M033-630 ERIC REPORT RESUME

ED 010 132 12-29-66 24 (REV)

HANDBOOK FOR SEVENTH- AND EIGHTH-GRADE WORK IN SPEECH--RHETORIC CURRICULUM, TEACHER VERSION.

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CRP-H-149-2

BR-5-0966-3

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EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.68 17P.

*RHETORIC, SPEAKING, WRITING, *SPEECH INSTRUCTION, *CURRICULUM GUIDES, *TEACHING GUIDES, JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, SEVENTH GRADE, EIGHTH GRADE, *ENGLISH CURRICULUM, EUGENE, OREGON, PROJECT ENGLISH, NEW GRAMMAR

A HANDBOOK WAS PREPARED FOR TEACHER USE IN SEVENTH- AND EIGHTH-GRADE RHETORIC CURRICULUMS. THE HANDBOOK CONTAINED DISCUSSIONS ON (1) EFFECTIVE AND CONFIDENT SPEAKING, (2) OPPORTUNITIES, ASSIGNMENTS, AND SPEECH ASSIGNMENTS, (3) CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING SPEECH ACCOMPLISHMENT, AND (4) STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR CRITICIZING SPEECHES GIVEN BY STUDENTS. AN APPENDIX ON THE USE OF SPEECH EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR TEACHING LISTENING WAS PROVIDED AS WELL AS A BIBLIOGRAPHY CONTAINING 41 REFERENCES FOR SPEECH INSTRUCTION. (NH)

OREGON CURRICULUM STUDY CENTER

HANDBOOK FOR SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE WORK IN SPEECH

Rhetoric Curriculum
Teacher Version

The project reported herein was supported through the Cooperative Research Program of the Office of Education, U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

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TOWARD EFFECTIVE AND CONFIDENT SPEAKING

The student makes his first step toward increased effectiveness and confidence in speaking by selecting a subject that is within his realm of knowledge and interest. He must know the material and have a desire to work with it and explore further. From choosing and exploring, thinking and reacting, he draws his controlling thoughts. Except for the period of criticism, it is during this exploratroy period, that you can exert greatest influence in teaching speech. Under the best circumstances, you can cause the student to use all possible means for selecting and testing thought. Among these are reading, personal observation, discussion, debate, conversation, and interview. Ideally the student will become thoroughly involved in ideas before he begins to consider ways to manage them with the audience. Thoroughness in the process of exploring ideas is necessary preparation for success in speaking and for gaining self-confidence.

Ordinarily a teacher should avoid much discussion of stage fright. It is common, however, and when it appears the teacher ought of course to treat the fear-plagued student with understanding and compassion. A fearful student needs help in fitting himself to the speaking situation. He needs encouragement and praise, and he needs to discover some reason to be pleased with himself as a speaker. Perhaps the teacher will observe that he has chosen his topic well; possibly he has included an apt description or sample of good thinking, and so forth.

Many problems of the student speaker arise from his feelings of inadequacy in a new or unfamiliar situation, and many of these problems fade markedly when the student comes to feel at home and competent before the class. Finding means to build a receptive atmosphere is a significant task of the teacher. As experienced teachers know, the class climate that allows the student to fit in and build confidence furthers his growth in speaking. Incidentally, vocal and articulatory problems related to the student's feelings about himself frequently can be eased without direct attention if you are forbearing.

In the section of this handbook covering suggestions for criticism you will find some help in managing problems of fear in the classroom. But what do you do if a student finds it impossible to stand and talk? Some teachers handle this situation by allowing the student to remain seated and speak, or by evoking the content of the speech with questions about his subject. If you help him in either of these ways, it is advisable to assume on the next speaking assignment that he will stand to give his speech. If he does balk on the second occasion, you might again help him with questions, let us say for the first half of his speech, and allow him to finish it on his own. Or if he needs help all the way through, you might ask him to give a summary on his feet.

Be patient and indulgent in teaching speaking. Many able adult speakers testify to having experienced overwhelming stage fright as children and to having benefited from sympathetic teaching.

SPEAKING ASSIGNMENTS

Opportunities for speaking assignments can be found at various points in the three areas of the curriculum. Since following a carefully conceived sequence of assignments is important in teaching speaking and since a minimum of direction toward this end is given in the units, please consider the following statement as you lay out your work for the year.

Assumptions

1. To learn how to handle ideas orally, students need opportunities in preparing and delivering speeches, opportunities in addition to group discussion, oral reading, and incidental oral activity.

2. Assignments in speaking should be designed to take the student from the accomplishment of relatively simple tasks to the more complex. We ought to be mindful of sequencing and spiralling in designing oral activities.

3. Since we are limited by time, we cannot provide as many "formal" oral assignments as we might wish to, but we ought nonetheless to give the student as many speaking assignments as possible. The assignments should unfold from the work of the class; class experience and content--language, literature, or rhetoric--may be the reservoir for ideas.

Assignments

To bring about desired improvement in speaking, you may give seventh graders three speech assignments, in sequence, with definite goals.

