

Action Research Project

“Engaging in self-assessment of speeches to develop and sharpen public speaking skills”

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Fundamentals of Speech

Abstract

An ill-defined problem for public speaking instructors is the development of successful methods to teach students to develop and sharpen their public speaking skills. Furthermore, in order for students to develop such skills, speech instructors must also promote the development of metacognitive skills to help students recognize the strengths and weaknesses in their public speaking skills. One way to promote the development of metacognitive skills is to engage students in self-assessment. Self-assessment has been found to serve as a powerful instrument for experiential learning, strengthens commitment for competent performance, enhances higher order thinking skills, and fosters self-agency and authority (Marianau, 1999). Furthermore, individuals' interpretations of the results of their performance attainments inform and alter their environments and their self-beliefs, which in turn alter their subsequent performances (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 1996a). Thus, speech instructors may promote the development of metacognitive skills by training students on how to accurately self-assess their performance. More specifically, students may be taught to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to devise strategies to improve their skills (control and management of learning).

The purpose of this research was to develop instructional strategies to promote the use of metacognitive skills to improve public speaking skills. Through participation in this project, students were encouraged to THINK about their public speaking strengths and weaknesses, to COMMUNICATE their ideas through discussions with peers and self-reflection, to VALUE the importance of effective communication through appraising own reasoning and perspectives, and to ACT by engaging in speech presentations. The specific learning outcome guiding the research was as follows: “Students will develop and sharpen public speaking skills through the use of metacognitive skills by engaging in self-assessment of speech presentations.”

A critical component of the process to achieve the learning outcome entails the discussion of the assessment criteria to determine successful completion of learning outcome. A rubric was used for discussion and assessment of the speech performance criteria. A combination of summative and formative course-embedded assessments allowed the researcher to examine the effectiveness of the instructional strategies: 1) Speech Presentation and Speech Outline, 2) Pre- and Post-

Assessment of Public Speaking Skills, 3) Speech Self-Evaluation Rubric, and 4) Student Reflection Questionnaire. The analysis of the data gathered through these various assessment techniques allowed the researcher to reflect on the results for further revision and improvement of the process.

Upon careful consideration of the results, the researcher plans to disseminate the findings with peers in the Public Speaking field through department meetings and a panel presentation at the Fall 2003 Florida Communication Association Convention. Most importantly, the results of the study will provide the researcher feedback that can lead to improvement of the instructional strategies to achieve the ultimate goal of helping students to develop and sharpen their public communication skills.

Clear Goals

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (2002), employers across the country have consistently rated communication skills (oral and written) as the most valuable skill sought from college graduates as potential employees. Undoubtedly, well educated individuals are more marketable and valuable in the work force and in society when they are able to communicate effectively and confidently. An ill-defined problem for public speaking instructors, however, is trying to design successful methods to teach students to develop and sharpen their public speaking skills. Furthermore, in order for students to develop such skills, speech instructors must also promote the development of metacognitive skills to help students recognize the strengths and weaknesses in their public speaking skills. One way to promote the development of metacognitive skills is to engage students in self-assessment.

Research Questions

The purpose of this action research project was to develop instructional strategies to promote the use of metacognitive skills to improve public speaking skills. The general research questions examined were:

RQ1: Does the process of self-assessment accurately inform students of their public speaking strengths and weaknesses?

RQ2: Do students' public speaking skills improve by engaging in self-assessment?

Adequate Preparation: Background from multiple perspectives

Expert Perspective

Self-assessment and peer assessment, as alternatives for traditional assessment, have received much attention in the last decade. This new "era of assessment" promotes the integration of instruction and assessment and sees students as active individuals who share responsibility for their learning (Dochy & Segers, 1999). This approach is consistent with the "learning college" format, which is based on the assumption that "educational experiences are designed for the

convenience of learners rather than for the convenience of institutions and their staffs” (O’Banion, 1997, p. 47). As stated by O’Banion, the learning college engages the learners as full partners in the learning process. A self-directed learning approach in higher education can encourage students to become more actively involved in their learning. Self-directed learning is a process in which the individual has primary responsibility in diagnosing learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying the resources for learning, choosing and implementing the appropriate learning strategies and evaluating the learning outcomes (Closson, 1996; Guglielmino & Murdick, 1997). Furthermore, self-directed learning focuses on the facilitation of learning and is organized to help the student attain greater personal integration, effectiveness, and realistic self-appraisal (Joyce & Weil, 1997).

