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HIGH SCHOOL PREPARATION AND

EXPERIENCE IN ORAL COMMUNICATION:

DO THEY AFFECT COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION LEVELS?

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Communication

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

By

Jennifer Dalbey Christensen

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,

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HIGH SCHOOL PREPARATION AND
EXPERIENCE IN ORAL COMMUNICATION:
DO THEY AFFECT COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION LEVELS?

Jennifer Dalbey Christensen

University of Nebraska, 2000

Advisor: Dr. Karen Kangas Dwyer

This thesis presents and tests the benefits of high school curriculum, skills

training and public speaking experiences in reducing overall trait communication

apprehension (CA) and public speaking context CA as determined by the results of

McCroskey's (1982) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). The

literature review introduces the need for public communication competencies, the

historical base for speaking skills and the need for public speaking skills in both

educational and work settings. An overview of high school curriculum concerns is

presented. Finally an explanation of CA as a phenomenon and its connection to college

and high school academic success is presented.

The results of this study show that public speaking skills training in high school

significantly impacts CA levels reported by students upon entering a college-level public

speaking course. In addition, students who report more public speaking experience both

in a high school setting and outside the high school setting, report lower over trait CA

levels and public speaking context CA levels.

Keywords: communication apprehension, public speaking, communication skills,

high school curriculum.

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A word to those striving to better themselves: never give in to the pressure and never let your opinions remain unspoken and unheard.

<div align="right">JLDC</div>

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INTRODUCTION

English, mathematics, sciences both social and natural, history, and music are all skills children learn in school. Parents put their faith in state and local school districts to properly prepare children for their academic and professional lives. Important preparation for any beyond-secondary education endeavor includes speaking skills.

Speaking skills have historically been a vital part of this country's heritage and character. Oratory can be traced back to clergymen and politicians. Today, communication skills are needed at all levels of the workplace, from interviewing for a job, to leading a training session for workers, to speaking to an array of corporate employees. Interpersonal communication skills are needed for simple communication between subordinates, coworkers, and supervisors. Academically, many colleges require communication within their core curriculum, so their students become proficient in public speaking fundamentals such as topic selection, outlining, use of supporting materials, research and delivery skills (NCA, 1998b).

The education and training used to refine these public speaking skills are not often intertwined with high school curriculum in preparation for college. Without communication skills training, communication apprehension (CA), "the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with others (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78)", may be greater upon entering a college classroom and even influence a student's decision and ability to complete a college degree. Unfortunately the communication

fears students experience may never be addressed before college because often students don't take public speaking classes in high school.

If communication skills and communication apprehension are not addressed in secondary education many negative consequences can impact a student's life. Individuals who continue to report high communication anxiety (HCA) often will leave college, drop out of specific college courses, receive lower grades, become less motivated, and receive fewer job opportunities, interviews and promotions (Dwyer, 1998; Ericson & Gardner, 1992; Frymier, 1993; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield and Payne, 1989; Monroe, Borzi & Burrell, 1992).

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between high school course preparation, prior public speaking experience and student CA levels. Although past research has maintained that there is a connection between success in college and CA levels (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield and Payne, 1989; Monroe, Borzi & Burrell, 1992), few studies, if any, have focused on high school courses, past public speaking experiences and CA levels of students as they enter college.

The following literature review examines the importance of public speaking in society, both past and present, as well as the insufficient curriculum guidance and lack of mandated public speaking curriculum in our educational systems. Finally, a connection is made to communication curriculum and communication apprehension as it is linked to students' academic, vocational, and interpersonal success.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Practical Applications of Public Speaking

Oratory, or the art of public speaking, has long been used as a means of expressing one's opinion, or persuading an audience. Public speaking has been a form of expressing views on political and judicial issues, as well as for entertainment. In the early 1800s politicians, union leaders, and government antagonists used public speaking as a forum for information dissemination. For patriot and renegade alike, oratory became a function of American society and a demonstration of its personality (Wartofsky, 1992). Events and famous orators such as Thomas Jefferson and his first inaugural speech, Abraham Lincoln and the Gettysburg address, and Theodore Roosevelt's oral campaign for railroad regulation helped our country find a voice in the 19th century (Bosmajian, 1965; Gelderman, 1995). Oratory has brought a "collective identity" to American audiences. The audience relies on orators to speak for them (Wartofsky, 1992, p. 409).

One-century later oratory has become an even more intricate part of American society. Persuasion in politics abound. Public speaking and effective interpersonal communication in the workforce are essentials for career advancement and success in the business arena. Associations such as the National Communication Association (NCA) and the National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) have created taskforces for researching how to further speaking and listening skills because of the vitality of these skills academically and their importance in the workplace (NCA, 1998a).

The Workforce. Communication plays a very important role in the workplace. The National Education Association suggests "...educational programs for all students should be developed that enhance self-esteem, assure equal opportunity for career development, and offer exploratory experiences in a variety of careers" (Bresler, 1998, p. 31). Employers in business and industry are insisting that those they hire understand communication processes and be skilled in the communicative arts (Sprague, 1996). A recent survey of employers of engineering graduates found communication to be one of the most needed skills (NCA, 1997). Teamwork with companies as well as with clients, and the presentation and publication of papers were among the important communication skills also mentioned in the survey results. Consequently, communication skills are essential to prepare high school and college students for the workforce.

College Requirements. According to the U.S. Department of Education college enrollment for Fall, 1998 was expected to reach an all-time high. Up to 14.6 million students were expected to enroll, over 240,000 more than 1997 (NCA, 1998f). Within the next decade college enrollment is expected to increase by 21 percent. The Institute of Higher Education recently studied the benefits of higher education and concluded that higher education increases socioeconomic gains, sense of community and civic responsibility, while providing a higher quality of life in general (NCA, 1998b). With more students enrolling in college to reap the benefits of life with a college degree, more students will be held responsible for basic skill acquisition. To meet this requirement many academic institutions now require several core courses, including a requirement for communication.

Within "Speaking and Listening Competencies for College Students," the NCA (1998d) outlines both public speaking and listening skill requirements for college undergraduates. These competencies include taking a basic communications course in general education. The following outcomes are expected of all students in regard to speaking competencies:

1. Students should be able to determine the purpose of oral discourse.

2. Students should be able to choose a topic and restrict it according to the purpose and the audience.

3. Students should be able to fulfill the purpose of oral discourse by formulation of a thesis statement.

4. Students should be able to provide adequate supporting material.

5. Students should be able to select a suitable organizational pattern.

6. Students should be able to demonstrate careful choice of words.

7. Students should be able to provide effective transitions.

A speaker should be able to use specific delivery skills suitable to the topic and the audience and thus should:

1. employ vocal variety in rate, pitch and intensity

2. articulate clearly

3. employ language appropriate to the designated audience

4. demonstrate nonverbal behavior that supports the verbal message

Since listening is an intricate part of public speaking and communication, related especially to the public speaking audience, listening competencies are suggested by the NCA (1998d). These competencies include:

1. recognition of main ideas

2. identification of supporting details

3. recognition of explicit relationships among ideas

4. recall of basic ideas and details

High School Speech Communication Competencies. Students' secondary school background and various experiences are predictors of college success. In fact, communication experiences are predictors of college grade point averages (GPAs) (Powell & Collier, 1990). Thus, strengthening oral communications skills would be beneficial for high-school students, especially those preparing for post-secondary education.

