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The Use of Simulation in the Beginning Public Speaking Classroom: Let's Make It Realistic, Relevant and Motivating*

John J. Miller

The beginning public speaking course typically consists of students with diverse backgrounds, academic pursuits and career goals. Students usually present several speeches to demonstrate their speaking competency. According to Gibson, Hanna, and Leichy (1990), oral performances determine 61% of their grade (p. 244). These performances normally compel the selection of topics which relate to the disparate classroom audience. When constrained in such a way, however they may see the course as irrelevant to their goals and become frustrated. Not surprisingly, the Gibson *et al* survey cites inadequate preparation and apathy among the ten major problems faced in the basic communication course (p. 249). Weaver and Cotrell (1989) contend that student motivation is the speech instructor's greatest battle (p. 184).

The use of simulation in the beginning public speaking classroom encourages students to select topics which resemble those of possible future presentations. They are free to choose more parochial subjects, but audience adaptation remains a requirement. This topic selection process heightens the significance of public speaking, which may motivate students to learn. Simulation offers an alternative teaching technique which necessitates the utilization of the student rhetors' pur-

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suits while concurrently providing instruction in the appropriate skills.

SIMULATION AS A SPEECH ASSIGNMENT

The instructional technique of simulation has been employed for many years. In fact, *Simulation and Gaming*, a journal dedicated to the study of games and simulation as a teaching method, recently celebrated its silver anniversary. The ability of this exercise to not only include the necessary skills but also a stronger sense of reality, makes it an effective speech assignment.

Simulation is composed of three phases: playing, debriefing and journal writing (Petranek, Corey, & Black, 1992, p. 175). The first phase involves the creation of the situation and its corresponding presentation. For example, a sophomore with an environmental technology works with an instructor to develop an appropriate situation. The student's situation involves a local chemical company recently charged with dumping dangerous chemicals into the town's river. The EPA cleared the company, but the townspeople are still very wary. Attempting to improve relations, the board of trustees has asked for proposals aimed at enhancing the local environment. The student works in the company's research and development division, and must make a presentation before the board. Relying on both material learned in other classes as well as personal interests in the subject, the student creates the appropriate speech and presents it to the board of trustees (the class).

For students who are unsure of their career aspirations, instructors should create a simulation based on students' hobbies, interests, or goals. For example, with a freshman who does not have a major and is interested in baseball, the situation might resemble a city government presentation. In this simulation, the city is considering the closing of a local

park to build a maintenance building, resulting in the end of little league baseball. The city contends that no other location is available for the building. As a supporter of little league, the student is asked to defend the institution at a public hearing. In this simulation, the student declaims in a realistic situation, employing personal interests and knowledge.

The second phase is the debriefing. An instructor provides an evaluation of the simulation. Petranek *et al.* (1992) explain:

The professor's role during the debriefing is very different from the role of lecturer. The debriefer sets the tone by being open and accepting new ideas. In debriefing, the professor is a facilitator and encourages all to offer opinions...He [sic] encourages student to see patterns of behavior and proposes associations from the simulation to the real world. The debriefer's role is a two-way street instead of the one-way street of lecturing (p. 177).

The debriefing enables students to learn from the experience by providing insights to their solution (Lederman, 1994, p. 218).

This phase is similar to an oral evaluation, but also involves class participation. The board of trustees or city council provides feedback concerning the speech's resolution of the problem. Other areas for feedback could include, but are not limited to, the speech's structure and order, the proposal's workability, and suggestions for improving the presentation.

The class must act within the situation as the board of directors or the city council, and the instructor must become a facilitator. In this way, the dynamics of the situation are also included in the critique. Such dynamics could be the board of trustees' emotions and motivations or the citizen's outrage over the park's closure. Further, the entire class becomes active participants in the situation. Therefore, they learn how situations affect speech presentations.

The last phase requires reflections, from the play and debriefing, to be recorded in journals. Petranek *et al.* (1992) contend that "participants integrate theories into their experiences ... allowing participants to think about things and write about them helps them interpret events" (p. 181). Students should respond to the evaluation and contemplate their performance, noting areas for improvement as well as positive advancements from the previous assignment. This phase reinforces the debriefing, as students must integrate the comments into their perceptual frameworks.

This assignment has some drawbacks. The biggest difficulty is the preparation time. Instructors must develop simulations for all their students. While the student helps to create the situation, the instructor still provides the finished product. As a result, this assignment may only replace one of the speeches given throughout the term.

Besides preparation time, the debriefing session also requires a considerable amount of class time, as the rest of the class participates in the critique. The teacher must be a skilled facilitator to stimulate class participation and encourage all comments. Through this participation, both the speaker and the remaining class members learn from the activity.

Further, during a simulation, the class members must portray an audience found in the situation. The classroom audience is transformed into one more likely to be encountered by a speaker. The current assignment, on the other hand, requires speakers to pretend to be someone else by delivering a speech they would normally not present. Simulation reverses who mirrors reality by faulting in favor of the speaker. Despite these problems, the use of simulation has two significant benefits: the creation of a clear rhetorical situation, and increasing student motivation.

THE CREATION OF A CLEAR RHETORICAL SITUATION

Bitzer (1968) describes the rhetorical situation as:

A complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation can so constrain human decision or action to bring about a significant modification of the exigence (p. 6) .

The central component of the rhetorical situation is the exigency or “an imperfection marked by urgency” (Bitzer, 1968 6). For Bitzer (1980), two components comprise the exigency: the factual and the interest. The factual component consists of observable objects or events; the interest component consists of the speaker’s perceptions (p. 24). Therefore, the rhetor examines the context of the situation in order to determine the speech’s expectations and constraints.

