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Oral Communication in High School

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Abstract

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While high school students have received formal instruction in reading and writing, few have received much formal instruction in speaking and listening skills; this paper supports the call for required courses in oral communication. In recent years, the need for instruction in oral communication has been emphasized in numerous reports on the direction of education, although it has been underemphasized in many of our schools. This paper presents research on the need for and benefits of oral communication. The pilot case study included 29 faculty members, 92 students at a small (500 students) urban high school in Michigan, and 21 area high schools to determine perceived oral communication skills and levels of speaking apprehension, course benefits, teacher preparation, and oral communication curriculum of other schools.
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Chapter One: Project Proposal

Problem Statement

While high school students have received formal instruction in reading and writing, few have received much formal instruction in speaking and listening skills; this paper supports the call for required courses in oral communication. In recent years, the need for instruction in oral communication has been emphasized in many reports on the direction of education. Adler (1982) in The Paideia Proposal recommended speech communication for all students. The College Board (1983) listed listening and speaking among the six basic competencies needed for college. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) recommended oral communication be included in the high school English program (Book & Cooper, 1986).

Yet while units of oral communication may be taught in the high school English class, this instruction may not be enough to adequately prepare today's youth in oral communication skills. Research has shown that "typically, more classroom time is spent teaching students the communication skills (reading and writing) they would use the least in their daily communications" (Rhodes, 1987). Perhaps even more than instruction in English class, a one semester course devoted solely to oral communication skills is needed (Swanson, 1984; Boileau & Bath, 1987; Zabava-Ford & Wolvin, 1992, 1993).

Importance and Rationale of the Study

According to the 1984 Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy, recent studies from employers have documented the fact that large numbers of young people graduate from high school lacking the essential basic educational skills. Among those basic skills are speaking and
Oral Communication

listening. Yet while "speaking and listening skills are probably the most widely used and least recognized skills essential to education" (Rhodes, 1987) schools that do not require courses in oral communications often are not teaching these skills in other classes either.

As employers "indicate wide dissatisfaction with the educational quality of high school graduates" as the Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy found in 1984, so too are other studies suggesting the need for communications skills to be taught in a required high school course. For example, The Report of the Panel on Secondary Education for the Changing Workplace (1984) calls for oral communications as one of its suggested core competencies. Further studies show that compared to national norms, academically at-risk students were found to be more apprehensive of communication and lower in self-perceived communication competence and could benefit from concentrated oral communication instruction (Chesebro et al., 1992). Studies also suggest that approximately 15-20% of the population of 21 to 25 year olds cannot adequately communicate orally (Vangelisti & Daly, 1982). Finally, data obtained from students enrolled in a communication course indicated that the course had a positive differential impact (Zabava-Ford & Wolvin, 1993) and that the percentage of teachers currently teaching by Michigan's minimal performance objectives for speaking and listening was lower than expected (Rhodes, 1987).

Background of the Study

Commissions, committees, states, and professional organizations urge that oral communications skills be taught in high school and most recommend a one semester course. The following national reports concur: A Nation At Risk, the National Commission on Excellence in Education
(1983), High School: A Report of Secondary Education in America by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1983), The Council for Basic Education Checklist (1983), The College Entrance Exam Board's report in Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able To Do (1984), The Association of American Colleges (1985), and state reports from Michigan, Washington, Florida, California, Oregon, and Texas (Book, 1985). As a result of these and other studies, it becomes clear that a renewed emphasis on communication education is needed. While many schools have oral communication courses as a requirement for graduation, others have relegated speech communication instruction to either an elective course or an extra curricular activity (Brooks, 1969; Book and Pappa, 1981; Rubin, 1985; Rhodes 1987). Yet studies have shown that an independent course in oral communication best meets the needs of students (Swanson, 1984; Boileau & Bath, 1987; Zabava-Ford & Wolvin, 1992, 1993). Furthermore, since Proficiency Tests in Michigan on reading, writing, mathematics, and science come into effect, oral communication skills may remain underemphasized in most educational efforts in elementary and high schools. Therefore, the issue is ever more timely. There is a need to assess the current state of instruction, develop a clearly defined program, and evaluate its impact on student skills (Book, 1985).

**Statement of Purpose**

The research problem is that of determining the effects of an oral communication course on the perceived communication competence and apprehension levels of those students in subsequent courses as compared with those who have not taken this course. Those with lower perceived competence and more apprehension about public speaking "do not engage in
many of the important learning activities available in the class" (Chesebro, et al., 1992). The research problem poses some questions: 1) Does a semester course in oral communications have an effect on students' perceived competence and apprehension levels in other courses? 2) Are those skills adequately taught in other courses where public speaking is a central part of the course? The research hypotheses is:

H: The high school students who are currently enrolled in the one semester oral communication course will show greater overall achievement in perceived oral communication competence and less apprehension about speaking in public than those who have not taken the course.