The NCA has devised competency statements for speaking, listening, and media literacy. Communication shapes our sense of self and the way we interact with our environment, from gathering and presenting information to managing conflict (NCA, 1998c). The document "Standards for Speaking, Listening and Media Literacy in K-12 Education" the NCA (1998e) outlines four categories of essential communications skills to be covered in elementary and secondary education.

The first category is the fundamentals of effective communication. Competent communicators should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of (NCA, 1998e):

1. the relationships among the components of the communication process

2. the influence of the individual, relationship, and situation on communication

3. the role of communication in the development and maintenance of personal relationships

4. the role of communication in creating meaning, influencing thought and making decisions

Competent communicators should also demonstrate the ability to (NCA, 1998e):

1. display sensitivity to diversity when communicating

2. enhance relationships and resolve conflict using appropriate and effective communication strategies

3. evaluate communication styles, strategies, and content, based on their aesthetic and functional worth

4. show sensitivity to the ethical issues associated with communication in a democratic society.

The second category is speaking. Competent speakers should demonstrate (NCA, 1998e):

1. knowledge and understanding of the speaking process

2. the ability to adapt communication strategies appropriately and effectively according to the needs of the situation and setting

3. the ability to use language that clarifies, persuades, and/or inspires while respecting differences in listeners' backgrounds

4. the ability to manage or overcome communication anxiety

The third category is listening. Competent listeners should demonstrate (NCA, 1998e):

1. knowledge and understanding of the listening process

2. the ability to use appropriate and effective listening skills for a given communication situation and setting

3. the ability to identify and manage barriers to listening

The fourth and final category is media literacy. Media literate communicators should demonstrate (NCA, 1998e):

1. knowledge and understanding of the ways people use media in their personal and public lives

2. knowledge and understanding of the complex relationships among audiences and media content

3. knowledge and understanding that media content is produced with social and cultural contexts

4. knowledge and understanding of the commercial nature of media

5. the ability to use media to communicate to a specific audience

Based upon the suggested competencies, communicator skills training should play a major role in preparing students for post secondary education and career success. Thus, students' curriculum should be a defined, ongoing process regarding learned materials and skills. Instructors must continue to ask "What skills, knowledge, and disposition are essential if children are to sustain a productive, democratic society and contribute responsibly to international society?" (Lewis, 1995, p. 551).

<u>Curriculum</u>

Curriculum has been deemed organizational bound, meaning individual schools adapt their own curriculum guidelines. This organizational-bound curriculum is the primary influence on the learning that may or may not occur in high school (Lee, 1993).

Curriculum offered in public secondary schools is much more expansive than 20 years ago. Students are offered a wide number of diverse courses and allowed to make their own curriculum decisions (Lee & Bryk, 1988).

> "Any effort that seeks to affect whether the overall level of academic achievement or – as important – a socially equitable distribution of that achievement must influence the policies and proactively determine students' exposure to subject matter" (Lee, 1993, p. 127).

Curriculum drives the learning base for schools. Curriculum needs to be focused, uniform and rigorously applied to the entire student population. An emphasis on academics by schools and less choice of curriculum by students may allow for all students to obtain a higher level of learned skills (Lee, 1993).

Curriculum Tracking. Proper curriculum tracking can predict how well a student will be prepared for post-secondary school or a career (Lee & Bryk, 1988; Lee, 1993; McKenna, 1994). High school tracking tendencies are geared toward broad categories of learning subjects including math, social studies, science, and civics. Learning subjects are sometimes, but infrequently, replaced with the skills needed to master these subjects such as vocabulary, writing, reading comprehension, abstract reasoning, arithmetic reasoning and computation (Jenks & Brown, 1975; Jenks, 1985).

Course tracking and track placement have been found to be the best predictors of academic achievement. This tracking is a better predictor of academic achievement then either attitudes, behavior or student backgrounds. Students who have taken more academically inclined courses such as math, Foreign language, English, science, social studies demonstrate increased learning (Lee, 1993).

A College Board study of 1993 SAT-takers found students who took 20 or more academic courses scored and average of 50 points higher then the national average. These same students score 100 points higher on their SAT scores than students who took only 16 academically based courses. The College Board review concluded students with a minimal academic load who plan on attending college, may be the most disadvantaged (McKenna, 1994).

The educational aspirations of students correspond to their placement. School policies effect assignments of curriculum tracking. Approximately 50 percent of all Catholic school students are placed on a guided curriculum track, but only 25 percent of public school students are placed on a specific curriculum track (Lee & Bryk, 1988).

By tracking high-school curriculum, high schools have managed to achieve a greater level of academic learning. Private schools, especially Catholic schools' rigorous curriculum tracking of their students has led to success for this school sector (Lee & Bryk, 1988).

Alternative Curriculum. A comparison of public schools verses Catholic school curricula shows Catholic school curricula to be more academically based; the requirements for graduation are more astringent, academically, than that of public schools studied. A study of sophomores showed 71.5 percent of Catholic school tenth-grade students' core tracking is geared toward college preparation, whereas only 38 percent of public high school students are on a college preparatory track (Lee & Bryk, 1988).

Catholic schools are more apt to place their students on an academic track then public schools. Catholic schools place 10 percent of their students on a vocational track, 18 percent on a general education track, and 72 percent on an academic track. Public schools percentages vary from Catholic school track placements. Public high schools place 28 percent of students on a vocational track, 34 percent on a general education track and 38 percent on an academic track. Catholic schools place 34 percent more students on an academically geared track than public schools (Lee & Bryk, 1988).

Catholic sector high schools have a strong education pull, and strive for educational aspirations, which correspond directly to college placement. Other schools across the country are experimenting with alternative curricula in an effort to bridge high school students to the careers of their choice (Jorgensen, 1994; Miller, 1996; Wilson, 1997). Such experimental curriculums include more student participation in curricula planning, school-to-work planning and student assimilation to local businesses.

One example of experimental curriculum is Amherst, New Hampshire; South Egan High School strives for student collaboration, backwards curriculum planning and by asking "Essential Questions" (Jorgensen, 1994, p. 53). This alternative curriculum is composed of three primary concepts: First a period of collaborative planning occurs between the student, special education teachers and general education teachers. The structure and schedule guide the success. All students and faculty members' support and participate in the collaboration. Second, curriculum is designed by planning backwards. The student's long-term goals, college and/or career, are discussed and the curriculum is centered on those long-term goals. Third, "Essential Questions" are addressed and tailor-made for each individual student depending on the student's level of intelligence or special needs. All curriculum decisions are made through this three-fold process (Jorgensen, 1994).

Several alternative curricula are career focused. The "New Vision Criminal Justice Program" is but one. In cooperation with the county sheriff's department, students attend school at the local sheriff's department building where classes are held on criminology theory, law enforcement, corrections and private investigation. This New

York City project's aim is to assimilate students to the working world. After meeting the basic graduation requirement, with a minimal 'B' grade average, a student can opt to participate in a work-based program during their senior year of high school (Wilson, 1997).

