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Public Speaking for Graduate Student Teachers in the Diploma of Education.

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PUBLIC SPEAKING FOR GRADUATE STUDENT TEACHERS IN THE DIPLOMA OF EDUCATION.

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ABSTRACT:

Graduate student teachers in the Diploma of Education took part in a 10 hour elective on speaking in groups, aimed at helping those who were communication apprehensive or shy to overcome their fears. Confident speakers also took part, to provide modelling and assistance, and to learn ways of teaching oral communication in school. McCroskey's (1977) Verbal Activity Scale (VAS) and Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) were used with a questionnaire evaluating the programme (EvalProg) to compare the reactions of the more and less confident speakers to the activities. The less confident speakers claimed to benefit from the programme, which is outlined. Certain activities were preferred by confident speakers, and others by less confident speakers, reflecting the different ways each of the groups view themselves and their audience.

Public speaking for graduate student teachers in the Diploma of Education.

Teachers need to be able to speak to groups. The importance of their ability to interact with students is detailed in a review of research by Nussbaum (1992). Teachers need to help their students to interact with others, too, since class work is group work. In the one-year Diploma of Education for graduates, a ten-hour, five-session elective aimed to attract both confident and shy speakers, the confident acting as models and also helping the shy. In addition, the exercises would provide examples for their own teaching of confident talk in the classroom.

Activities were designed to help shy students and to create situations where others would help them. Also important was motivational talk of the kind: "Everyone should help others to take part", "Try to understand how it feels to be shy; think of something you don't do well. For instance, at school I was no good at singing", "You need to applaud everyone, whatever their efforts", "Remember, your aim is not only to do well, but to make sure that others in your group do well, too".

The activities, including whole group work, two teams groups, groups of three or four, pairs, and individual speeches, took place in a large studio. Eighteen student teachers took part.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAMME:

Session 1: Introductory exercises for being heard and seen.

(a) With everyone seated in a circle, aims and rules were introduced (100% attendance to pass; applause after every event; everyone to be included in every activity).

(b) The students were asked: 'Who is a confident speaker? Who is quite confident? Who needs more practice? Who is nervous?' The aim was for shy speakers to see that others (about half the group) felt the same.

(c) They then moved around the room to find a partner, talk with them about their history, interests, aims; take notes; and introduce them - reading if that felt safer, but thinking only about how the *other* felt, not about their *own* feelings while talking - so that shy speakers would focus away from themselves.

(d) Sitting in a circle, they took part in games where each person spoke a few words, performed simple actions, sat or stood, to get used to being heard and seen by the whole group.

(e) The group ended with a discussion of group behaviour, a theoretical base for understanding their own behaviour and the ways groups influence individual behaviour.

Session 2: How leaderless groups function.

From now on, direction of activities was handed to the group. The leader called a roll, set up activities for the session, gave directions for the following week, and called for reflection at the end (which sometimes did not happen if time ran out - a mistake).

The group was divided in half, without appointed leaders, with nine in each team.

(a) Two plays based on chorus work, "Aussie Rules" by L.D. Gates, and "Family" from *Talking with Confidence* (Travers, 1995) have 12 parts each, so teams had to double up or write parts out. They managed directing and casting, rehearsed and performed the play for the others, and reflected afterwards on the process. "Family" was more demanding, because actions made participants more visible, as well as audible. "Aussie Rules" was noisier, with actors in rows viewing a game. The teams swapped and repeated plays. Shy people are most nervous of looking stupid and being wrong (Travers, 1992), so the aim was to produce group cohesion and support—and laughter, and thus establish confidence in the reception individuals would get from this audience if they spoke and were seen.

b) The same groups of nine sat facing each other in two rows. Each side had a different academic article on group communication and teaching, to present to the other side. No leaders or methods were suggested. They had 15 minutes as a group to prepare, and 15 minutes to present. Both chose the same method, each member summarising a section. One group took 25 minutes, cutting the final activity short.