Self-assessment has been found to serve as a powerful instrument for experiential learning, strengthens commitment for competent performance, enhances higher order thinking skills, and fosters self-agency and authority (Marienau, 1999). A study that compared self-, peer and instructor assessments found that almost 100% of the participants reported that peer and self-assessment procedures made them think more, and 85% said the peer and self-assessment procedures made them learn more than traditional assessment procedures (Stefani, 1994). Thus, the ability to engage in self-assessment may be an essential component of an individual’s educational process.

According to Bandura’s Socio-Cognitive theory, individuals’ beliefs about themselves can influence their control and management of learning (Gredler, 1997). Bandura explained that self-referent thought acts as a mediator between knowledge and action, and through self-reflection people evaluate their own experience and thought processes. Furthermore, individuals’ interpretations of the results of their performance attainments inform and alter their environments and their self-beliefs, which in turn alter their subsequent performances (Bandura, 1986; Pajares, 1996a). Thus, instructors may promote the development of metacognitive skills by training students on how to accurately self-assess their performance. More specifically, students may be taught to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to devise strategies to improve their skills (control and management of learning).

As described by Gredler (1997), metacognition “refers to one’s knowledge about cognition and the ability to manage and direct or own learning and thinking” (p. 175). The key components of metacognition are (Gredler, 1997):

1. Knowledge and awareness of one’s own thinking, own capacities and limitations.
2. Knowledge and awareness of how to use task-specific acquired strategies.

In summary, the literature seems to suggest that students can use metacognitive skills when engaged in self-assessment to inform and improve their learning. Therefore, learning-centered educators may design instructional strategies and activities to promote the development of these important skills in addition to task-specific skills.

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Colleague Perspective

Upon reviewing the existing literature, the researcher engaged in discussions with colleagues in the field to share ideas about best practices to achieve the common goal to effectively teach students public speaking skills. One common theme that emerged from these discussions was the use of self-evaluation of speeches. While there are a variety of methods to accomplish this task, several colleagues agreed that students gain valuable insight about their public speaking abilities when asked to engage in self-assessment.

Student Perspective

Similarly, many of my own public speaking students seem to have embraced the concept that engaging in self-assessment has helped them think about and improve their public speaking skills. Discussions with several of my students prior to beginning the implementation of the Action Research Project, provided me with additional insight about the process. Students enrolled in a “Fundamentals of Speech” course were asked to write a few comments about their thoughts and ideas about engaging in self-assessment. More specifically, they were asked to explain how they felt about engaging in self-assessment after their speech presentations and whether they thought the process would help improve their public speaking skills. Students’ comments and insights served to generate ideas about the implementation of the research. Following are some of their comments:

“When we evaluate ourselves, our strong points and weak points are revealed to us. With this info, we are aware of what we need to work on to improve. I think it helps!”

“The method of self-evaluation helps me to see my weaknesses and strengths.”

“Most definitely. It kind of made me try harder for the next speech.”

Self Perspective

After reviewing the existing literature on self-assessment and after discussions with colleagues and students, I reflected on how my own teaching philosophy is consistent with the concept of allowing students to participate in their own evaluation as part of their responsibilities as learners. As a learning-centered instructor, I feel that engaging students in self-assessment can lead to greater development of metacognitive skills, which can also lead to improved public speaking abilities. Therefore, I believe that conducting this action research project can provide valuable insight to guide my teaching practice.

APPROPRIATE METHODS: Methods & Assessment Plan

Student Learning Outcomes

The general goal of engaging students in self-assessment is to help them sharpen their public speaking skills through the use of metacognitive skills. By watching their videotaped speeches, students should be made more aware of their understanding and performance of the following skills.

1. Students will write a speech outline using an appropriate organizational pattern.
2. Students will use an appropriate attention getting strategy in their speeches.
3. Students will clearly state a speech thesis statement.
4. Students will adequately support the thesis statement.