In Maryville, Ohio, classes are guided through the Honda of America factory. From the pounding out of parts by machinery, to the first drive of a new automobile, the class is able to see the mechanics of a manufacturing plant. The tour of a local factory is only a part of the "What's up in Factories? A New Look at the World of Manufacturing" curriculum developed by a Public Broadcast Service Station (WNET) in New York (Miller, 1996, p. 31).

The "What's up in Factories" program involves multimedia curriculum and includes teacher training to allow students from cities such as San Diego, Dallas, and Atlanta to benefit from the knowledge of the manufacturing industry. The program guides teachers through the curriculum and allows for specification to local manufacturing plants (Miller, 1996).

These integrated learning techniques link students' academic life to future careers. Learning skills are connected to on-the-job applications including; effective communication, ingenuity, computer literacy and mathematics. Learned information is directly applied (Miller, 1996).

Miller (1996) and Wilson (1997) bridged the alternative curriculum choices to skills needed for college or a career. Business, industry and labor are very concerned that high school graduates are not being properly prepared for work, in terms of basic skills or

ability to solve problems and learn on the job. In 1990, the National Center on Education and the Economy called for a national system of standards and assessments benchmarked to the highest in the world. The following year, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCAN) began defining competencies high school graduates need to meet the changing demands of the workplace (McKenna, 1994).

One such skill is oral communication. Garary and Bernhardt (1998) acknowledge oral communication skills as the most important and difficult skills needed in the workplace. Therefore, it is essential that secondary education equip students with these needed skills.

Oral Communication Curriculum. Currently all studies in high-school curriculum with specific regard to oral communication have been developed on a state level. Chesebro and Gaudino (1991) found that two states had no speech requirement at all, but their local school entities were responsible for specifying these kinds of requirements.

In 1980, research of 13 states found 76 percent of schools in this study reported speech courses existed and 32 percent said a speech course was a graduation requirement. Speaking or oral communication was required by 26 states as a part of the language arts curriculum. Fifteen states made recommendations for oral communication as part of the language arts curriculum and all remaining respondents had no mention of oral communications or did not have public speaking as a requirement (Book and Pappas, 1981).

Often oral communication is defined under what schools consider speaking and listening skills. Fifteen states said these skills were important to the development of their

curriculum (Backlund, Brown, Gurry & Jandt, 1992). A national curriculum survey of K-12, found eleven states had no standard for speaking and listening skills. One state had intentions of developing a standard. Three states said they were currently working on their ability to assess such skills. An additional 21 states had begun inclusion of these skills into curriculum (Litterst, VanRheenen & Casmir, 1994).

There seems to be an unfortunate disparity in what states say they are doing and what actually happens in the classroom. Time is often given to other language arts skills and not to oral communication (Barnes & Hayes, 1995).

In Hall, Morreale and Gaudino's (1999) study of speech /oral communication, they specified three relevant arenas: state standards, exit level of communication competence, and the importance of communication to the state. Respondents reported that 65 percent of states required communication as part of the language arts program, while only eight states recommended it to be a part. Out of 43 respondents, 20 said standards existed for communication competence upon leaving school. In regard to the role of oral communication within the state most indicated that communication was an important component in K-12.

Today, communication and teaching organizations support the need for public speaking skills. Students need to be taught and they need to master public speaking skills for future use academically and professionally (Lewis & Schaps, 1995). Public speaking practice throughout a student's academic and professional career helps to define and refine the student's knowledge and public performance. However, before people can be

competent in their public speaking, they must overcome the anxiety and fear of public speaking.

<u>Communication Apprehension</u>

Communication Apprehension (CA) has been defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1982, p. 137). CA has been associated with phrases such as stage fright, audience anxiety, and shyness (Dwyer, 1998). Public speaking anxiety is but a facet of CA. Surveys show that 70-75 percent of the American population reports a fear of public speaking (McCroskey, 1993; Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). When ranking our fears, Americans chose public speaking as their number one fear 41 percent of the time (Bruskin Report, 1973). In fact, 15-20 percent of college students report high levels of communication apprehension (HCA) (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998).

CA affects every individual to some degree. Rarely is a person found who experiences no CA in some communication setting (McCroskey, 1982). "Students often say their fear of public speaking makes them feel stupid and less intelligent than others or even weak and cowardly" (Dwyer, 1998, p. 17).

Learned responses, worrisome thoughts, performance orientation, perceived lack of public speaking skills, excessive activation and situational aspects are all contributors to escalating CA levels within students (Dwyer, 1998). The more significant the negative expectations are, the stronger the feelings of learned helplessness appear to be (McCroskey, 1982). These negative expectations and feelings of learned helplessness

lower academic achievement expectations of high CA students (O'Mara, Allen, Long &

Judd, 1996).

Researchers have observed five distinct types of communication apprehension:

traitlike, context-based, audience-based, situational and pathological (Richmond &

McCroskey, 1998). Each type of CA is distinctive and a person may have one or more

types of CA.

The first type of CA is traitlike. Traitlike CA refers to innate personality

variables within the individual (McCroskey, 1982). Trait behaviors have been associated

with both heredity and environment. We are born with these traits or learn them over

time, even through adulthood (McCroskey, 1972, 1982). Those with traitlike CA

experience anxiety when communicating across situations; not only in public speaking

contexts, but also in small groups, one-on-one communication, and even communication

with family members. Traitlike CA can span oral to written communication (McCroskey,

1977). Traitlike CA is experienced by roughly 20 percent of our population. Because the

nature of traitlike CA is bound in one's personality, it is often difficult to overcome

(Richmond & McCroskey, 1998).

The second type of CA is context-based. Context-based CA is specific toward a

context of communication, and can be broken down into four variables; public speaking,

meetings or classes, small group discussion and dyadic speaking (McCroskey, 1982;

Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). For example, HCAs unwilling or afraid to actively

participate in the day-to-day workings in every college class meeting may not reap the

knowledge gained or benefits from those students actively participating (Allen &

Bourhis, 1996). The most common of these context fears is the fear of public speaking (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998)

The third type of CA is audience-based. Audience-based CA is specific to an individual's communication with a person or group over an extended period of time. This type of CA is specific and often places limitation on the relationships the individual enters into, as opposed to the CA being bound innately in the individual's personality (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998).

The fourth type of CA is situational. Situational CA is a short-lived fear an individual has while dealing with a specific group or individual in a particular situation (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). Everyone has experienced situational CA at sometime (i.e., an important job interview or an oral examination) (Dwyer, 1998).

The fifth and final type of CA is pathological behavior. Pathological behavioral CA stems from abnormal behavior when faced with a threatening situation such as public speaking. It is considered extreme. The behavior's spectrum runs from those who talk continually when they shouldn't to those who refuse to speak at all when the situation requires communication (McCroskey, 1997; Richmond & McCroskey, 1998).

