:**
Basic Drawing Supplies: Markers, crayons, notebook paper.
Public Speaking Supplies: Time cards, stopwatch
Directions:

The activity listed is just one of the many that instructors can implement throughout the semester to foster drawing in the basic speech course. This activity works well in at-risk and communication-apprehension sections as well as regular sections of the basic speech course.

Draw Your Mood Exercise:

Hand out markers, crayons, or whatever you have on hand. Instruct students to get out a piece of notebook paper and draw their mood. Tell the students that they can draw anything they want as long as it represents their mood. They must also answer the following questions in front of the class:

1. Why did you draw what you did?
2. How does this drawing represent your mood?
3. What affects or changes your mood?
4. What was your mood yesterday?
5. How has your mood changed?

Allow the students to converse as they draw. Answer any questions they may have but do not interfere with the students. Let them talk and joke with one another. Allow students ample time to finish their drawings, and complete their answers. (10-15 minutes)

Next, you can draw names out of a hat to decide who will speak first or ask for volunteers. You should announce that this is an ungraded mini-speech exercise.

Have the students each explain drawings by answering the questions 1-5.

Debrief:

Explain to the class that they just gave a speech. Talk about how they felt while they were giving their mini-speeches. Ask the students to give one item of advice to someone who has never given a mini-speech. Tie this activity to a graded assignment. The Personal Attitude Speech Assignment (PA) works well.
The PA speech requires students to formulate a thesis starting with the words, "I believe." One of the requirements is that a student's is a personal belief. The body of the speech consists of three main points. The main points should all answer the question of why the student believes the thesis. The assignment requires that the student use extemporaneous delivery. This is where the speech is practiced and delivered from carefully prepared notes. Students are allowed one note card with a maximum of 20 words. (See Haleta, p. 135-137). 10 minutes

**Typical Results:**

This activity allows students who are unsure of themselves and public speaking to practice by giving mini-speeches. Mini-speeches are also an effective teaching technique to make the transition from non-graded to graded assessments. Students who give mini-speeches are more comfortable with subsequent graded speeches. An instructor will clearly see the benefits after students give their graded speeches and later in grading. Students become familiar with how speeches will be given in the classroom. An added benefit centers on the students’ increased ability to communicate within the classroom and in their daily lives.

**References:**


Mahwahh, NJ: Erlbaum.