5. Students will maintain eye contact during the speech presentation.
6. Students will incorporate body language to emphasize the verbal message.

Participation in this project encouraged students to THINK about their public speaking strengths and weaknesses, to COMMUNICATE their ideas through discussions with peers and self-reflection, to VALUE the importance of effective communication through appraising own reasoning and perspectives, and to ACT by engaging in speech presentations.

Performance Indicators of Student Learning Outcomes

The speech presentations will be assessed based on the following criteria, which are required for all speech assignments throughout the semester. The "performance indicators" for each student learning outcomes are:

1. Students will write a speech outline using an appropriate organizational pattern.
 - Attention getter, thesis, preview, main points w/support, transitions, summary and closing remarks are clearly identified and proper format is utilized.
2. Students will use an appropriate attention getting strategy in their speeches.
 - Attention getting strategy effectively captured listeners' attention and helped introduced topic. The attention getting technique is relevant to the topic.
3. Students will clearly state a speech thesis statement.
 - Thesis statement clearly reveals the intent of the speech (narrate, inform, or persuade), captures the main idea of the speech, and previews the main points.
4. Students will adequately support the thesis statement.
 - Main points provide sufficient support for the thesis in an accurate and detailed manner. A variety of relevant supporting materials (facts, examples, analogies, etc.) are presented in a coherent manner.
5. Students will maintain eye contact during the speech presentation.
 - Consistent use of direct eye contact to establish rapport with audience and enhance speaker credibility. Inconspicuous use of speaker notes for extemporaneous delivery
6. Students will incorporate body language to emphasize the verbal message.

- Expressive and natural use of gestures, posture and facial expressions convey confidence and complement the verbal message.

Instructional Strategy

1. A “Pre-Assessment” instrument (see attached) was administered at the beginning of the term to determine students’ perceptions of their public speaking skills.
2. Class lectures and textbook readings throughout the term introduced conceptual definitions of public speaking skills.
3. Students and instructor participated in class discussions of public speaking skills assessment criteria. Six predetermined assessment criteria were measured for three graded speeches in order to maintain consistency of measurement (attention getter, thesis statement, organization, depth of content, eye contact, and body language).
4. Practice sessions with assessment criteria were followed by class discussions.
5. Students delivered speech presentations.
6. Students evaluated their own speech presentations using the “Self-Evaluation Rubric” (attached) by rating their performance on each of the predetermined assessment criterion.
7. Students completed the “Self-Reflection Questionnaire” (attached) designed to assess their feelings about engaging in self-evaluation of speeches.
8. Students completed a “Post-Assessment” instrument (attached) at the end of the term to examine how their public speaking skills’ perceptions had changed throughout the course of the term.

Assessments of Student Learning Outcomes

1. Speech Presentation and Speech Outlines (Summative Assessment)
2. Pre- and Post-Assessment of Public Speaking Skills - Attached (Formative Assessment)
3. Speech Self-Evaluation Rubric – Attached (Formative Assessment)
4. Student Reflection Questionnaire – Attached (Formative Assessment)

Action Research Methodology Design

This project has been designed as action research instead of an empirical, more traditional research study for several reasons. First, I do not have a baseline, as this would be the first time collecting this data. However, I can use this project as a baseline for future projects. I have also decided not to have a control group because I sincerely feel that this method will help students' learning and I don't want some of my students to be deprived of this opportunity. I also understand that without strict control measures (randomization, control groups, etc), the statistical analyses are somewhat limited, as well as the validity of the study. Nevertheless, I feel that the insights gained from this action research will provide valuable information to help me examine and further refine my teaching and assessment methods. I also think that this project can be easily replicated by other speech instructors, as the learning outcomes addressed are typically core learning outcomes in any public speaking class. In order to help others replicate this project, I have clearly outlined the strategies and assessment methods employed in this study.

Significant Results

Students' Perceived Public Speaking Skills

Based on a 5-point Likert Scale measuring eight items

Means of Students' Perceived Skills

	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-Test	10	40	26.55	6.36
Post-Test	25	40	34.75	3.75

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N = 46, Maximum possible score = 40

Students' perceived public speaking skills improvement was measured on a 30 point scale (5-point Likert scale measuring six speech assessment criteria). The scale measured students' own assessment of speech performance.