Consequences of Student Trait CA. High school students reporting high trait CA are more likely to drop out of school by their senior year. Though socioeconomic factors are predominant, decisions to remain in high school coupled with high CA scores account for 26 percent of the variance in student's decisions to leave before high school graduation (Monroe, Borzi & Burrell, 1992). CA is also "a significant factor associated

with a high school graduates decisions about postsecondary education." A student may

chose not to enter college at all due to high CA (Monroe, Borzi & Burrell, 1992, p. 122).

A number of studies have examined the relationship between college students'

CA and college success. CA has been found to be a determinate of communication

avoidance (Dwyer, 1998). When presented with a decision to participate in or not

participate in a public speaking course, HCAs choose not to participate (Beatty, 1987).

When relationships between college students' motivation to study and their respective

CA levels were examined students with more anxiety reported less success in the

classroom (Frymier, 1993). Motivation to study decreased as CA increased.

High CA levels implied lower academic achievement for college students. HCAs

tend to receive lower grades and tend to drop out of college if their CA level does not

diminish within the first two years (Ericson & Gardner, 1992; McCroskey, Booth-

Butterfield & Payne, 1989). HCAs have been found to be more reticent, less willing to

communicate, have high levels of shyness and experience more audience anxiety

(Burgoon, 1976; Buss, 1980; Phillips, 1968; Pilkonis, Heape & Klein, 1980; Zimbardo,

1977). CA has been negatively correlated to constructs such as self-esteem and self-

efficacy; as CA levels rise, self-esteem and self-efficacy levels fall (Dwyer & Fus, 1999;

McCroskey & Richmond, 1975). Basic communication skill courses reduce student's

CA levels (Rose & Rancer, 1993).

Treating Communication Apprehension. "Traitlike personality variables,

although resistant to change, can be and often are changed during adulthood (McCroskey,

1982, p. 147)." Though traitlike CA is inherent, the learning process through modeling

and reinforcement can compensate for the child's biological self. Thus CA can be overcome through learning new attitudes and behavior (McCroskey, 1982).

McCroskey (1982) found three components are required in learning communication, and overcoming CA. First, communication competence requires understanding and learning communicative behaviors. Second, communication skills require physically producing and practicing the appropriate communication behavior. Third, positive communication affect requires wanting to or liking to produce the appropriate communication behaviors. All three components necessary to overcome CA involve learning how to communicate properly, whether formally or informally, for long term behavior to be effected (McCroskey, 1982).

Discovery and treatment of CA early in a college student's career may help them overcome or cope with high CA levels. Ericson and Gardner (1992) suggested surveying incoming college students to determine who may or may not avoid a public speaking course. Researchers have suggested that counseling, special workshops, basic speech course sections, or communication labs be made available to students with high CA in an attempt to overcome the related college retention (Dwyer, 1995; Ericson and Gardner, 1992; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield & Payne, 1989).

Within a public speaking course, CA levels can be reduced by various techniques, targeting the source of the anxiety. Seven different treatments have been applied to student's personality dimensions to reduce CA within a public speaking class, each treatment meeting different student personality dimensions and satisfying individual needs (Dwyer, 1998, 2000).

Seven different personality dimensions exist and deserve treatment. These dimensions can be linked to emotional problems such as CA (Lasarus, 1989). The dimensions comprise the acronym BASIC ID, standing for Behavior, Affect, Sensation, Imagery, Cognition, Interpersonal Relationships and Drugs/Biological Functions. Behavior involves an individual's skills or lack of skills (i.e., inappropriate communication behavior). Affect addresses an individual's emotions or feelings (i.e., feelings of anxiety). Sensation is an individual's physiological feelings (i.e., stomach sensations, blushing, etc.). Imagery is an individual's images or mental pictures (i.e., seeing a negative speaking experience). Cognition involves an individual's negative or worrisome thoughts (i.e., thinking "I can never please the audience; I will always be a poor speaker."). Interpersonal relationships involve an individual's external support system (i.e., uses a support group to learn public speaking skills). Drugs and biological functions involve an individual's health, stress level and/or any use of harmful drugs (i.e., overstressed lives add to CA). Helping students assess their personality dimensions for CA can help them determine which treatment for CA should be initiated and which will be the most effective (Dwyer, 2000). Applying treatment to all dimensions is vital (Dwyer, 1998).

First, deep abdominal breathing can help reduce tension often associated with biological functions, affect and sensation dimensions, addressing both physiological and emotional feelings. This treatment quickly reduces stress and tension, increasing the oxygen in the speakers blood system and improving speaker concentration (Davis, Eshelman & McKay, 1988).

Second, cognitive restructuring deals with worrisome thoughts by replacing them with truthful coping statements. This mental restructuring technique targets the cognition dimension and helps the speaker change cognitions from negative to positive. Positive coping statements and productive thoughts lessen CA experienced by speakers after only a few weeks of memorization and practice (Meichenbaum, 1977).

Third, systematic desensitization using deep muscle relaxation and imagery targets sensation, mental imagery, and affect dimensions. Speakers have learned to be fearful of specific situations. In this technique the speaker relearns a relaxation response to public speaking by visualizing the step-by-step speech process while completely calm, eventually retraining their body to respond to public speaking in a more relaxed manner (Wolpe, 1958).

Fourth, mental rehearsal or visualization helps the communicator to picture himself/herself doing well in a specific communication situation. The speaker's imagery dimension is targeted as they rehearse the speaking situation in their mind, imagining they are performing well. This visualization of public speaking prepares the speaker for a positive experience that carries over into the actual public speaking event (Ayres & Hopf, 1993; Dwyer, 1998).

Fifth, physical exercise has been found to be an excellent stress reliever specifically targeting body functions and stress (Carr, 1996). It targets the drugs/biological functions dimension. Ten minutes of exercise before giving a speech has been found to reduce CA (Otto, 1990).

Sixth, interpersonal support involves maintaining positive social relationships. It targets the interpersonal relationships dimension. This relational support system involves sharing speaking experiences and support for others, especially in acquiring speaking skills (Ray & Miller, 1994). This support environment often helps high CAs learn skills while decreasing the affect of CA on a speaker.

Seventh is skills training. Skills training involves learning communication skills. It targets the behavior dimension. If speakers suffer from CA because of the lack of public speaking skills training, acquiring these skills through instruction and systematic practice will help lower students' CA levels (Fremouw & Zitter, 1978).

Summary

Throughout history and leading up to today, there has been a necessity for public speaking skills, not only in the political arena, but also in the workforce and in post-secondary education. Corporations call for strong communication skills in their workers. Colleges expect students to be equipped with communication skills that courses require. Students ill prepared for college and lacking in communication skills can experience high drop out rates, less academic success, and career stagnation. Though both the workforce and post-secondary educational institutions have called out for communication skill acquisition, are secondary educational institutions responding? Communication curriculum is not always required in high schools today. In order to decrease the CA students experience upon entering the workforce or a post-secondary educational institute, public speaking skills and competencies should be acquired prior to high school graduation.

