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ABSTRACT

An oral communication course, offered at Michigan State University during the 5-week summer session, was conducted for academically talented high school students. Students learned about the responsibility of creating and delivering ethical, informed, and rhetorically sensitive messages. Each student researched one socially significant issue, and delivered three different speeches (one informative and two persuasive) based on this single issue. Feedback and critique of famous and peer speeches were also integral parts of the course. Review of student presentations included: (1) immediate oral critique by peers, led by the speaker; (2) peer and faculty written critiques; and (3) critiques following video playback. Students were also required to play back their video at home. Throughout the 5-week summer session, instruction emphasized personal and social responsibility. Students were responsible for several roles--researcher, contributor, supporter, critic, and orator. The students learned to value their own voices and the voices of others. (KEH)

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THE GIFT OF ORATION
FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED--
TEACHING ORAL COMMUNICATION TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech
Communication Association, Chicago, Illinois.

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Academically talented high school students were provided accelerated learning opportunities in the High Achievers program at Michigan State University. Similar to programs offered at other universities, this program was designed to provide selected high school students the chance to take college classes exclusively with their peers, with no "regular" college students in attendance.

Michigan State collaboratively developed this program with the Ingham Intermediate School District. Students were invited to participate who had taken the Scholastic Aptitude Test as seventh graders, and who obtained a minimum score of 450 on the verbal portion or 450 on the math portion and a total score of 850 or more. The students also had to have a minimum of a "B" average in their school courses. Minority students were especially recruited, and financial aid in the form of scholarships was available through the university and private foundations.

Two courses were included within the 1988 curriculum: Oral Communication and Computer Science. Students were only permitted to take one course per year. In 1989, Natural Science was added.

The composition of the 1989 Oral Communication class included: 4 males and 5 females, 1 black, 1 hispanic, 1 oriental and 6 caucasians. Students ranged from freshman to senior standing. Instruction was lead by a full professor of communication and teacher education, and the support staff included one doctoral student in teacher preparation and communication, and one undergraduate student in communication education.

The philosophy of the course was based on the premise that high achieving students are preparing to take a leading role in this democratic society. Students learned about the responsibility of creating and delivering ethical, informed, and rhetorically sensitive messages. They each researched one socially significant issue. Three different speeches based on this single issue were delivered. The first presentation was informative, and typically focused on the background information and definitions necessary to provide the audience with adequate knowledge before the persuasive speeches were given. Students could then either illustrate opposing views or choose to describe different perspectives of the argument for the second and third speeches. Topic choices ranged from pollution and nuclear weapons to the greenhouse effect.

Four methods incorporated into the course included:

- 1) analyzing rhetorically and historically significant speeches to illustrate important concepts and principles of speaking,
- 2) using a variety in methods of feedback and critiquing,
- 3) researching a topic from different perspectives and
- 4) sharing responsibility in learning and critiquing.

Since one purpose of the course was to enhance students' ability to develop and articulate arguments as thoughtful participants in our society, it was important to critique and analyze speeches of orators whose speeches illustrated points highlighted in class lecture. For example, Ann Richard's keynote address to the 1988 Democratic National Convention and John F. Kennedy's 1960 address to the Greater Houston Ministerial

Association were used as powerful contrasts of addressing friendly and antagonistic audiences. The "I have a dream" speech by Martin Luther King was analyzed for language and stylistic devices. Senator Edward Kennedy's 1969 "Address on the Mary Jo Kopechne Incident" was analyzed for devices to build source credibility.

Feedback and critique of famous and peer speeches were an integral part of the course. Critiquing of student presentations included a) an immediate oral critique by peers, lead by the speaker b) peer and faculty written critiques and c) video playback the following period. Students then could playback their video at home.

Immediately after the presentation, the speaker remained in front of the class and asked specific questions about the speech, selecting areas of concern he/she felt comfortable talking about. After class, the instructors viewed the videotape and wrote a detailed written critique. Written critiques filled out by peers were also used in part to determine the speaker's grade. The following class period was then devoted to critiquing each speech by playing back the video tapes in small groups. During class viewing of the videotape, the instructor and students selected points to stop for discussion and analysis. Instruction and modeling of appropriate and constructive feedback helped students responsibly critique themselves and others.

In order to create and critique presentations responsibly, students needed instruction in research and communication theory. Students were taken on a library tour and shown multiple library resources. Class lecture incorporated topics such as: message structure, topic and evaluation, analysis and adapting to an audience, and materials of speaking and delivery. The written final examination encouraged high level analysis as students viewed and critiqued a video taped speech. They also were asked to demonstrate competence in construction and analysis of arguments as they read editorials and had to create a speech arguing for benefits of courses for the gifted and talented.

Throughout the five week summer session, instruction emphasized personal and social responsibility. Students were personally responsible for several roles, that of researcher, contributor, supporter, critiquer and orator. They were also encouraged to recognize the important social responsibility which accompanied oration. As high achieving students, they will be more than likely to be called upon to speak on behalf of others, and through the course they learned to value their own voice, and the voice of others.

K-12 educators are encouraged to be aware of, and to create more accelerated opportunities for gifted and talented students. Oral Communication class provides experiences which are immediately useful. Students report that this class has already helped them in other communication situations. These gifted and talented students now have a college transcript and a self-confident communication skill.