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Julie Semlak

North Dakota State University

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Traditional Pedagogical Tools: Examining Peer Feedback in the Basic Communication Course*

Julie Semlak

Gustav Freidrich, in his comments regarding the communication education research agenda published in the 50th anniversary issue of *Communication Education*, stated “I believe we can and should be doing more [research] focusing specifically on the tasks of communication instruction” (Freidrich, 2002, p. 373). Friedrich’s view is not new to communication scholarship. In 1989, Book expressed “pedagogical content knowledge unique to communication has gone virtually unexamined” (Book, 1989, pp. 318-319). Pedagogical content knowledge for communication education includes strategies used to teach communication skills to students. The quantity of basic communication course pedagogical research is limited, and a review of extant literature concludes much more attention needs to be directed to the combination of pedagogy and theory in the basic com-

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munication course (Hunt, Novak, Semlak, & Meyer, 2005).

Responding to such criticism, communication education scholars have investigated the speech evaluation process (Reynolds, Hunt, Simonds, & Cutbirth, 2004), communication apprehension (Dwyer, Carlson & Dalbey, 2003), as well as the use of technology to enhance the basic communication course (Sims, 2003). All of these studies have investigated a specific aspect of the basic communication course in an attempt to provide a theoretical and pedagogical base for the use of specific pedagogical practices. However, the prevalence of research focusing on teaching strategies used in the basic communication course is not complete.

This study presents an additional response to Freidrich (2002), Book (1989), and Hunt et al.'s, (2005) call for theoretically grounded research focusing on pedagogical practices in the basic communication course by exploring a commonly used basic course practice, peer feedback. The benefit of receiving and providing peer feedback in the basic communication course is worthy of study, as forty-one percent of basic communication courses use peer feedback in their basic communication courses (Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999), and 20 percent of basic communication courses use a combination of instructor and peer feedback to determine public speaking grades (Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). Although empirical evidence is not available, peer review practices are also likely used in other public speaking courses, including persuasive speaking courses, business and professional speaking courses, and oral performance courses.

There has been some investigation into the benefits and drawbacks of using peer assessment and peer feedback in other disciplines (Butler & Hodge, 2001; Hanrahan & Issacs, 2001; Miller, 2003; Mitchell & Bakewell, 1995; Nilson, 2003; Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel & van Merriënboer, 2002; Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel, van Merriënboer, & Bastiaens, 2003; Story, Lytle & Brirnbaum, 2002; White & Kirby, 2005), but most of this research is atheoretical, relying strictly on empirical data to draw conclusions. The present research attempts to expand the existing base of student and instructor perceptions of peer feedback assignments while exploring the theoretical implications of peer feedback assignments.

PEER FEEDBACK

Peer feedback is “student evaluation and critique of one another’s work” (Nilson, 2003, p.34). In a basic communication course, peer evaluation of speeches involves one student evaluating the speech of another student. Peer feedback assignments typically require one student to complete an evaluation form focusing on the content, structure, and delivery of a fellow student’s speech in a basic communication course. Unlike peer assessment, when a peer evaluator assigns a grade or other form of judgment to a peer’s work, peer feedback merely asks a peer evaluator to provide comments about the work of another student (Hughes, 2001).

There has been some investigation of feedback in basic communication courses, but such investigation has been limited to the content of instructor feedback (Rey-

nolds et al., 2004), student responses to low and high intensity speech feedback (Smith & King, 2004), and differences in feedback content based upon gender (Sellnow & Trienen, 2004). Although the benefits of providing peer feedback for oral assignments has not been studied, several researchers (Hanrahan & Issacs, 2001; Miller, 2003; Nilson, 2003; Sluijsmans et al., 2003; White & Kirby, 2005) have examined the benefits of providing peer feedback for written assignments. Participants report reviewing the written assignments of a peer helps improve their own writing (White & Kirby, 2005), the peer assessment process encourages students to work harder to impress their peers (Hanrahan & Issacs, 2001), and peer assessment encourages reflection of one's own work (Nilson, 2003; Sluijsmans et al., 2003). Peer feedback also provides a different perspective on an assignment, allowing for an assignment to be critiqued by both an instructor and a peer (Miller, 2003).