Assignment 1

Goal: To teach that speeches are based on a clearly conceived thesis or purpose sentence.

Ask the student to (1) state a purpose in the form of a clear declarative sentence that contains one idea only and (2) "develop" the idea in two minutes. Avoid stressing development at this point. Merely ask him to "talk about" the idea. This assignment echoes Aristotle's singling out statement and development as the necessary parts of a speech.

You may wish to assign the speech after completing the orientation unit and to suggest topics drawn from that study. Or, since it emphasizes proper wording of a purpose sentence, this assignment might stem from work in a language unit.

Assignment 2

Goals: To reinforce the need for a carefully planned purpose sentence; to teach the value of organizing ideas.

Ask the student to (1) form an acceptable purpose sentence and (2) discuss it under two or three headings in two to three minutes. Once again, development need not be given special stress. The student is to use his own ideas and observations to expand his thought. This assignment might follow from the unit of work on finding ideas.

Assignment 3

Goals: To reinforce the principles and methods presented in the first two assignments; to teach the value of developing ideas.

Ask the student to formulate a purpose and organize ideas for a speech of three minutes. This time he is to develop his main heads with well selected materials, perhaps examples from reading or other experience, quotations from literature, visual aids, or other physical objects.

This assignment might be based on work in a literature unit, for the student will have topics and materials available from his reading and discussion of literature.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

Following are the criteria for measuring the speaker's accomplishments in each of the three assignments. Besides using the questions for class discussion of speaking, you may put them on ditto forms for your own use in writing reactions and suggestions.

Assignment 1

Subject

1. Is it interesting to the speaker?

2. Does the speaker know enough about it to speak?

Purpose Sentence

1. Is it a complete sentence?

2. Is it clearly worded?

3. Does it contain only one idea?

Assignment 2

Subject

1. Is it interesting to the speaker?

2. Does the speaker know enough about it to speak?

Purpose sentence

1. Is it a complete sentence?

2. Is it clearly worded?

3. Does it contain only one idea?

Arrangement of ideas

1. Are the main heads clear?

2. Do they accomplish the purpose?

Assignment 3

Subject

1. Is it interesting to the speaker?

2. Does the speaker know enough about it to speak?

Purpose sentence

1. Is it a complete sentence?

2. Is it clearly worded?

3. Does it contain only one idea?

Arrangement of ideas

1. Are the main heads clear?

2. Do they accomplish the purpose?

Materials

1. Does the speaker include enough material?

2. Does it all relate to the main heads?

Audibility

1. Could all the audience hear?

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR CRITICISING STUDENTS' SPEECHES

The following suggestions for criticizing students' speeches are not new to most teachers. They are presented here as reminders of effective ways to let students know how they are doing in their speaking.

A student needs response to his oral presentations. He does need to know how he is doing, in order to recognize his progress. The teacher must acknowledge and accept a student's effort. This "acknowledgment" or "acceptance" is not to tell him that his work is wholly satisfactory, but it is to tell him, in effect, "All right, we shall accept your ideas for consideration, and we may have suggestions for you."

The first act in criticism, then, is to accept the student's contribution and note its strength. Remember that no student has ever given a perfect speech and that nearly all student speeches have at least one redeeming quality--though at times you may have to seach for that quality.

Secondly, mention the part of the work that needs attention, without criticizing too many aspects of a student's speaking. Criticize only those that relate directly to the assignment. Here we should observe parenthetically that a good assignment will not only specify the requirements lucidly but also will include only two or three new elements. A necessary base for useful criticism, therefore, is a clear assignment that introduces only a few unfamiliar elements.

Bear in mind that your comments are for the improvement of the student's speaking and that they ought to be constructive and positive. They should not include many don't's. After all, we find few absolutes in rhetorical practice. Something that ought not to be done on one speech occasion perhaps ought to be done on another. More importantly, a flat "don't" may produce a negative result. To most people, and especially to a youngster of thirteen, speaking is highly personal; many young people are sensitive and self-conscious before audiences. They need to learn to handle thought, to master the discipline of speech in its intellectual aspects. A speaker who lacks confidence before his audience cannot do an adequate job of discussing ideas--not the job that he can do

if he feels comfortable. In dealing with our student speakers we must remember both the personal and intellectual problems. Instead of setting down restrictions or suggesting that everything is wrong, teachers should make positive suggestions to students--"try this next time," or "perhaps your speaking could benefit from..." The quality of the comments affects future work.

Particularly after the student's first speeches at the beginning of the year, you may make nonpublic comments on the performances. You may write comments on the student's outline or on other forms the student may submit. With notations intended for the student alone, you can be direct and can spare the student the embarrassment of public rejection of his ideas, manner, or self. We must remember that some students do consider strong negative criticism of their ideas or methods as criticism of themselves.