Purpose and Research Questions

The study seeks to determine if there is a connection between students' high school communication curriculum, public speaking experiences and CA levels in a college introductory public speaking course. Although previous studies have examined the relationship between CA and student performance measured through a student's final grade (e.g., Dwyer & Fus, 1999), few, if any have investigated relationships among the speaking experiences of students, their high school oral preparation, and CA levels. Based on research showing the negative impact of CA on academic and career success and the NCA call for fulfillment of oral communication competencies at the high school level, the following research questions are proposed.

RQ1: Is there a significant difference between students who have taken a speech course in high school and those who have not, in students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference between students who have learned public speaking skills in a high school course and those who have not, in students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels?

RQ3: Are there significant linear correlations between the students' self-reported number of speeches given in a school setting, and the students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels?

RQ4: Are there significant linear correlations between the students' self-reported number of speeches given in settings outside of school, and the students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels?

RQ5: Are there significant linear correlations between the students' self-reported total number of speeches given, and the students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels?

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this investigation the following definitions apply:

Public speaking/speeches: Public speaking/speech is the experience/s of the respondents strategically presenting information to a group of gathered listeners. For the purpose of this study, public speaking and speech/speeches are used interchangeably. Because of the self-reported nature of the study, the perception of what event the respondents consider to be a public speech may vary (i.e., formal presentation to a class or organization, presentation to co-workers, a informal toast at a wedding, a campaign address for a class-representative election, etc.).

Learned public speaking skills: Learned public speaking skills include communication skills, which provide the respondents with the tools necessary to speak in public competently. Because of the self-reported nature of the study the perception of what public speaking skills the respondents include may vary (i.e., non-verbal communication, outlining and formatting, voice inflections, animation, listening skills, audience inclusion methods, etc.).

Overall Trait Communication Apprehension (CA) level: Overall trait CA is the total of McCroskey's (1982) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) score (Appendix C, questions 1-24).

Public Speaking Context Communication Apprehension (CA) level: Public speaking context CA level is the score dealing with the public speaking sub-scale of McCroskey's (1982) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24). This sub-scale focuses on public speaking anxiety (Appendix C, questions 19-24).

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

The previous literature review examined the importance of communication skills, specifically public speaking skills, as they are needed to succeed in both educational and work atmospheres. It sets forth the needed high school and college competencies suggested by the National Communication Association to prepare students for the workforce. In addition, it points out that since CA has been associated with students' educational choices (i.e., to take certain courses or even drop out of school) students need to develop their communication competencies in their educational track (Monroe & Borzi, 1988; Monroe, Borzi & Burrell, 1992). Consequently this study seeks to determine the effect high school preparation and speaking experience have on student CA levels upon initial enrollment in a public speaking fundamentals course.

Subject Sample

Public Speaking Fundamentals course instructors from 18 course sections at the University of Nebraska at Omaha administered the PRCA-24 to 445 enrolled students, with 378 total student respondents during the Fall 1999 semester. This course satisfies a university-wide oral-communication general education requirement. The sample represents approximately one-third of students enrolled in this course during the Fall 1999 session. These sections were chosen based on instructors' willingness to participate. Respondents are primarily freshman, but also include sophomores, juniors and seniors attending the university. They ranged in age from 18 to 56 with a mean of 20.56 years.

<u>Measurement Instrumentation</u>

Student information regarding past speaking experience was gathered using the standard student demographic information sheet (Appendix A) specifically referring to two questions:

      1: Did you take a speech course in high school?
      2: Did you learn public speaking skills in any high school course?

Two additional questions were added to the information sheet and queried by the instructor for information regarding specific numbers of past speaking experiences (Appendix B):

      1: How many speeches have you given in a school setting?
      2: How many speeches have you given in any other setting (work, organizations, etc.)?

McCroskey's (1982) Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) was used as a measurement for CA (Appendix C). The PRCA has been widely used in post-secondary student populations as a CA measure (Beatty, 1987; Frymier, 1993; Monroe and Borzi, 1988; Monroe, Borzi & Burrell, 1992; O'Mara, Allen, Long & Judd, 1996).

The updated version of McCroskey's (1982) PRCA-24 is made up of 24 statements regarding the subjects' feelings about communicating with others. Four subsections within the PRCA-24 survey subject's feelings about communicating in discussion groups, meetings, dyads (interpersonal) and public speaking. The subjects' responses can range from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a five point Likert-type scale (Beatty, 1984; McCroskey, 1982).

The PRCA-24 has shown high content validity (Booth-Butterfield & Gould, 1986; McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney & Plax, 1985; Remland & Jones, 1989). When weighed against other measures of CA; Guttman Siplex – Linear, Unidementional and Second-Order Factor, the PRCA-24 showed higher validity (Levine & McCroskey, 1990). Past research has demonstrated the reliability of the PRCA above an estimated .90 (Monroe & Borzi, 1988).

Procedure

Public Speaking Fundamentals course instructors administered the PRCA-24 during the Fall 1999 semester. An initial PRCA-24 was given to students the first week of class. The student information sheets, along with the two additional questions were also collected during the first week of class. All instruments were administered during class-time and turned-in to their instructors upon completion. Copies of the instruments were returned to the Department of Communication for departmental records.

All data collected for this thesis was not obtained for this thesis specifically, but as a part of departmental information. The Department of Communication provided the data in order to answer the research questions previously noted. The Institutional Review Board's approval was not required for this thesis because the records are departmental and no student's name or social security number is reported in this thesis.

Data Analysis

The SPSS for Windows software was used to analyze the collected data. Rejection region for each of the five two-tailed tests was $p < .05$. Each of the five research questions were analyzed as follows:

A t-test (group) was used to measure Research Question One: Is there a significant difference between students who have taken a speech course in high school and those who have not, in students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels? In response to the question "Did you take a speech course in high school" (Appendix A) coders used "yes" or "no" as the two coded responses for the independent variable. The two dependant variables are the respondent's score on the overall trait PRCA and the public speaking context sub-scale score (Appendix C).

A t-test (group) was used to measure Research Question Two: Is there a significant difference between students who have learned public speaking skills in a high school course and those who have not, in students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels? In response to the questions "Did you learn public speaking skills in any high school course?" (Appendix A) coders used "yes" or "no" as the two coded responses (respondents answering "some" or "somewhat" were coded as "yes" responses) for the independent variable. The two dependant variables are the respondent's score on the overall trait PRCA and the public speaking context sub-scale score (Appendix C).

A Spearman rho test was used to measure Research Question Three: Are there significant linear correlations between the students' self-reported number of speeches given in a school setting, and the students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels? In response to the question "How many speeches have you given in a school setting?" (Appendix B) coders used the reported number of speeches between "0-98" as the coded response (respondents answering "over 98" [i.e.,

100, 150, 200, etc.] experiences were coded as "98" experiences) for the independent variable. The two dependant variables are the respondent's score on the overall trait PRCA and the public speaking context sub-scale score (Appendix C).

A Spearman rho test was used to measure Research Question Four: Are there significant linear correlations between the students' self-reported number of speeches given in settings outside of school, and the students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels? In response to the question "How many speeches have you given in any other setting (work, organizations, etc.)?" (Appendix B) coders used the reported number of speeches between "0-98" as the coded response (respondents answering "over 98" [i.e., 100, 150, 200, etc.] experiences were coded as "98" experiences) for the independent variable. The two dependant variables are the respondent's score on the overall trait PRCA and the public speaking context sub-scale score (Appendix C).