While many students report satisfaction with the peer feedback process, some students report peer feedback assignments are frequently not taken seriously by the peer reviewer (Hanrahan & Issacs, 2001). Further, peer feedback is usually not available to help improve the quality of the assignment as peer feedback is typically returned after an assignments has been graded by the instructor (Hanrahan & Issacs, 2001). Another common student and instructor complaint is peer feedback is often quite vague, not providing specific suggestions for improvement (Sluijsmans, et al., 2003). Additionally, many instructors who assign peer feedback assignments often find the content of the feedback uncritical, superficial, trivial, inconsistent, and contradictory (Nilson, 2003).

As implied above, there are contradictory feelings about the peer feedback process. Further, many presentational strategies used in basic communication courses exist due to traditional practice, rather than pedagogically sound strategies grounded in empirical research (Hugenberg & Moyer, 1998). These strategies include informative and persuasive speaking and audience analysis and adaptation, and would not be difficult to empirically investigate (Hugenberg & Moyer, 1998). The benefit of providing peer feedback in the basic communication course is appropriate to investigate at this time. Consequently, the research question for this study will focus on student perceptions of the peer feedback process, by both comparing student perceptions of peer and instructor feedback for an informative speech in a basic communication course. Based upon the above rationale and research findings, the following research question was advanced:

RQ1: What differences do students perceive between peer and instructor feedback in the basic communication course?

SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

As implied above, peer feedback has been studied in a variety of disciplines, including composition education (White & Kirby, 2005), nutrition education (Story, Lytle & Brirnbaum, 2002), and physical education (Butler & Hodge, 2001). Perhaps the most widespread use of peer feedback is in teacher training programs (Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel & van Merriënboer, 2002; Sluijsmans et

al., 2003). Using peer feedback in teacher training programs allows pre-service teachers to observe and evaluate other teachers. Peer evaluation in teacher training programs relies on vicarious learning, a teaching strategy allowing one to reflect on the techniques and strategies used by others, providing an opportunity to learn about effective teaching without actually teaching (Sluijsmans et al., 2003).

The process of vicarious learning is explained by social learning theory (SLT). SLT speculates behaviors can be learned through observation, as behaviors of others can be observed and remembered (Bandura, 1977). The observer can decide if a change in behavior is worth the perceived rewards or consequences of enacting the behavior in a specific environment. SLT is an appropriate lens to apply to an examination of the pedagogical benefits of providing peer feedback, as a peer evaluator is assigned a model speech to evaluate, and a peer feedback assignment provides an opportunity for the peer evaluator to critically analyze the speech of another student. Additionally, there is a possibility the peer reviewer may learn from the successes and failures of the assigned speaker, from the safety of the peer reviewer's desk.

SLT divides vicarious learning into three distinct phases: attention, retention, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). The attention stage requires the speaker to gain the attention of the reviewer (Bandura, 1977). As a peer feedback assignment requires the review to pay attention to the speaker, gaining the attention of the peer reviewer should be easy in a basic communication course. The peer feedback forms used in many basic communication courses focus on the content, structure, and de-

livery of another speaker, forcing a peer reviewer to minimally pay attention to another speaker to complete the form. The second phase of SLT, retention, requires the peer evaluator to retain specific verbal and nonverbal messages sent by the speaker (Bandura, 1977). For example, if a speaker uses motivated movement, in order for the peer reviewer to learn to use motivated movement via vicarious learning, the peer reviewer must remember the speaker he or she evaluated used motivated movement. If, and only if a message has been retained can the final phase of social learning, motivation, be set in motion. Motivation to perform specific actions explains how a person decides which behaviors to imitate and which behaviors to disregard (Bandura, 1977). If a peer reviewer notices and remembers the speaker he or she evaluated used motivated movement, according to SLT, the peer reviewer is able to learn vicariously the benefits and drawbacks of using motivated movement in a speech.

The idea of social learning was tested in a public speaking setting, and students who engaged in a peer feedback assignment prior to their speeches ultimately scored higher on their speeches than students who did not observe speeches of their peers (Mitchell & Bakewell, 1995). While the authors were not directly testing the idea of social learning, one possibility for their results is the constant exposure to other oral presentations, as “vicarious presentation experience may have helped to reinforce the cognitive aspects of learning and how to present [a speech]” (Mitchell & Bakewell, 1995, p. 362). This example illustrates the potential for a peer feedback assignment to be a source of vicarious learning

in a skills-based course like a basic communication course.