(c) What happened next was unintentional. I planned a final exercise on 'giving directions firmly to a group'—something teachers must do—where each person from one group stands and tells everyone in the other group to say or do something quite simple in unison: "Shout Hooray", or "Wave your right arm". The groups faced each other. As time was short, I declared as 'winner' the side which kept to 15 minutes in the previous exercise, and that side would give the directions. This produced astonishing results. Even gentle members joined in making the 'opposition' run upstairs, stand on their chairs, barrack for football teams they disliked, and sing with ridiculous actions—all slightly humiliating. No member of the 'losing' team refused to take part. The result was that we went over time, and they dispersed before reflecting on what had happened and why, in group terms.

Session 3: Video: Seeing yourself as others do.

I had, elsewhere, videoed speakers individually, but some found this upsetting: one wept when viewing the result; another left. I wanted this group to work with support from others, and to be able to hide behind acted parts. The teams divided, so four or five produced and directed, and the other four acted. They then changed over, resulting in four videos in two hours with

everyone both directing and acting. They had a week to plan, but the videoing was done in the session with two video cameras on tripods, and a television. They could present whatever they liked, but all wrote plays. Everyone was involved in directing or acting, though clearly some dominated. The process was more important than the final productions, except for people to see themselves. However, videoing was essential to provide a focus, thus altering the way the groups co-operated.

Session 4: Panels and forums.

The aim was for individuals to speak to an audience, with support. The class was divided into groups of three, with a week to prepare a 15 minutes presentation. They were given handouts on panels and forums. By now, a group bond had developed, and shy speakers appeared to feel unthreatened by the audience. Some presented satires, some serious discussions. Although some speakers dominated, all took part. This was the activity in which all students, whether confident or shy, performed best, perhaps because others both controlled and depended on them.

Session 5. Speeches and audiences.

The intention was to have all five minute speeches in one session. The group felt listening to 18 speakers would be exhausting, and suggested dividing in two rooms, leaving audiences of eight. As there was no grading, I moved between the two rooms, thus missing half the speeches.

Students were more anxious, and three contacted me during the week. The results varied from witty, well-informed talks without notes, through chatty, inconsequential conversations (sitting on the table) to well-prepared talks read aloud over the time limit, ignoring the restless audience.

Audience response was questions, not critiques. I believed that the opportunity to prepare and speak formally to a friendly audience was valuable on its own. Detailed criticism could have been destructive as we had no time for repeats. In fact, follow-up sessions would have been better.

Post-script activity: I felt I had to comment on the exercise ending Session 2, saying I was mistaken in setting up a 'onqueror-victim' situation by naming a 'winning' team. I advised against creating such situations with adolescents. Far from being concerned, the 'losing' group demanded their turn to pay the others back--

which they did. I was even more doubtful about that.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME:

The purpose was to provide a programme to assist shy student teachers in taking control of a group and speaking with confidence, using confident speakers as models and supporters; and to provide all student teachers with ideas for teaching shy school students in class.

Participants: All 18 students were graduates in the one year Diploma of Education, aged 22 to 40, 6 males and 12 females. Some were advised to take the elective, but most selected it from a range. We met in a large sound-proof studio, empty but for 19 chairs and two tables.

Procedure: The course ran for 5 weeks in 2 hour sessions. Assessment was by attendance and active participation.

Measures: Students completed two McCroskey scales, *Verbal Activity Scale (VAS)* and *Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA)* at the beginning of the second week. The VAS measures talkativeness but not necessarily shyness. McCroskey (1977, 1991) says that for teachers, a high score means they may "dominate the activity of quiet children" and a low score that their "natural tendency will probably not be to engage in the verbal activity that can stimulate such activity on the part of others" (p.17). VAS has 10 items on a 5 point scale such as "I enjoy talking", "Most people talk more than I do".

The PRCA measures fear of oral communication. For teachers, a very high score may mean too much anxiety about speaking in a group to implement suggestions on teaching, and a low score may mean intolerance of or insensitivity to those who are anxious speakers--the silent children in the classroom. PRCA has 25 items on a 5 point scale such as "I am tense and nervous when participating in discussion", "I have no fear of facing an audience".

On the last day, students completed an *Evaluation of the Programme (EvalProg)* questionnaire (Appendix) written for the programme.