A Spearman rho test was used to measure Research Question Five: Are there significant linear correlations between the students' self-reported total number of speeches given, and the students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels? In response to the questions "How many speeches have you given in a school setting" and "How many speeches have you given in any other setting (work, organizations, etc.)?" (Appendix B) coders used the sum of the two reported number of speeches between "0-98" as the coded response (respondents answering "over 98" [i.e., 100, 150, 200, etc.] experiences were coded as "98" experiences) for the

independent variable. The two dependant variables are the respondent's score on the

overall trait PRCA and the public speaking context sub-scale score (Appendix C).

Chapter IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this thesis is to query the effect of high school preparation and oral communication experiences on respondents overall trait CA level and public speaking context CA level. The Fall 1999 "Public Speaking Fundamentals" class files were reviewed in this investigation. These file included student initial PRCA-24 questionnaires (Appendix C), student demographic information sheets (Appendix A), and student responses from the departmental memo regarding student's oral communication experiences (Appendix B).

Of the 445 students enrolled in the 18 sections of "Public Speaking Fundamentals," 328 completed the initial PRCA-24 and the demographic sheet including the two additional questions in response to the memo. Of the 328 students, 51.2 percent were female and 48.8 percent were male (no data missing). Age of respondents ranged from 18 to 56 years, the mean at approximately 21 (53 percent of age data not collected). Ninety percent of the respondents were between the ages of 18 to 22, ten percent were 23 or older.

Reliability

Reliability coefficient analysis was conducted on the overall trait CA level measure and public speaking context CA sub-scale of the PRCA-24 scale. Both measured high reliability with an alpha of .94 for the overall trait measure and an alpha of .86 for the public speaking context measure.

Research Question Results

      SPSS for Windows was used to analyze all data. Group t-tests were utilized to answer Research Questions One and Two. Spearman rho analyses were utilized to answer Research Questions Three, Four and Five. The mean score of the PRCA-24 measuring the overall trait CA level was 60.84 (SD=15.45); lower than McCroskey's (1982) reported grand mean for overall trait CA of 65 for 100,000 college students. As a group, the mean score of the public speaking context sub-scale of the PRCA-24 was 18.94 (SD=5.19) slightly lower then the grand mean for reported public speaking context CA of 19.3 for 100,000 college students by McCroskey (1982).

      Research Question One asked: Is there a significant difference between students who have taken a speech course in high school and those who have not, in students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels? Of the respondents, 54 percent reported taking a speech course in high school and 43.3 reported not taking a speech course (2.7 percent data missing). The group t-test showed no significance for overall trait CA and public speaking CA (see Table I). Thus, those students who took a speech course in high school and those who did not take a speech course in high school did not show significantly different initial overall trait or public speaking context CA levels. The overall trait CA differed by only .4 between those did take a speech course and those who did not. The public speaking context CA differed by only .03 between those did take a speech course and those who did not.

TABLE I
Research Question One: T-test
Speech Course Taken in High School and CA Levels

PRCA Measurement	*RQ1* *Speech Course in H.S.*	*N* *(N=319)*	*Mean*	*Std* *Deviation*	*T*	*Sig* *(2-tailed)*
Overall Trait CA	Yes	177	60.49	15.84	-.256	.798
	No	142	60.93	14.74	-.259	.796
Public Speaking CA	Yes	177	18.90	5.37	-.053	.957
	No	142	18.93	4.98	-.054	.957

Research Question Two asked: Is there a significant difference between students

who have learned public speaking skills in a high school course and those who have not,

in students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA

levels? Of the respondents, 69.5 percent reported learning public speaking skills in high

school and 26.2 reported not learning those skills (4.3 percent data missing). The group

t-test showed significant differences (p<.001) for both overall trait CA and public

speaking CA (see Table II). Those students who learned public speaking skills in any

high school course showed significantly lower trait and public speaking context CA

levels than those who have not. The overall trait CA levels differed by 6.8 between those

who learned public speaking skills and those who did not. The public speaking context

CA levels differed by 2.5 between those who learned public speaking skills and those

who did not.

TABLE II
Research Question Two: T-test
Public Speaking Skills Learned in High School and CA Levels

PRCA Measurement	RQ2 P.S. Skills in H.S.	N (N=314)	Mean	Std Deviation	T	Sig (2-tailed)
Overall Trait CA	Yes	228	58.57	15.23	-6.76	.000
	No	86	65.33	13.90	-6.76	.000
Public Speaking CA	Yes	228	18.15	5.06	-2.44	.000
	No	86	20.59	4.89	-2.44	.000

Research Question Three asked: Are there significant linear correlations between

the students' self-reported number of speeches given in a school setting, and the students'

reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels? Of the

respondents, 77.5 percent of students reported giving 0 to 10 speeches in a school setting,

16.3 percent reported giving between 11 to 20 speeches, and 6.2 percent reported giving

21 or more speeches (15.9 percent data missing) (see Table III). The Spearman rho

analysis showed a significant relationship between self reported number of speeches

given in a school setting and overall trait CA levels (rho = -.276, p<001) and self reported

number of speeches given in a school setting and public speaking context CA levels (rho

= -.192, p<.002) (see Table IV). Thus, students' overall CA levels and public speaking

context CA levels were influenced by their reported number of speeches given in a school

setting; the more speeches given, the lower the overall trait and public speaking CA

levels.

Research Question Four asked: Are there significant linear correlations between

the students' self-reported number of speeches given in settings outside of school, and the

students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels?

Of the respondents, 89.3 percent of students reported giving 0 to 10 speeches in a setting

other then school, 4.1 percent reported giving between 11 to 20 speeches, and 6.2 percent reported giving 21 or more speeches (17.1 percent data missing) (see Table III). The Spearman rho analysis showed a significant relationship between self reported number of speeches given outside of the school setting and overall trait CA levels (rho = -.222, p<.001) and self reported number of speeches given outside of the school setting and public speaking context CA levels (rho = -.146, p<.02) (see Table IV). Thus, students' overall CA levels and public speaking context CA levels were influenced by their reported number of speeches given outside of the school setting; the more speeches given, the lower the overall trait and public speaking CA levels.

Research Question Five asked: Are there significant linear correlations between the students' self-reported total number of speeches given, and the students' reported initial overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels? Of the respondents, 58.3 percent of students reported giving 0 to 10 speeches total, 21.8 reported giving between 11 to 20 speeches, and 18.8 reported giving 21 or more speeches (18.9 percent missing data) (see Table III). The Spearman rho analysis showed a significant relationship between self reported number of total speeches given and overall trait CA levels (rho = -.306, p<.001) and self reported number of total speeches given and public speaking context CA levels (rho = -.198, p<.002) (see Table IV). Thus, students' overall CA levels and public speaking context CA levels were influenced by their reported number of total speeches given; the more speeches given, the lower the overall trait and public speaking CA levels.