Vicarious learning also allows for introspection (Bandura, 1977). Specifically, a peer feedback assignment lets the peer evaluator compare his or her speech against a peer's speech, providing a model speech to learn from. Learning through observation comes at no cost to the peer evaluator, and one can learn from modeled peer behavior during the peer evaluation process (Sluijsmans, Brand-Gruwel, Van Merriëonboer, & Basi-tiaens, 2003). In order to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of other presentations, one must be able to reflect upon his or her own work, which may result in development of content-related skills (Sluijsmans et al., 2003).

This reflection should lead to increased awareness of the quality of a speaker's presentation (Falchikiv, 1995). In fact, Sluijsmans et al. (2003) contend the peer assessment process is merely a series of learning activities for the peer reviewer, rather than an effective product for the speaker. For example, pre-service teachers completing guided reflections of discipline problems in their classrooms, helping to create a structured learning experience and allowing the teacher to develop strategies to cope with future discipline problems in the future (Hole & McEntee, 2003). While peer feedback requires a student to reflect on an observed behavior, rather than a personal experience, the principle of reflecting upon a modeled behavior allows students to learn from the strengths and mistakes of their peers. As the basic communication course is a potential source of vicarious learning, the above review of literature allows the following hypothesis to be advanced:

H1: Students will report the process of providing peer feedback will help prepare for future speeches in a basic communication course.

METHOD

Participants

The participants for this study were students enrolled in a basic communication course at a large Midwestern university. The basic course is a required component of the general education program and services approximately 1,500 students a semester. In lieu of random selection, this study utilized purposive sampling, as data for this study was collected as part of a larger research project. Sections of the basic communication course chosen for this study were selected based upon the amount of training and experience the instructor had with the evaluation criteria used to evaluate informative presentations for this basic course. Instructors selected were trained by the university as graduate teaching assistants in a consistent manner, and had at least one year of experience using the evaluation criteria. All instructors in this study were asked to require peer feedback as part of their course.

Data were collected in both the fall 2003 and spring 2004 semester. One hundred seventy nine basic course students participated in this study during the fall 2003 semester; 31% ($n = 55$) were male and 69% ($n = 124$) were female. The overwhelming majority of research participants reported being first year students (97%; $n = 174$), Caucasian (83%; $n = 148$), and between 18 and 22

years of age (99%; $n = 178$). The spring 2004 data collection added 143 additional participants, 46% ($n = 66$) were male and 54% ($n = 77$) were female. Again, the overwhelming majority of research participants reported being first year students (97%; $n = 138$), Caucasian (88%; $n = 126$), and between the ages of 18 and 21 (100%; $n = 143$). Overall, this study had 322 research participants.

Instruments

As no measures currently exist to address the hypothesis of this study, the author developed the Perceived Utility of student feedbackK (PUNK) scale. Thirty-two basic course students were surveyed in the spring 2003 semester, to assess their perceptions of useful peer feedback by responding to the following three prompts:

1. What does the word useful mean to you?
2. When something is useful it is _____.
3. In my opinion, useful peer feedback contains:

All responses were transcribed and frequent themes were placed on a seven-point semantic differential scale. A pilot test of this instrument was conducted using basic course students in the summer of 2003. Thirty-two students enrolled in a basic communication course completed the PUNK scale, and preliminary analysis revealed that the PUNK scale has high face validity, and a Chronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .90. At that time, several modifications were made, including rewording the directions, rewording three items, and eliminating seven semantic differential items which

were either redundant or confusing. Furthermore, in order to determine the true difference between the perceived utility of peer feedback, two identical scales were developed, one to measure perceived utility of peer feedback, and one to measure perceived utility of instructor feedback.

The PUNK scale contains seven seven-point semantic differential items, focusing on the perceived utility of feedback received from one speech for preparing future speeches, as well as the appropriateness of the feedback received. As a summative scale, the peer PUNK scale had a Chronbach alpha reliability score of .84, and the instructor PUNK scale had a Chronbach alpha reliability score of .80, indicating the PUNK scale is a reliable instrument for data analysis.

To provide additional insight into basic communication course student feelings about the peer feedback assignment, research participants were also asked several open-ended questions about their perceptions of the peer and instructor feedback they received. These questions probed research participants perceptions of which comments would be more helpful preparing future speeches. Data to address the research question of this study was collected only during the fall 2003 data collection period. See Appendix A for the PUNK scale.