As Bitzer demonstrates, the exigency of the situation becomes the basis for the speech. The factual condition of the current assignment (choose a topic which relates to the entire class) may not provide clear “dimensions or conditions” which students can examine for their subject. The context of the speech classroom is that of how to prepare a speech which does not lend itself to a readily available subject for speaking. Therefore, a search occurs outside of the factual condition to locate a topic. As a result, tried and true topics such as drinking and driving are chosen for classroom orations rather than more realistic models of future presentations.

With the use of simulation, students may endure less stress from their topic search. The simulation creates a clear rhetorical situation consisting of an exigence and the necessary factual components. In essence, it suggests the topic; the identification of the exigence is tantamount to discovering the

subject of the speech. Students no longer select a subject from the typical list. They choose topics as a speaker would outside of the classroom, by examining a situation. In the previously described environment simulation, the student must create an environmental program that would improve a company's image.

Aside from easing the topic selection process, simulation has educational benefits. A realistic simulation assists students in learning the processes involved in recognizing a controlling exigency. In order to create a "fitting" response, speakers analyze a hypothetical situation, and take into consideration not only the attending audience, but also the subject's historical context, the exigence's clarity, and the factual components. Through this analysis, they develop the speech's subject. The examination encourages students to discover proper methods of topic selection. This topic selection method closely resembles the process employed in a public forum.

SIMULATION AND MOTIVATION

Proponents of cognitive and active learning theories maintain that students attend class "with their own perceptual frameworks intact" (Myers & Jones, 1993, p. 6). Explaining active learning, Fuhrmann and Grasha (1983) claim that, "Teachers must not merely transmit, but must also involve and engage students in the activities of discovery and meaning making" (p. 12). Thus students must actively engage the subject being addressed.

In order to apply course material to their daily lives, speakers need to select realistic topics. However, topics which more closely resemble those subjects would less likely relate to the entire audience. For example, the accounting major who works in a bank might possess a desire to speak about the need for a different accounting system at the bank, a topic

which would be more realistic for the student. However, the attending audience is probably not interested in accounting systems. Fearing a poor grade, the speaker chooses a more secular topic which fulfills the requirement of the assignment, but does not exercise the student's perceptual framework. Simulation, however, requires the selection of a topic related to the student's interest.

Simulation has long been viewed as an effective teaching technique. According to Diulus and Baum (1991) :

A simulation reflects life; a simulation abstracts reality without reproducing it. In an educational simulation reality-based elements are offered in an initial scenario description; at once, players are asked to be engaged in everyday life experiences. . . . Simulation is an active learning experience usually requiring of the participants not only thought but also feelings, choices, communication and movement (p. 35) .

Students become active players in the simulation, learning how actions interact within and affect a situation. Diulus and Baum further explain, "By its very nature, a simulation asks a participant to make-believe, to fantasize, and to apply principles of creative problem-solving" (p. 36). Applying the information revealed to them, students perform within a realistic situation to learn the skills taught by the course.

As students apply material, simulation may increase the motivation to learn the facets of public speaking. Motivation is acknowledged by scholars to be a major contributing factor to the learning process (Weaver & Cottrell, 1988, p. 22). Weaver and Cottrell (1988) contend that motivation "arouse(s) and stimulate(s) students ... gives direction and purpose ... and leads students to choosing or preferring a particular behavior" (p. 22).

Although motivation is very complex and comprised of both internal and external components, the subject's relevancy to the student is an integral part of overall motivation. Relevancy relates to the fulfillment or potential of fulfilling a

personal need, motive or value (Keller, p. 407). Frymier and Shulman (1995) explain that relevancy is the "linkage between content and a student's interest and goals" (p. 41). Although difficult to ascertain empirically, as a course's relevancy increases, motivation to study appears to increase (Frymier & Shulman, p. 46). Likewise, Weaver & Cottrell, (1988) posit that "people are more likely to listen and respond if they feel there will be some personal gain from the experience" (p. 28). When students believe that the course material will be relevant, they are more likely to learn.

The use of simulation may increase student motivation. For example, in the situations previously described, the rhetor employs personal experiences and knowledge to create a solution appropriate to the board of trustees or a city council. This student has an opportunity to learn the importance of speech to their possible career. Rather than speaking to earn a grade, they are declaiming in a realistic situation related to their aspirations. This heightens the relevance, as the course material concerns an important career skill. In a review of studies concerning educational games and simulations, Randel, Morris, Wetzell and Whitehill (1992) found that in classes lacking motivation, games and simulations promote active participation (p. 270). The personal involvement encourages students to learn

CONCLUSION

As instructors of public speaking continue to explore methods to more effectively educate, simulation should be considered as a method of teaching the art of public speaking. Simulations have been found to increase retention and understanding of tested material (Specht & Sandlin, 1991, p. 207).

The traditional mode of assessment fails to consider the need of solving an exigence and adapting to a situation. Simu-

lation requires the creation of a situation where the student must learn to identify the exigence in order to speak. The appropriateness of the response becomes an important component of the overall assessment as well as an important skill gained through the activity.

As the population of higher education continues to change, instructors must adapt to the diverse experiences and goals of students. The current speech assignment may encourage an impersonal speech that ignores the disparate student body and the importance of relevancy. Simulation, on the other hand, actively engages personal experiences and interests to teach the skills of public speaking. This utilization demonstrates the importance of the course, increasing the motivation to learn.

Simulation offers much, but it demands much in return. Instructors must take the time to learn about their students and create engaging, relevant and realistic situations. Students must actively partake in the discovery of necessary principles by solving the problem of the situation. However, simulation, as an alternative speech assignment, can instruct students to recognize the importance of a situation and motivate them to learn the art of public speaking.

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