As experienced teachers know, a private conference with a student can produce salutary effects in school work. At times this method is the only effective means of criticizing a student's speaking. Any other approach may be too public or too indirect. For example, you may have to talk with a student in private about his habitual and innocent use of a socially unacceptable word. Or the student may be so frightened before the class that only personal counsel will encourage him to try speaking again.

Group criticism is another way to avoid putting a student on the spot. You will often find it wise to comment on the efforts of speakers as a group, not mentioning any one person's name. Congratulate the group for phases of the assignment that they carried off well, and explain how they might go about eliminating the weaknesses that were revealed. Of course, group consideration of speeches also makes it possible for the students to profit from each other's experiences.

Good criticism can help a student become a good speaker; the difference between salvaging people who have the potential to do good work and losing them may be determined by the manner of your criticisms. None of this is to say, of course, that you should allow a student to get by with weak effort. Good criticism accepts the positive worth to be found in the effort, but also it prods, encourages, and causes the student to go beyond his present position and to reconsider his present modes and habits of thinking. To grow intellectually, he needs the prodding.

SUGGESTIONS FOR UTILIZING ORAL READING

Opportunities for students to read aloud in class appear in most units of the curriculum, especially in literature and rhetoric units. Though some assignments are written to include experience in oral reading, you may decide to try additional exercises or assignments. The following suggestions will help to make reading aloud a valuable classroom activity:

Selecting Material

1. When feasible, allow students the opportunity to select material. Students who like a selection typically prepare better and read more satisfactorily than do those with selections assigned them. Too, what a student selects may offer useful information about his thinking or growth.

2. Encourage the student to select material that interests him. To please someone else, a student occasionally will choose a selection that others judge worthy but which he at heart does not value. Again the first interests to be satisfied are the student's.

3. Make available material that reads well aloud. Not all literature can be read aloud with profit to reader and audience. If the selection is appealing to the reader, he very likely can make it so for the class.

Studying The Material

1. The reader must know the meaning of the material. In preparing his work, he should determine the theme or purpose, the author's point of view, and the meanings of words and figures of speech. Writing a precis may help him. Knowledge of the author's background may give added meaning to the selection.

2. The reader may need to be reminded to study pronunciations of certain words.

3. The student must recognize the key words that carry the meaning. If he emphasizes the wrong words, or falls into patterns you can ask him questions that make him focus on the meanings. For instance, what words carry the meaning of the first sentence of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address? --"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Occasionally a student will need to be asked the meaning of fourscore and seven. Who are "our fathers"? What words should recieve emphasis in "all men are created equal," and why? By probing for the sense and significance of the words and phrases, by causing the student reader to become vitally aware of what lies behind the symbols before him, you can help him to unlock the author's rich store of thought and feeling.

Practicing the Material

1. Provide opportunity for oral practice.

2. Encourage the student to read freely and with a spirit that will allow him to interpret and release the thoughts and feelings that he has discovered in the material. Knowledge first, then a willingness to express the knowledge, are two necessary keys to successful oral readings.

Discourage superficial or stereotyped interpretations. Such work frequently stems from superficial thinking or misconceptions about literature and oral reading. Much can be done by the teacher to foster an atmosphere conducive to good oral interpretation. Some of the suggestions and practices included in the section of this handbook entitled "Standards and Guidelines for Criticizing Students' Speeches" may be beneficial.

3. Help the student to handle poetry. If he can learn by the seventh or eighth grade to avoid sing-song patterns in reading poetry, he will have made a significant accomplishment. Some problems in reading poetry arise from limited knowledge and appreciation of the selection or from bad habits. Is he sensitive to the imagery? Can he see the sense of the lines of poetry? If so, perhaps he can read the lines to reveal the sense, allowing this knowledge to tell him when to pause or drop his voice or subordinate the meter or rhyme scheme. In achieving vocal variation, he should not be controlled by a plan to raise the voice here and lower it there but by information and a desire to convey the thought and feeling. Hard work on meaning may help him to avoid the pitfall of stopping at the end of each line of poetry. Again, the student's willingness to read a given poem to his class will affect his presentation of it.

APPENDIX A: LISTENING

The criteria for evaluation can be used to teach listening since most of them represent focal points for attention of the listeners also. Select certain of the student speeches and discuss what happened among the listeners during presentation of the speeches. For example, after hearing some speeches of the first assignment, determine through discussion or written response if the listeners recognized the speaker's purpose and why or why not. Following speeches of the second assignment, ask again about clarity of the purpose and about relevancy or suitability of the main heads.

Should a visiting speaker appear at school, you can exploit the occasion for instruction in listening. If your class is currently doing or has recently done the first speech assignment, you might ask them to listen for the visiting speaker's purpose. You should warn them that some speakers give their purpose by implication only. After the speech, ask the students to restate the purpose. Their citing of a variety of purpose ideas may indicate that the speaker did not present a clear purpose or that the listening was faulty. Discussion of such problems should prove valuable.

For a number of suggested exercises in listening see Ralph G. Nichols and Leonard A. Stevens. Are You Listening? New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1957, pp. 212-221.

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