To address the hypothesis of this study, participants were asked if they felt the process of providing peer feedback would help prepare for future speeches. This question was intentionally left open-ended, to allow participants to fully express their opinions, rather than limiting answers to focused closed-ended responses (Jenson & Lamoureaux, 1997).

Procedure

As part of regular classroom instruction, all research participants were assigned to present an informative speech and complete peer evaluations for two of their classmates on the same informative speech assignment. All written feedback from the speech (including instructor and peer feedback) was returned to research participants simultaneously. After research participants had an opportunity to review their peer and instructor feedback forms, the instruments were distributed, and collected when complete.

Data Analysis

Data from the PUNK scale was analyzed by creating a summative score for the overall perceived utility of both peer and instructor feedback, and appropriate statistical tests were conducted. Alpha reliability was set at .05 for all statistical tests. The open ended questions were coded using the constant comparative data analysis method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For each open-ended question, 22 surveys (12%) were selected, each item was separately examined for consistent themes, and preliminary theme categories were created. When remaining the remaining 183 surveys, if a response was found to lie outside the scope of one of the original categories, this new category was added to the existing categories, and all responses were re-coded to search for existence of the new category.

RESULTS

The research question of this study focuses on the differences in student perceptions of instructor and peer feedback in a basic communication course. This research question is answered using a combination of the comparison of the instructor and peer PUNK scales, as well as some open-ended data. The results of the comparison of the individual items of the PUNK scale can be found in Table 1, but the results of the pared samples of *t*-test indicated a statistically significant difference in the summative scores of the PUNK scales [$t(164) = -6.85, p > .00$], indicating research participants feel instructor feedback is significantly more helpful than peer feedback for preparing future speeches.

The open-ended questions that followed the PUNK scales explain this finding. Of 176 students who re-

Table 1
PUNK Scale Averages

Item	Peer <i>Mean</i>	Peer <i>SD</i>	Instructor <i>Mean</i>	Instructor <i>SD</i>
Helpfulness	5.28	1.62	6.38	1.19
Value	5.22	1.46	6.07	1.56
Utility	5.43	1.42	6.99	1.38
Comprehension	6.05	1.22	6.11	1.23
Relevance	5.28	1.7	6.64	2.00
Credibility	5.20	1.95	5.77	1.97
Reasonable	5.45	1.50	5.68	1.67
Overall	5.44	1.11	5.96	1.08

Total *n* size = 179. The *PUNK* scale utilizes a 7-point response option.

sponded to the question asking if instructor feedback would be helpful preparing future speeches, 100% ($n = 176$) of research participants indicated instructor feedback would be useful for preparing future speeches. The 165 students who explained their answer either indicated their instructor feedback would help improve their grade on future speeches (73%; $n = 131$) or their instructor is perceived as a credible source of feedback (19%; $n = 34$).

While 100% of participants indicated instructor feedback would be helpful preparing future speeches, 72% ($n = 233$) of research participants indicated the peer feedback received would be helpful for preparing future speeches, and 26% ($n = 82$) felt the peer feedback would not be helpful for preparing future speeches. Research participants felt peer feedback would be helpful when preparing future speeches because “I know what to keep [in my speeches] and what to change” (65%; $n = 132$) and because peer feedback “helps to see how your audience views you as a speaker” (26%; $n = 54$). The 77 reasons provided by research participants who indicated their peer feedback would not be helpful when preparing future speeches were broken into six categories. These categories focus on lack of constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement, as well as indications peer feedback is not as important as instructor feedback for improving public speaking skills. Complete descriptions and frequencies for these categories can be found in Table 2. These data indicate although research participants do perceive peer feedback would be helpful for preparing future speeches, instructor feedback is perceived to be more valuable.