Anonymity: Each VAS and PRCA sheet was numbered. Students were asked to put the same number on the EvalProg questionnaire. I wanted an honest evaluation without identifying individuals. By the end, a group cohesiveness had developed, perhaps partly relief at completing the

speeches; evaluations later may have been more detached.

Organization: My part as leader became less important with each session, until the final speeches when the groups did not need me to hear them. They relied on the group for audience. I recognised my unwillingness to relinquish control, despite carefully constructing the programme so that members supported each other and finally cooperated rather than needing support.

HOW SHY OR CONFIDENT WERE INDIVIDUALS?

Table 1

Verbal Activity Scale (VAS: McCroskey, 1977, 1991):

<i>Possible score range: 10-50.</i>		<i>N=18</i>
Very quiet (approaching 10)		0
Quiet (up to 21)		2
Lower normal (22-27)	1)	10
Normal (29-31)		6)
Upper normal (36-38)	3)	6
Talkative (39 upwards)		0
Very talkative (approaching 50)		

On their own assessments, half were talkative or 'vocally active', and only one-sixth 'quieter than most people'. No-one was in McCroskey's 'very quiet' or 'very talkative' group.

Table 2

Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCF, McCroskey, 1977):

<i>Possible score range 25-125:</i>		<i>N=18</i>
High communication apprehension (98+)		4
High average (83-88)		4)
Average (62-88)		3)
Low average (62-69)		2)
Low communication apprehension (-61)		5

On McCroskey's scale, four (22%) were very apprehensive or 'shy', and five (28%) very unapprehensive or 'confident'. If we take a broader range, eight (44%) were at the 'shy' end, and seven (39%) at the 'confident' end, with three on the median point. The group was about evenly divided. This elective on learning to speak with confidence and helping others, attracted as many confident as shy students.

Table 3
Evaluation of the Programme Questionnaire (EvalProg Q4), Confidence rating:

Very unconfident	4 (22%)
Middle range	7 (39%)
Very confident	7 (39%)

At the end of the five sessions, when students were asked to rank themselves on a scale from 'very confident speaker' to 'very unconfident speaker', ratings showed the standard one-in-five as shy--this being the norm (McCroskey, 1977).

At a glance only two individuals were inconsistent over the three scales:

A: 'very high apprehension' (PRCA); 'average confidence' (EvalProg); 'talkative' (VAS).

B: 'fairly low apprehension' (PRCA); 'average confidence' (EvalProg); 'quiet' (VAS).

If scores on the three scales are grouped together, with a score of 5 for 'high' on all scales (3 scales x score 5 = maximum score 15), and a score of 1 for 'low' (3 scales x score 1 = minimum score 3), the overall composition of the group (range 3-15) was as follows:

Table 4
Composition of group relating PRCA, VAS and EvalProg Scales:

N=18	Score (3-15)
Very apprehensive, very quiet, unconfident	2 4,5
Quite apprehensive, fairly quiet, unconfident	3 6
Shyest of the average group	3 7,8
Shy tendency = 8.	
Average	2 9,10
Average = 2.	
Most confident of the average group	3 11,12
Very confident, unapprehensive, talkative	2 13,14
Totally confident, very talkative	3 15
Confident tendency = 8.	

This loose division into a tendency to shyness or confidence is used in a discussion of students' attitudes to the programme. The 'average' group is omitted so N = 16.

STUDENTS' EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME:

The Evaluation of Programme (EvalProg) questionnaire asked students about the

'interestingness' and 'usefulness' of activities (Q1). (The two upper and lower levels on the 5 point scale are scored together; only pronounced differences between 4/5 and 1/2 warranted comment).

Week 1 (Introductory activities): The shy and confident agreed that these were reasonably 'interesting' or 'useful'.

Week 2 (Plays): Confident students found the plays more interesting and useful (88%) than did the shy students (62%), though the confident preferred 'Aussie Rules' (noisier), and the shy 'Family' (acting with partners).

(Communication article): This academic activity was liked by 88% of the shy, but only 38% of the confident, though both found it equally useful (88%). Possibly the confident preferred more sociable activities, or the shy appreciated the content on how to handle classroom groups, perhaps obvious to the confident.