TABLE III
Research Question Three, Four, Five: Supplementary Data
Percentage of Students Response to Number of Speeches Given

Number of Speeches given	Percentage Respondents School Setting	Percentage Respondents Other Setting	Percentage Respondents Overall
0-10	77.5 %	89.3 %	58.3 %
11-20	16.3 %	4.1 %	21.8 %
20+	6.2 %	6.2 %	18.8 %

TABLE IV
Research Question Three, Four, Five: Spearman rho
Number of Speaking Experiences and CA Levels

PRCA Measurement	Spearman rho Analysis	RQ3 Speeches in School Setting	RQ4 Speeches in Other Setting	RQ5 Total Speeches Given
Overall Trait CA	Corr. Coefficient	-.276	-.222	-.306
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	276	272	266
Public Speaking CA	Corr. Coefficient	-.192	-.146	-.198
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.016	.001
	N	276	272	266

Supplemental Analysis

A one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to determine the mean differences between the 18 individual course sections' overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels. No significant differences were found between individual course sections on reported CA levels (see Table V).

TABLE V
Supplemental Data: One-way ANOVA
Analysis Between Public Speaking Course Sections and CA Levels

PRCA Measurement	ANOVA Analysis	df	Mean Square	Sig.
Overall Trait CA	Between Groups	17	299.96	.207
	Within Groups	310	235.27	
	Total	327		
Public Speaking CA	Between Groups	17	40.51	.077
	Within Groups	310	26.17	
	Total	327		

However, there was apparent variation among sections as seen in the individual

section means (see Table VI). Lack of significance in the ANOVA could be attributed to

unequal cell sizes and relatively large standard deviations.

TABLE VI
Supplemental Data
Public Speaking Course Sections and CA Levels per Section

PUBLIC SPEAKING CONTEXT					OVERALL TRAIT			
Sections*	N	Mean	Std Deviation		Sections	N	Mean	Std Deviation
1	24	16.08	6.63		1	24	54.42	20.73
2	13	17.54	5.53		2	16	56.06	16.49
3	20	17.65	5.21		3	20	57.05	13.99
4	21	18.10	6.24		4	13	57.31	18.56
5	19	18.16	5.16		5	19	58.26	13.46
6	18	18.33	4.56		6	18	58.61	11.65
7	21	18.43	5.89		7	20	59.40	17.06
8	16	18.44	5.23		8	21	59.52	18.49
9	21	18.71	3.99		9	19	60.42	15.82
10	19	18.79	3.94		10	20	60.95	10.91
11	20	18.80	3.36		11	21	61.43	13.90
12	10	18.90	5.32		12	5	62.00	8.43
13	19	19.84	3.56		13	21	62.62	14.18
14	20	19.85	5.42		14	21	63.29	14.08
15	5	20.40	5.68		15	22	63.55	13.54
16	22	20.50	4.49		16	10	63.60	12.38
17	19	21.26	5.92		17	19	68.58	14.33
18	21	21.95	4.81		18	19	69.47	17.23

* *Section numbers were assigned only to distinguish between each section*
on the above chart and do not reflect the actual course section numbers.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The goal of this study was to determine if high school curriculum and past speaking experiences determine the CA levels college students report upon initial enrollment in a college public speaking fundamentals course. This chapter further examines the research questions and discusses possible explanations for the results. This study's limitations and recommendations for further research are reviewed.

Interpretation of the Research Questions

Research Question One examined whether or not students had taken a speech course in high school and their overall trait and public speaking context CA levels. The results showed that when students who took a high school speech course were compared to those who did not take a speech course, there was no significant difference in overall trait CA levels and public speaking context CA levels.

Research Question Two examined whether or not a students reported learning public speaking skills from any high school course and their overall trait and public speaking context CA levels. The results showed that when students who reported learning public speaking skills in a high school course were compared to those who reported they did not, there was a significant difference in their overall trait and public speaking context CA levels. When students reported learning public speaking skills in high school (e.g., in speech, English, business classes, etc.) their CA level decreased. The reported CA levels on overall trait CA were approximately seven points higher and

public speaking CA levels were approximately 2.5 points higher when students reported not learning public speaking skills as part of any high school course.

Based on the data from Research Questions One and Two, it appears that the learning of the public speaking skills, not necessarily the taking of a public speaking course is what benefits students the most and helps them reduce CA levels. Past research has shown that forcing HCAs to participate in a public speaking course may compound the anxiety problem and contribute to heightened student anxiety about public speaking (Buss, 1998; Kelly, 1997; Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). In this study, results suggest that those courses where public speaking skills were taught within course requirements are helping decrease student CA levels. This finding reinforces previous research that has shown communication skills training even within other coursework helps to decrease public speaking anxiety levels (Fremouw & Zitter, 1978; McCroskey, 1982). It may be that a course, other than public speaking, that teaches public speaking skills places less pressure "to perform" on students than a public speaking course does (where a grade is based mainly on performance).

National surveys have found less then 50 percent of the states incorporate communication skill acquisition into state standards (Backlund, Brown, Gurry & Jandt, 1992; Litterst, VanRheenen & Casmir, 1994). High schools integrating the NCA's standards for speaking, delivery skills, audience inclusion, listening and media literacy for K-12 (NCA, 1998e) do so not only in public speaking courses, but often integrate these skills in courses such as English and business, etc.. The NCA standards statement outlines four categories of communication competencies high schools should integrate

into their skill acquisition base in their curriculum (NCA, 1998e): 1) a demonstration of knowledge and understanding of communication (e.g., the communication process, relationships among communicators, the meaning within communication) as well as the ability to communicate properly (e.g., display sensitivity to diversity, resolve conflict, evaluate different communicative styles); 2) a demonstration of competent speaking techniques (e.g., use appropriate methods, use clarifying language, overcome communication anxiety); 3) a demonstration of competent listening abilities (e.g., use appropriate and effective listening skills, identify barriers in speaking); 4) a demonstration of media literacy (e.g., understand the social and cultural content of media, comprehend commercial nature of media, know how to communicate to specific audiences). This study reinforces the importance of including these standards across high school curriculum.

Both the National Communication Association and the National Center of Educational Statistics have stressed the importance of communication skill acquisition to prepare students for higher education and careers (NCA, 1998a). Understanding communication processes and becoming skilled in the communicative arts are skills employers require of new hires (Sprague, 1996). To meet these demands of the workforce, many post-secondary academic institutions are holding students responsible for the acquisition of communication skills, by requiring a communication class as part of the core requirements (NCA, 1998b). To prepare students for these courses, all high schools should be encouraged to continue their efforts in public speaking skills training.

Research Questions Three, Four and Five examined the relationship among the number of student public speaking experiences in a high school setting and, the number of student public speaking experiences outside the educational setting and the total number of speaking experiences with overall trait CA and public speaking context CA levels. Relationships were found between the total number of speeches a student had given in all circumstances and their overall trait and public speaking context CA levels. The more speeches a student reported giving, in high school or outside of high school doors, the lower the students' CA levels were, both in the reported initial trait CA and public speaking context levels. Exposure to public speaking may help students gain higher confidence (Lee, 1993). Students practicing public speaking skills through added numbers of speech events seem to reduce their CA levels.