Table 2
Reasons Research Participants
Felt Peer Feedback Was Not Helpful

Reason	Frequency
“Just consisted of comments, not suggestions”	<i>n</i> = 20 (26%)
“The comments weren’t accurate [for my speech]”	<i>n</i> = 19 (25%)
“Just said stuff I already know”	<i>n</i> = 15 (20%)
“My peer feedback didn’t include details”	<i>n</i> = 11 (14%)
“I think instructor feedback is more important”	<i>n</i> = 7 (9%)
“I haven’t read [my peer feedback] yet”	<i>n</i> = 5 (6%)
Total	<i>n</i> = 77 (100%)

The hypothesis of this study, speculating the peer feedback process itself is useful for preparing future speeches, was answered by analyzing research participant responses to the question “do you feel completing the peer feedback form for the informative speech you just received will help you prepare for upcoming speeches in this course?” One hundred twenty research participants answered this question; 82% (*n* = 98) indicated they felt the peer feedback process would help prepare for future speeches, and 18% (*n* = 22) indicated they believed the peer feedback process would not help prepare for future speeches. A chi-square analysis of this data indicated a significant difference ($\chi^2 (1) = 53.17, p > .00$) between the two answers, signifying basic course students feel the peer feedback process would help prepare for upcoming speeches.

The reasons provided for the peer feedback process’s benefit included: “[providing peer feedback] helped to focus on good and bad parts of [my] peers speech which

helped me to make my speech better” (58%; $n = 57$), “you get a chance to see what works and doesn’t work,” (22%; $n = 20$), and “I know what my teacher looks for when (s)he is grading my speech” (17%; $n = 17$). Some research participants indicated they did not feel the process of providing peer feedback would help them improve their future speeches, because “it was a waste of time. [I] just did the assignment because it was required” (23%; $n = 5$), and “giving feedback about other speeches wouldn’t help because I don’t have the same problems” (14%; $n = 3$). The above results provide support for the hypothesis of this study, as a majority of research participants indicated providing peer feedback helps identify strengths and weaknesses in their own speech, reinforcing the attention and retention phase of SLT.

DISCUSSION

This study, grounded in social learning theory, examined the use of peer feedback in a basic communication course. Answering the research question revealed although basic communication course students feel peer feedback is valuable, instructor feedback is more important for preparing future speeches. This finding is not particularly surprising, because as one research participant pointed out: “my teacher is the one who grades me. Of course I am going to follow [my instructor’s] suggestions when preparing for my next speech.” Research participants in this study did indicate their peer feedback was useful for preparing future speeches, although research participants unanimously indicated their instructor feedback was more useful.

Although not specifically tested in this study, it is reasonable to assume if a peer and an instructor differed with regard to a suggestion to improve, a student would likely follow the instructor's advice. If the purpose of the basic communication course is to teach students to critically evaluate other speakers, efforts may be necessary to bolster the credibility of peer reviewers. On the other hand, if an instructor is providing the one and only grade for a presentation, a speaker is more likely to improve his or her grade by taking the instructor's suggestion. Perhaps peer feedback is doomed to be perceived as the less important source of feedback for a speech unless the peer reviewer is allowed to assign a portion of the speaker's grade.

While student perceptions of peer feedback are useful for basic course instructors, instructional communication scholars should be encouraged by the support for vicarious learning found in this study. Support for the hypothesis of this study indicates, when taken seriously, a peer feedback assignment provides for vicarious learning by forcing peer evaluators to experience the first two stages of social learning theory. The first stage of SLT, attention, is automatically fulfilled when an evaluator is assigned a speech to evaluate (Bandura, 1977). Even if the peer evaluator is not being graded on the peer evaluation, there is evidence students will work harder on an assignment if they are aware a peer will also be evaluating the assignment (Hanrahan & Issacs, 2001). If a student is being graded on the content of peer feedback, the peer evaluator has been given an incentive to pay close attention to the speaker, in order to successfully complete the assignment.

The second stage of SLT, retention, was illustrated in participant responses to the open-ended questions. Many students indicated providing peer feedback “helps me notice other mistakes people make so I can watch out for them in my speeches” and “I liked watching other students try the things [my instructor] suggested, to see if they worked.” Research participants repeatedly stated they liked watching other students’ behaviors, to see if behaviors suggested by the instructor or the course text were successful. Calling attention to the benefits of providing peer feedback indicates some research participants did retain information about the strengths and weaknesses of their peer’s speeches, fulfilling the retention stage of SLT (Bandura, 1977).

