

Must I Justify "Speaking Across The Curriculum?"

Kina Mallard

Recently I was invited to attend a faculty forum at a nearby university on the theme, "Oral Communication in the Classroom." This particular university had just completed a two year self-study program for accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. One finding of the Association claimed that the institution was deficient in teaching oral communication skills. The forum had been called to determine what action to take for correcting the problem. This university offers a course in Public Address, which the student can elect, but has no oral communication requirement in their core curriculum. The forum included faculty speakers who advocated adding an oral communication component to the requirements for graduation. These professors had been required to take a speech course at some point in their educational preparation, and they expressed how it had benefitted them. Their talks were well organized if unimpressive. The opposing viewpoint was presented from faculty who felt that a "course in talking" was unworthy of their academic objectives. One professor even remarked, "The written word is the **only** form of intelligent discourse." The discussion continued, and faculty members revealed what type of oral assignments their particular discipline (psychology, physics, and education among others) required in their respective courses. They each felt these assignments sufficed in meeting the oral communication educational needs of their students, despite the fact that many shared the opinion expressed by one of their colleagues, "I require oral reports in all my classes, but I never grade them because I don't feel qualified."

Most college professors require written work in the form of a research paper, a report, or answers to an essay question. In those classes, the teacher must 'feel qualified' to grade the work. Professors grade these written discourses on grammar, vocabulary, organization and clarity of thought, research and evidence to support a conclusion, and the ability of the student to persuade the professor that he has mastered the material. I doubt that these professors believe they must have a degree in English to grade the written work they assign. Why, then, would that same professor feel unqualified to grade an oral presentation that must demonstrate many of the same communication competencies? Vocal and physical delivery elements can be added to the professor's evaluation. Have we all not passed judgment on the eye contact, rate, articulation, or energy of a preacher, a political candidate, or, dare I say, a colleague? It is no more necessary to have a Ph.D in Rhetoric and Public Address to grade an oral presentation than it is to have a Ph.D in English to grade a written presentation.

Recently I heard a professor comment that he felt it was unethical not to require writing in small classes. We have been bombarded recently with lectures, seminars, and articles advocating "Writing Across the Curriculum." I agree with this position, but may I offer the premise that it is unethical not to require **oral** work in small classes.

If it is true that the written word is our only intelligent form of discourse then perhaps the educational society should take a closer look at the ineffectiveness of our teaching of oral discourse. We must recognize the need to incorporate oral communication skills into our curriculum. In a society that spends over 40 percent of its communication time listening to the spoken word, we educators have an obligation to teach our students how to compose, organize, and deliver oral discourse intelligibly.

My first teaching position was at a private two-year college as Oral Communications Instructor. I understood that my employment was the result of the long debated issue of requiring oral communication as part of the core curriculum. Those in favor of adding a speech course won the battle, and I am confident that the persuasiveness of their **spoken** views influenced those who originally opposed the idea.

The faculty forum mentioned earlier decided that their university was already teaching "speaking across the curriculum," and that no formal course in oral communication need be added to the general education requirements. I hope their students will learn the importance of effective oral discourse while crossing the curriculum, but I am certain it will only be learned if it is **taught** - if the professor is gutsy enough to provide concrete oral feedback. Students who know that their oral work will not be graded probably will be poorly motivated to do their best.

I take the stand that oral proficiency should be part of the total evaluation of students graduating from institutions of higher learning. I believe we can accomplish oral proficiency best by a general education requirement of at least one course in oral communication. It is inevitable that most of our students will be asked at sometime to address an audience. Whether Sunday School teacher, PTA president, football coach, executive, doctor, or teacher, it is probable that the request to communicate orally will occur more frequently than the request for written reports. Is not a major objective of education to prepare our students for the "real world?" Must the importance of teaching speech communication skills in an oral/aural society be justified?

I regret having to communicate with you in this manner. I could be much more effective if you could **hear** my voice and **see** my face.

Introduction

The following text is a very faint and illegible document, likely a scan of a page with extremely low contrast or significant fading. The content is mostly unreadable, but appears to be a formal document or report. The text is organized into several paragraphs, with some lines appearing to be headings or sub-sections. The overall structure suggests a formal introduction or the beginning of a report, but the specific details are lost due to the quality of the scan.