Students' Perceived Improvement

(2 plus or minus points)

Sample size = 34

Skills Improved	54.4%
Skills Unchanged	29.1%
Skills Declined	16.6%

Students' actual speaking skills improvement was measured on a 30 point scale (5-point Likert scale measuring six speech assessment criteria) based on the instructor's evaluation of the students' speeches.

Actual Improvement (Scores)

(2 plus or minus points)

Sample size = 34

Skills Improved	41.2%
Skills Unchanged	41.2%
Skills Declined	17.6%

Student's Perceived Benefit from Engaging in Self-Assessment

Overall, the majority of students who participated in the study perceived that engaging in self-evaluation of speeches:

(5) Strongly agree (4) Agree (3) Somewhat agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

Engaging in my own speech evaluation has helped me develop and improve my public speaking skills.	5 (67%)	4 (30%)	3 (3%)	2 (0%)	1 (0%)
Engaging in my own speech evaluation gave me ideas for how to better prepare for subsequent speeches.	5 (48%)	4 (41%)	3 (11%)	2 (0%)	1 (0%)
Engaging in my own speech evaluation has helped me recognize the strengths and weaknesses in my speech performance.	5 (59%)	4 (30%)	3 (11%)	2 (0%)	1 (0%)

N = 27

Students' perceived value of engaging in self-evaluation

Students answered the following question included in the "Self-Reflection Questionnaire" (attached):

"Do you feel that engaging in the evaluation of your own speeches can have an effect on your speech performances in this class? Please explain".

Sample responses:

1. "Yes, I feel that engaging in the evaluation of my own speeches can have an effect on my speech performances. When I watch myself on the video I see things that I should do to improve my speeches. For example, I have a tendency to put my hands in my face while I talk, now that I know, I'll try to remember not to do it anymore."
2. "Yes, because you are involved with the learning process and improvement process more if you look at your mistakes and learn to correct them."
3. "I feel that evaluating my speeches allows me to see what I did wrong and try to see if I could find a way to correct my problems. And it allows me to grow as a speaker."
4. "I do believe that self-evaluation is beneficial because we can see our progress throughout the course (videotapes). It also helps us recognize our areas of weaknesses so we can hopefully improve for future speeches."

5. "I feel that my last speech was powerful because of what I've learned in this class. I've become a more effective speaker by watching myself. My speeches have gotten better and better."
6. "Yes, it helps me understand what my strengths and weaknesses are. Then I can use those to make the next speech even better by learning from my mistakes. Videotaping the experience helped me see myself as the audience would have seen me. I was able to evaluate myself much easier than trying to picture myself in front of the class."
7. "Maybe. I don't like to do it, but it can help me recognize my weaknesses and try to work on them."
8. "I think that it helps when I get to see the tapes. It shows me the movement, tone of voice, and eye contact. That way I can focus my attention on specific problems that I have."
9. "I definitely believe that engaging in the evaluation of my own speeches can have an effect on my performance. In fact, I am very pleased with my performance in my last speech, it really surpassed my previous performances. I strongly believe that by evaluating my speeches I was able to recognize my weaknesses and focus my efforts on correcting them. Definitely my efforts paid off."

Reflective Critique

The results of this research suggest that students' engagement in self-assessment of speeches is indeed a valuable strategy in the public speaking course. Engaging in speech presentations and self-assessment increased students' confidence in their public speaking abilities, thus increasing student motivation. While the increase in perceived skills may not be as accurate as the actual increase in speech performance, it may help to motivate students to be more confident in their speech presentations, which in turn could improve their delivery. In order to improve students' ability to be more accurate in their self-assessment, more practice exercises are needed prior to the speech presentations.

As a result of engaging in Action Research, I now feel more confident in the use of self-assessment of speech presentations and will develop new methods to teach students how to assess themselves more accurately. This will be achieved by discussing levels of achievement for each assessment criterion on which the speeches will be evaluated. A speech rubric is now included in the course syllabus, and several class exercises consist of using the rubric to evaluate videotaped speeches. These practice exercises allow them to become very familiar with the speech skills and the appropriate levels of achievement before they are asked to evaluate themselves.