The final stage of SLT, motivation, can only be gauged when research participants actually prepare their next speech. While research participants indicated providing peer feedback “gave me more ideas to use” when preparing future speeches, it is outside the scope of these data to assume students are motivated to change behaviors. However, support for the hypothesis of the study suggests when asked to critically evaluate a peer, students in a basic course may choose to incorporate behaviors they noticed in their peers into their own speeches.

Practical Implications for Basic Course Instructors

The findings of this study provide direction for basic communication course directors and instructors with regard to peer feedback assignments. Based upon SLT’s three stages, there are pedagogical strategies that could

be used to increase peer feedback's effectiveness in the attention, retention, and motivation stage of SLT. First in the attention stage, an obvious way an instructor could encourage better retention of both the good and parts of a speech is to grade the content of peer feedback, specifically for critical analysis of the content, structure, and delivery of the speech. As many participants of this study indicated, much of the content of their peer feedback was delivery-focused, specific attention should be paid to teaching students to critically evaluate the content and structure of a speech. Using video-taped speeches available in supplemental textbook materials, students could be trained to find errors in reasoning, lapses in structure, and weak supporting materials. Such preparation may not only increase the quality of the peer feedback provided in class, it also provides other examples of public speaking skills and blunders for students to learn from. Grading the content of peer feedback, as well as providing practice presentations to critically evaluate content and structure, allow basic course instructors to know students will pay better attention when providing peer feedback for a classmate.

The second step of SLT, retention, allows students to retain the lessons they learn from critically analyzing another presentation. While forcing a student to retain a positive or negative speech strategy is unlikely, instructors can reinforce the positive and negative content, structure, and delivery aspects of sample speeches. Continuous reinforcement of positive and negative public speaking strategies may increase student retention of positive and negative elements of individual speeches. Further, evaluating the same presentation several times, analyzing different elements of the presentation

may help students retain successful and unsuccessful speech strategies. For example, an instructor could ask students to evaluate the effectiveness of the audience analysis, the appropriateness of the speaker credibility, or the credibility of the sources used in the same speech. Such tasks prepare students to evaluate a peer's presentation in such a way they may be more likely to retain specific strategies used by a peer, for use in future speeches.

The final stage of SLT, motivation, is difficult to teach in a basic communication course classroom. Instructors can both teach and model effective public speaking behaviors, show examples of effective and ineffective speaking techniques, and reward students who master content, structure and delivery elements of public speaking with higher grades than students who are not as motivated to improve their performances. However, such tactics will not work for students who are not interested in improving their public speaking grades. Realistically, the primary motivator for most basic course student to improve the content, structure, or delivery of their speeches is likely a higher course grade. If a student wants a higher grade, he or she is more likely to be motivated to change his or her behavior, regardless of what was learned as part of a peer feedback assignment.

Limitations of the Present Research

While this was a fruitful investigation for peer feedback, this investigation was not without its limitations. These data were collected as part of a larger study, which may have skewed the finding of this research.

However, the larger study also investigated the use of peer feedback in the basic communication course, limiting potential bias of confusion. Of larger concern to the researcher was the need to re-collect data, apparently due to participant misinterpretation of an open-ended question. During the primary data collection period, a full 80% ($n = 136$) of research appeared to misinterpret the question: "Do you believe providing peer feedback will help you prepare for future speeches? Why or why not?" This misinterpretation required follow-up data collection the following semester, in order to address the perceived utility of peer feedback to students. While the follow-up questions were much more focused on the benefit of providing peer feedback, the need for continued data collection indicates care must be taken when phrasing open-ended questions.

Additionally, the study of peer feedback in a basic communication course is limited to the time a student spends in a basic communication course. Applying SLT to peer feedback in a basic course does not provide an indication regarding long-term behavioral change. While all teachers hope permanently to touch the lives student's, all behavioral theories, including SLT only allows for behavioral changes as long as the potential for social sanctions exists (Bandura, 1977; Bandura 2001). Examining the motivations that influence behavioral change can help shed light on how and why students change their behaviors, but were not specifically investigated in this research.