Week 3 (Video plays): There was equal interest in the video activity as directors (75%) and actors (88%), though they judged this less useful (62%) than the article summary above, possibly from habitual assumptions about appropriate university work.

Week 4 (Panel or forum): This was supported, though with less enthusiasm. A minority doubted its usefulness, especially some satirical presentations ('clowning', as one shy student objected).

Week 5 (Making a speech): The speech was the culmination of the course, and had more support than any other (confident 100%, shy 88%). The confident rated it higher for interest, the shy higher for usefulness.

(Being an audience): Speakers need audiences and an awareness of audience makes for better speakers. Unsurprisingly, the confident speakers found being in the audience not only interesting (75%) but useful (88%). Shy speakers are often so absorbed in their own anxiety that they cannot listen to others (Hartman & Clelland, 1990); some in this shy group were less interested (50%) in hearing others speak, and found listening less useful (63%).

How the group worked: Certain questions (Q2, Q8) asked for personal assessments.

Did your speaking in a group improve? Around 88% agreed. One confident speaker was in doubt, and

one shy speaker claimed not to have improved at all.

Did you help quieter members? No-one gave an unqualified 'yes'; only 50% of the confident thought they did, 38% of the shy. These students plan to be teachers, and as McCroskey warns, too shy or too confident teachers may well ignore quieter children.

Did some take too small a part, or dominate? The confident were more likely to think some took too small a part, the shy to think some were allowed to dominate. We judge others by ourselves, perhaps. Overall, they thought everyone joined in, but over half thought some members dominated.

Did you have enough practice at speaking and leading? About half the confident agreed (speaking 50%; leading 62%); less than half the shy felt they had enough speaking practice (38%) and only one thought leadership practice were sufficient (12%). Speaking tasks were allotted, but leadership was negotiated within the group.

Did you learn from others? The confident all claimed (100%) to have learned both from those who spoke well and others' mistakes, but fewer valued a supportive audience (62%). Most of the shy learned from other good (88%) or poor speakers (75%), but all (100%) valued a supportive audience. As we saw, the shy group valued their own role as audience less than the confident did, but were very aware of how others, as audience, viewed them--the usual anxious egocentricity of a typically shy person. Shy people are usually less observant of how others use successful strategies to get heard (Cheek & Briggs, 1990), and this is confirmed here.

Should the group have been limited to shy speakers? If only shy speakers attend, as in Phillips' (1991) successful 'reticence' programmes for undergraduates (Kelly & Keaton, 1992), they maximise practice at speaking and leading. The majority of both confident (75%) and shy (88%) students felt the group should not be limited to those who needed improvement.

Did they want more lectures and material on communication? (Q5, Q6) Half of both shy and confident groups said they did, and half considered it 'about right'. The programme was geared to practice; I underestimated this graduate groups' desire to explore the area further.

Would they have taken the elective if they had known what it was like? (Q2). All but one said they would. This student was in the average group, found most activities interesting and useful but did not help quieter members at all, and thought the group should be limited to shy students.

CONCLUSION:

In open comments given at the end of EvalProg (Q9), some students wanted an extension to 10 weeks. Students suggested: more leadership practice; impromptu speeches; speech techniques; advice on stage fright; voice projection; help in getting others join in discussion and making others listen. Some wanted critical comments on their speech, and a chance to redo solo speeches to follow advice. They said,

"You can read millions of books on how to speak in front of a group, but you never learn anything until you get up and try it for yourself",
"I found the sessions on forums and speech making most useful",
"The communication articles were very boring, but the rest was good".

I did not compare the results of VAS, PRCA and EvalProg with observations. I could observe without interruption as they ran their own activities, except for the speeches when half went to another room. However, I particularly did not want to identify questionnaires with individuals. The scales and questionnaires remain anonymous. So I cannot compare their behaviour in the group with their attitudes on VAS, PRCA and EvalProg, and their own estimations of how much they took part.