Reflection on Essential Competencies Addressed in this LO (ARP):

Assessment: I feel that this project allowed me to incorporate a variety of assessment methods in my teaching. I learned about the differences between formative and summative assessment. More importantly, I was able to foster student growth by engaging them in self-assessment of their own work. Students self-assessed their speech performance throughout the term, thus providing opportunities for “feedback loops early and often.” I will continue to explore strategies that can improve my assessment methods in my teaching.

Outcomes-based Practice: Through this project, I was able to ‘help students understand their growth in the acquisition of student core competencies’ and assess students’ growth in the core competencies. In addition, I was able to document growth in the General Education Outcome Communicate. Participation in this project encouraged students to COMMUNICATE their ideas through discussions with peers and self-reflection, to VALUE the importance of effective communication through appraising own reasoning and perspectives, and to ACT by engaging in speech presentations. THINK about their public speaking strengths and weaknesses

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Conducting this project allowed me the opportunity to examine my teaching and assessment strategies. Although the results of the study were not exactly as expected (or as I hoped), I still gained valuable insight about how student self-assessment impacts their learning. Most importantly, by sharing this project with colleagues in my department and with other professionals in the field (during presentation of this project at a Florida Communication Association Convention) I have received invaluable feedback on how to further improve my teaching.

EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION

The timeline for implementation and dissemination:

Summer - Term A * Review of literature * Discussions with peers and students * Design of project through “Destinations” Summer Program

Summer – Term B * Pilot testing of project * Data gathering * Analysis of data * Reflection and necessary revisions

August – October - Implementation of Project/Data Collection/Analysis

October - Presentation of Results at the 73rd Annual Convention, Florida Communication Association, Kissimmee, Florida

Spring - Ongoing Reflection, redefinition, on-going implementation

ATTACHMENTS

Pre-Assessment

This assessment will help your instructor determine the needs of the class for preparation of class activities. This is a non-graded activity!

5 = Strongly agree

4 = Agree

3 = Somewhat agree

2 = Disagree

1 = Strongly disagree

_____ I know how to develop thesis statements.

_____ I know how to research and present sound and relevant messages to support my thesis.

_____ I know how to use appropriate organizational patterns to structure my speech message.

_____ I know how to properly cite my research sources to establish credibility.

_____ I can maintain eye contact with my audience when giving oral presentations/speeches.

_____ I speak clearly and fluently when giving oral presentations/speeches.

_____ I feel comfortable speaking in public.

_____ I believe I'm a good speaker.

Comments:

Post-Assessment

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire designed to collect data on students' attitudes and skills about public speaking. Please circle the answer that best represents your thoughts and feelings about each of the following statements. **There are no right or wrong answers.** This assessment will also help your instructor determine the effectiveness of class activities used throughout the term. **This is a non-graded activity!**

5 = Strongly agree

4 = Agree

3 = Somewhat agree

2 = Disagree

1 = Strongly disagree

___ I know how to develop thesis statements.

___ I know how to research and present sound and relevant messages to support my thesis.

___ I know how to use appropriate organizational patterns to structure my speech message.

___ I know how to properly cite my research sources to establish credibility.

___ I can maintain eye contact with my audience when giving oral presentations/speeches.

___ I speak clearly and fluently when giving oral presentations/speeches.

___ I feel comfortable speaking in public.

___ I believe I'm a good speaker.

Comments:

Student Reflection Questionnaire

Part I. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to your feelings about engaging in self-evaluation of your speech:

(5) Strongly agree (4) Agree (3) Somewhat agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

Engaging in my own speech evaluation has helped me develop and improve my public speaking skills. 5 4 3 2 1

Engaging in my own speech evaluation gave me ideas for how to better prepare for subsequent speeches. 5 4 3 2 1

Engaging in my own speech evaluation has helped me recognize the strengths and weaknesses in my speech performance. 5 4 3 2 1

Part II. Do you feel that engaging in the evaluation of your own speeches can have an effect on your speech performances in this class? Please explain.