Direction for Future Research

The first area for future research comes as a result of the findings of this study. If students universally perceive the content of instructor feedback to be more useful than the content of peer feedback, efforts should be taken to increase the credibility of the content of peer feedback. Many students in the present investigation indicated the peer feedback received from classmates was not useful, because the feedback was vague, unspecific, or delivery-focused (see Table 2). While the content of the peer feedback received by basic course students may be the result of the misconception basic course students are unqualified to critique public speakers, low-quality peer feedback may also result from asking students to provide emotionally charged responses (Nilson, 2003). For example, some standard peer feedback questions for basic courses include: “Was [this speech] adequately audience-oriented?” “Was [the topic development] sufficient?” and “Comment on the speaker’s delivery.” Peer feedback forms often simply ask students to identify something the speaker did well, something the speaker could do to improve, and to provide a rationale. Such items ask students to provide evaluations of the other speaker, not the speech. Taking the potential to attack an individual may increase the quality of peer feedback, as the possibility to hurt the feelings of a classmate is eliminated. This can be accomplished by substituting comprehensive and analytic tasks, which may also increase the quality of peer feedback (Nilson, 2003).

Another way to improve the content, and therefore the credibility, of peer feedback may be for instructors to evaluate the content of peer feedback. If an instructor

evaluates the content of the peer feedback, a student may be more likely to pay attention to the presentation they are evaluating, intensifying the impact of the attention step of SLT. Evaluating the content of peer feedback, while potentially time consuming for an instructor, encourages a peer evaluator to pay better attention to the presentation, which may increase the critical feedback provided for the speaker. This critical feedback, which could be guided in a variety of areas, may increase the quality of the peer feedback provided for a speaker, and improve overall feelings students have about the peer feedback process.

Additionally, this study has revealed peer feedback has the potential to motivate students to change their behaviors. As this study confirms the first two stages of SLT are present in peer feedback assignments, but determining if the peer feedback assignment alone is enough to motivate students to change their behavior would provide insight for instructors. While it is possible watching a peer enact a specific element of a speech may be motivation enough to change one's behavior, it would be naïve to assume basic course students are purely motivated to improve their public speaking. The motivations for behavior change likely include increasing one's grade, learning skills that will help one get or keep a job, or to perform well in other performance-based courses. Examining the motivation of behavior changes in basic course students would not only provide a more clear picture of the process of vicarious learning play in the basic communication course, but would provide instructional communication scholars with a clearer picture of what motivates students to learn.

Interestingly, many business practitioners are interested in changing employee behaviors, and may benefit from the findings of the present study. Setting goals to improve individual performance is hardly a novel concept; however this study provides some insight into strategies which could be used to enable behavioral change in organizational settings. Based upon the findings of this research, more credibility is given to the feedback provided by instructors than the feedback provided by peers. Transferring this finding to an organizational setting, it would seem natural organizational behavioral changes could be modeled by supervisors, and positively reinforced by coworkers. This inference is supported by research focusing on goal orientations in work groups (Dragoni, 2005). The present research isolates the attention and retention step of SLT as important when encouraging changes in behaviors, but also draws attention to the challenges of motivating people to change behaviors. Business practitioners interested in changing employee behaviors would do well to model appropriate behaviors, call positive attention to desired subordinate behaviors, and provide mechanisms for rewarding employees who change their behaviors.

CONCLUSION

A basic communication course student commented in a paper synthesizing her basic communication course experience: “the first thing I learned in [my basic communication course] is how to critique someone’s speech. I really enjoyed being able to give my feedback towards my peer’s speech. I feel that I have learned how to re-

spect other people's speech a lot more not that I have taken a [basic communication] class." This comment illustrates the benefits peer feedback can have for students. This study provides empirical support for what many basic communication course instructors have felt for years—that learning how to provide effective feedback for a speech is an important skill for good public speakers. Giving students training and a tool to provide effective feedback for the initial experiences students have providing feedback for a peer enhances that student's ability to provide effective, useful comments for their peers.

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APPENDIX A

PERCEIVED UTILITY OF PRESENTATION FEEDBACK SCALE

Please rank your personal experiences and feelings with regard to the **FEEDBACK** you received following your informative speech by indicating your feelings regarding the following sentences.

I feel the feedback I received will be _____ when preparing for future speeches.

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1. Helpful | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Of no use |
| 2. Of no value | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Valuable |
| 3. Easy to use | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Difficult to use |

Please use the same scale to complete the following sentence:

I feel the feedback I received is _____:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| 4. Difficult to understand | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Easy to Understand |
| 5. Relevant to my speech | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Not relevant to my speech |
| 6. Credible | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Not credible |
| 7. Reasonable | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Unreasonable |