As is evident from this study, it is not only public speaking classes that effect reported student CA levels upon entering a college public speaking course, it is also the speaking practice the students have gained throughout their high school careers. Communicator skills training and opportunities to practice public speaking should play a major role in preparing students for life after high school (Lewis & Schaps, 1985; Lewis, 1995). Thus, one important suggestion based on the results of this study is that the NCA's communication competencies should be integrated into a curriculum-wide high school philosophy, prioritizing the acquisition of communication skills within each course of a student's curriculum track (Jenks & Brown, 1975; Jenks, 1985). The acquisition of these skills may even help students make the decision to further their education beyond high school because of decreased CA levels (Ericson & Gardner, 1992;

Frymier, 1993; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield & Payne, 1989; Monroe, Borzi & Burrell, 1992). In addition, a curriculum-wide school philosophy could help students who need communication skills go directly and successfully into the workforce after graduation (Bresler, 1998; Garary & Bernhardt, 1998; NCA, 1997; Sprague, 1996).

Limitations of the Study

There are factors that limit this study. This study was based on records from one department of communication and one university's records from one semester. The PRCA-24 scale used (Appendix C) has been shown to be valid and reliable (Booth-Butterfield & Gould, 1986; McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney & Plax, 1985; Remland & Jones, 1989). However, the student information sheet (Appendix A) along with additional questions regarding speaking experience (Appendix B) could be worded more precisely to clarify the questions for the instructor collecting the data and the students who report the information. In addition, more precise questions could make the recollection of the student's past experience clearer (i.e., incorporate a clear definition of "speech" and examples of what a "speech" or "speaking experience" might include). Finally, because this study relied on instructors to gather data, it was difficult to monitor how complete the data would be. A more complete set of instructor directions would be helpful.

Recommendations for Future Research

The first recommendation for future research is to widen the scope of the study and include non-college-bound high school students. Since college students were the only participants in this study, the students choosing not to continue on to college are not

represented. This may be why reported student CA levels were lower in this study than in national norms. Students with high CA levels often do not seek out post-secondary education (Monroe, Borzi & Burrell, 1992).

This thesis reinforces the importance of high school public speaking skills acquisition. Thus, one suggestion for future research would be to study high school skill-based training. Not the curriculum itself, but the communication skills taught throughout the curriculum should be queried. Such a study could include the frequency of speech events the students encounter, not only in public speaking courses, but also in courses such as English, business, and government, etc.. The specifics regarding what public speaking skills high schools teach could be obtained at the state, district or local school levels. A study could also investigate how these skills are taught within the classroom and in extracurricular activities. In addition, it could investigate differences in public speaking skills training between schools in urban and rural settings.

Finally, this study strengthens the support for public speaking skills training at the high school level. Not only is there a need for students to possess skills upon entering college, but also upon entering the workforce. Learning these skills and practicing public speaking helps to decrease the communication anxiety speakers feel when faced with upcoming speaking experiences. The more skill and the more speaking experiences, the less communication anxiety students report. The less communication anxiety students experience, the more they are willing to learn and practice public speaking skills. The more confidence and less CA students report, the more likely they are to succeed academically, socially and vocationally.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET

Please complete the following information. It will help your instructor become acquainted with you, as well as provide information in case your instructor needs to contact you during the semester (for reasons involving illness, emergencies, etc.).

Name:_____ Social Security #: _____

Preferred Name:_____ Class Time: _____

Local Address (& Zip Code):_____

E-mail Address:_____

Telephone: (Day)_____ (Evening) _____

High School Attended & Graduation Date:_____

Year in College:_____

College Major:_____

Did you take a speech course in high school?_____ If yes, when (e.g., 11th grade)?_____

Did you learn public speaking skills in any high school course?_____ If yes, which course

(e.g., English)?_____

Previous Experience In Public Speaking (oustide of high school):_____

Employment or Volunteer (& Where):_____

Ultimate Career Goal:_____

Describe How Developing Effective Public Speaking Skills Can Help You Reach or Further

Your Career Goal:_____

Describe Your Worst Fear(s) About Public Speaking:_____

Please Share Any Other Information You Think Your Instructor Should Know About You

That Is Pertinent To This Course:_____

_____

Please Write Any Questions That You Would Like Answered About This Class (Use the back

side of this page, if necessary):_____

_____

I Have Read & I Understand the Course Policies & Requirements Explained On Pages 3-8

In This Workbook (Please Sign Your Name):_____

APPENDIX B

Date: August 20. 1999

To: All Speech 1110 Instructors

From: Jennifer Dalbey Christensen. Speech GTA

RE: Copies of Student Information / PRSA Scores

Karen Dwyer and I are asking for all Speech instructors to have their students fill out and turn in the following information. All information is located within the Public Speaking Workbook.

PAGE 9: Student information sheet: have student fill out completely and ask the following questions in <u>addition</u> to the printed material. Have the students mark their responses at the top of page 9.

A. How many speeches have you given in a school setting? _____
B. How many speeches have you given in any other setting? (Work. organizations, etc.) _____

ALSO. please administer the PRCA on **PAGE 14** to your students.

We are requesting a copy of pages 9 and 14 from your entire class. Please have the department secretary make copies of these sheets after completion and place them in Karen Dwyer's mailbox. Please label the copies with the instructor's name and section number.

Thank you so much for your help and time with this research endeavor. This graduate student is eternally grateful!

APPENDIX C

ASSESSING YOUR COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION LEVEL

Name:_____ SS#:_____ Date:_____

McCroskey's Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24)*

Directions: This instrument is composed of twenty-four statements concerning feelings about communicating with others. Work quickly, record your first impression. Please indicate in the space provided the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking:

(1) STRONGLY AGREE. (2) AGREE (3) ARE UNDECIDED. (4) DISAGREE. (5) STRONGLY DISAGREE.

___ 1. I dislike participating in group discussions.

___ 2. Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions.

___ 3. I am tense and nervous while participating in group discussions.

___ 4. I like to get involved in group discussions.

___ 5. Engaging in a group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous.

___ 6. I am calm and relaxed while participating in group discussions.

___ 7. Generally, I am nervous when I have to participate in a meeting.

___ 8. Usually I am calm and relaxed while participating in a meeting.

___ 9. I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express an opinion at a meeting.

___ 10. I am afraid to express myself at meetings.

___ 11. Communicating at meetings usually makes me uncomfortable.

___ 12. I am very relaxed when answering questions at a meeting.

___ 13. While participating in a conversation with a new acquaintance. I feel very nervous.

___ 14. I have no fear of speaking up in conversations.

___ 15. Ordinarily I am very tense and nervous in conversations.

___ 16. Ordinarily I am very calm and relaxed in conversations.

___ 17. While conversing with a new acquaintance. I feel very relaxed.

___ 18. I'm afraid to speak up in conversations.

___ 19. I have no fear of giving a speech.

___ 20. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am giving a speech.

___ 21. I feel relaxed while giving a speech.

___ 22. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech.

___ 23. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence.

___ 24. While giving a speech. I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.