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Contents and Abstracts

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Research demonstrates that immediate feedback is effective for speech instruction (King, Young & Behnke, 2000; Smith & King, 2004). However, feedback interventions can be a double-edged sword depending on the type of feedback and performance task (see Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Thus, given the mixed effects reported in feedback intervention research, the present studies examined an immediate feedback intervention aimed at reducing distracting filler words during public speeches in a classroom setting as well as how the intervention impacted state/trait anxiety and self-perceived communication competence. Results from study one indicate that immediate feedback effectively reduces filler word use during speeches in initial exposures and does not adversely impact state and trait anxiety, or self-perceived communication competence. Results from study two, in which immediate feedback was implemented over the duration of an entire course, demonstrate that in initial exposures, participants receiving immediate feedback used less than half the number of filler words as those not receiving immediate feedback during speeches. In addition, participants across all conditions reported significantly lower trait and state speech anxiety as well as significantly higher self-perceived public speaking competence. The peda-

gogical implications of these findings and recommendations for speech teachers are discussed in this report.

This study reports the results of a grade-norming training exercise in a mid-Atlantic university. The study's goals were to improve consistency in grading among Public Speaking instructors, and to see whether self-report normative perception behavior and self-efficacy also improved. Four training sessions on speech evaluation were conducted with a group of instructors over the course of one semester. A control group was asked to evaluate speeches independently at the same time period, but its members did not have any training. Results show that the training led to greater consistency in grading over time in the training group compared to the control group. The training group also had higher levels of perceived normative behavior over time, and normative behavior perception was significantly correlated with self-efficacy regardless of group.

This study seeks to examine the effective means of assessing whether goals and objectives set within a basic communication course are met. The study outlines specific techniques used to evaluate learning outcomes to ensure that the course retains its relevance and general

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education status. A pretest-posttest design is utilized to determine whether students' scores on cognitive, behavioral, and affective assessment instruments improve from the beginning to the end of the semester. Results indicate students' scores improved on each of the primary learning indicators for the course including: an assessment of communication knowledge, conflict management skills, and intercultural communication apprehension. Discussion and implications for the basic communication course are included.

Kevin R. Meyer, Stephen K. Hunt

Basic communication course instructors encourage student participation in the classroom by employing a variety of strategies, including graded participation. The present study examined the methods that basic course instructors use to facilitate and assess student participation in the classroom through focus groups interviews exploring how students perceive graded participation in the basic course. The findings suggest that while there are conditions in which the focus group students enjoy participation, there are also conditions in which they perceive such strategies as a power issue for instructors and reject the notion that participation accurately measures their level of involvement and learning in the classroom. Moreover, results indicate that students perceive instructor immediacy to be a significant factor in their willingness to participate. Finally, the focus group members offered several suggestions for instructors to better facilitate student participation in the classroom.

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Jennifer M. Hennings

In universities across the United States, an increasing number of departments are turning to graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) to teach introductory courses. As GTAs assume a larger percentage of university teaching responsibilities, it becomes even more important to understand the tensions and challenges that GTAs face. The majority of research on GTAs focuses on the perceptions of students and GTA supervisors, and few researchers have talked directly to GTAs. This research fills that gap by studying the GTA experience from the GTA perspective. Using relational dialectics theory, this study identifies three key tensions that emerge from GTAs' stories about role conflict and identity management: distance-closeness, perfect teacher-perfect student, and structure-freedom. Further, it analyzes the strategies GTAs use to manage and negotiate these tensions. After discussing the implications that these tensions have for GTAs and supervisors, the study offers suggestions for coping with tensions constructively. Finally, since these tensions can influence GTAs' future careers as educators, this study concludes by considering the broader implications of these tensions for students and teachers.

Katherine N. Kinnick, Emily Holler, Marla Bell

This study provides empirical evidence of the impact of learning communities on outcomes for public speaking students, including grades, speaking anxiety, and stu-

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dent and instructor perceptions. Subjects (n = 236, half of whom took the course in freshman learning communities and half in traditional sections) perceived the learning community as the preferable environment for public speaking, and students with greater speaking anxiety were more likely to self-select into learning communities. Perception, however, was not reality: Participation in a learning community made no measurable difference in terms of course outcomes of grades or decline in speaking anxiety. The findings challenge assumptions about the relationship between speaking anxiety and audience familiarity and friendliness. While the first-year learning community may benefit the institution as a whole with modest gains in retention, it does not appear to offer particular advantages to public speaking students. Indeed, it may isolate students with the weakest public speaking confidence levels and provide no opportunities for exposure to more seasoned students who can model appropriate college-level performance standards and classroom behavior. This study fills a gap in the literature about the impact of learning communities on the communication discipline, and adds insight to our knowledge of pedagogical approaches to reducing speaking anxiety.

Melissa A. Broeckelman-Post,
B. Scott Titsworth, LeAnn M. Brazeal

This field experiment answered the call to explore alternative pedagogies in communication by testing the use of structured peer workshops in public speaking courses. Peer workshops use systematic and structured peer feedback to assist students in improving their

speeches. While strong theoretical reasons for using workshops have been advanced, and evidence from other disciplines suggest that they are effective, no research has specifically examined their use in public speaking. Results of our study show that peer workshops are a viable pedagogical option because they improve students' speech grades, reduce public speaking anxiety, and improve perceptions of classroom climate. When comparing the use of workshops at two different universities, however, we observed inconsistent results which could be attributed to how workshops were integrated and supported.

Robert J. Sidelinger, Scott A. Myers,
Audra L. McMullen

The connected classroom climate centers on supportive student-to-student communication in the classroom, and may provide students enrolled in public speaking courses with a safe and comfortable haven to present speeches. This study examined student connectedness in public speaking courses and it's affect on students' (N = 368) communication abilities. Results revealed positive perceptions of student connectedness related to decreases in public speaking anxiety and public speaking apprehension, as well as increases in perceptions of communication competence. These outcomes suggest public speaking instructors should consider the relationships that exist among students and how they may further encourage connectedness in their classrooms.

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