I was impressed with their involvement in the activities, particularly from those I knew to be reticent. As is always the case with shy people, those who volunteer for such programmes have reached the stage where they want to and therefore can change (Kelly & Keaton, 1992). Deciding to be a teacher was their first step. In a recent study, many practising teachers told me they had been shy in their youth (Travers, 1994). The same is said to be true of many actors, salespeople and clergy, who also adopt personas and work with 'captive audiences'.

A different group of shy speakers would not plan to train as teachers--or actors, salespeople or clergy, nor join public speaking groups. The improvement I noticed, and the students claimed for themselves, could be so--despite the shortness of the course--because they were already motivated to change.

NOTES

For those interested in developing a similar programme for secondary schools or adults, all the activities are among those to be published in *Talking With Confidence* by Cambridge University Press, July 1995.

The contribution of the La Trobe University DipEd students who agreed to take part in this pilot trial is acknowledged with gratitude.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Fox, Mem. (1993). *Radical Reflections: Passionate Opinions on Teaching, Learning and Living*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace.

Mem Fox's "passionate opinions" are introduced to us as "ammunition" for teachers and parents "who are, this minute, engaged in fighting against the still current skills-and-drills mentality in the teaching of language arts". Her style is lively and anecdotal and her arguments are completely convincing. As the author of the best selling children's book ever in Australia, *Possum Magic*, as a sought after story-teller and performer, as a teacher educator and an academic, Mem Fox is uniquely and powerfully placed to attacked poor practice in language arts teaching, and this is a timely publication. The book challenges educators to think again about how and why we learn. It is most valuable for teacher trainees to read such a passionate and knowledgeable account of language teaching and learning as an antidote to the often purely academic and joyless approach to teaching language offered in schools and tertiary institutions.

The book is a collection of articles and presentations on various aspects of language arts teaching which retain the charismatic quality of her live addresses. She has a valuable refreshing and irreverent approach to teaching and learning which is people oriented, not "intellectual", which affirms the all important affective aspects of learning, not just the academic ones. For example, she says, "we know intellectually that we should trust our students to learn - after all that's what we preach - but we're only human ..." (34). It is the humanity in the approach which shines through the book, inspiring the reader to "trust our students to learn". It is an affirmation of the role of significant people, ideas, books, words and excitement for effective learning. In "Notes from the Battlefield" she presents the strongest and best argued affirmation of the fun and the power of writing, and compares this with the lack of power in much school writing. "It seems to me a supreme arrogance on our part as teachers not to see that the granting of power to our children is politically and socially essential". (21) She attacks the "skills and drills" approach to teaching reading with energy and conviction in 'A Fox in

Possum's Clothing", comparing her own significant experiences sharing books and her own writing with the dry and joyless experiences children have with basal readers. In "There's a Coffin in my Office" Mem Fox buries "past mistakes in the teaching of English" (34) in the coffin in her office - "dead ideas, dead theories, and dead practices", and describes how she uses the coffin as a footstool. She is irreverent, too, about current academic research, suggesting that "a great Ph.D. dissertation topic would be "The Role of Love in the Mastery of Reading"; I hope someone tackles it soon" (52). Many other aspects of teaching and learning are covered in the articles, from the detailed affirmation of "read" writing experiences which are shared with significant people to issues of politics and sexism in literature. All topics are presented with conviction and enthusiasm which make the book a powerful and memorable addition to current writing about teaching, and I highly recommend it for teacher trainees and young teachers.

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Edith Cowan University

Ingvarson, L. and Chadbourne, R. (Editors), (1994), *Valuing Teachers' Work*, Melbourne, ACER, 301 pp.

Much of the spectacular reform effort over the past decade in Australian schools systems has been directed to increasing efficiency with much less done to improve effectiveness or to make the lives of those involved in schooling more satisfying. *Valuing Teachers' Work*, like the ACER's 1989 publication by J Lokan and P McKenzie, is an important resource for teacher educators who seek to stimulate classroom teacher's thought and action on matters related to teacher evaluation. Many classroom teachers in Australia have not given informed thought to teacher evaluation since they began teaching. Many have not experienced satisfactory systematic teacher evaluation since they commenced their career. They have little idea of how appropriate teacher evaluation may help them become more effective teachers and make the experience of schooling