The study will include 11th and 12th grade students in a case study in a small (Class B - 500 students) high school. The project will describe a series of inquiries headed by a research question, then present a description of the subjects, procedures, findings and analyses. This researcher, who currently teaches the oral communication course, will have students currently enrolled in the course keep journals about their speaking experiences and perceived communication skills. These narratives will be used to answer a research question about whether the current oral communication students see benefits of the course. To determine if students currently enrolled in the oral communication course respond with more self-confidence and less apprehension when asked to give an extemporaneous speech than do those who have not received formal training in oral communication, an experiment to test apprehension levels will be used. Students will write narratives about the experience. These narratives about perceived oral communication competence and apprehension levels will be compared with narratives of students who
have not taken the course. To determine whether students value and/or recommend the oral communication course at the end of the semester, this study will further include student evaluations from previous oral communication courses. To answer the research question regarding teachers' perceptions of oral communication in the classroom, a series of three related questions will be linked together. The questions will help determine 1) if teachers perceive the value of oral communication for students, 2) in a required course, and 3) if those who teach oral communication in other classes provide opportunities for students to develop speaking and listening skills according to state objectives. For this part of the study, all high school teachers will be surveyed concerning the oral communication activities in their classrooms to determine from which courses students' perceived competence and apprehension levels should be compared. Furthermore, those teachers who report that they teach oral communication skills will be interviewed by this researcher. Other area school districts will be surveyed as to their curriculum regarding oral communication courses.

If the hypothesis proves to be true, the findings will indicate that the oral communication course does have a positive effect on students' perceived oral communication competence and apprehension level in other courses where public speaking activities are required. Further findings will also indicate that the high school teachers may show interest in teaching oral communication skills but are actually not doing enough to integrate oral communication into their classes. Finally, the research will suggest that those teachers who use an integrated approach of teaching oral communication skills are not necessarily trained in teaching oral communication and do not currently teach by the state objectives.
This means that the teaching of oral skills in other courses may not be adequate in meeting state speaking and listening objectives and the oral communication course should become a requirement for all high school students in order to meet those needs.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Since the early 1980s, committees, commissions, states, and professional organizations have presented the need for oral communication skills to be taught to high school students. Most of them call for those skills to be taught in a specific course designed to promote skills in both speaking and listening. The chapter review is based on relevant books, newsletters, professional journals, educational reports, textbooks, papers, government documents, annuals, and empirical studies. The literature review evaluates the need for speech communication as a core competency because of its necessity in jobs and society, and can benefit students in general education programs, vocational education education programs, at-risk students, female and minority students, and gifted and talented students. Finally, the related literature is used to compare study results of independent oral communication courses with integrated teaching of those skills in other classes.

Need for Oral Communication Skills

A renewed emphasis on communication education is needed. As early as 1978, legislation from Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Public Law 95-561 called for "...elementary and secondary education to improve instruction so that all children are able to master

Speaking and listening skills and related research, once the focus of education in the 1940s through 1960s and again in the late 1970s and early 1980s, has now been diminished. The lack of research in this area may have "diminished the perceived value of the study of communication
education" (Book & Cooper, 1986, p. 90). Instead, the focus for communication skills has been on reading and writing, not speaking and listening. While studies have pointed out the sizable numbers of people who cannot read and write, "it is important to recognize that there are still many individuals who lack even a more basic group of skills - the skills involved in orally communicating..." (Vangelisti & Daly, 1989, p. 142). Indeed oral communication skills are even more basic than reading and writing. When one looks at the communication skills required of the average person in every day work and living, "research studies indicate that of the total time devoted to communication, 45% is spent in listening, 30% in speaking, 16% in reading and 9% in writing" (Martin, 1987, p. 2).

**Lack of Communication Skills Needed for Basic Education**

According to studies by the Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy in 1984, high school graduates "lack the ability to express their ideas intelligibly and effectively" (p. 17). In the typical classroom, students are required to speak in informal contexts such as reading orally from a text, answering questions, and small or large group discussion. As they progress to classes which require higher thinking skills, they may be required to use oral skills in presentations, debates, role playing, and
formal speeches. In many cases oral skills are not taught; some students may perform poorly on them in the classroom. This may cause them to become more apprehensive about their perceived communication skills and less likely to speak up in class or even to ask or answer questions. Don M. Boileau, director of educational services for the Speech Communication Association, found that "the failure of students to learn and perform well in school frequently reflects weakness in basic communication skills - reading, writing, computation, listening and speaking (emphasis added)-more than it reflects their inability to master subject matter" (1984, p. 31).

**Study of Young Adults**

Related research also points to the need for oral communication skills. Vangelisti and Daly (1989) examined the speaking skills of a nationally representative sample of 21 to 25 year olds. The study included a relatively small sample of 208 people. One criteria of the sample was the respondents' educational level. Two point four percent had 0-8 years of education, 22.6% had not graduated from high school, 48.1% had some post-high school education, and 26.9% had earned college degrees. What was important to this researcher about this study was that respondents' skills were evaluated on actual speech performance on
eight tasks including persuasive, informative, and narrative skills by trained raters to assess low level speaking skills. However, assessment of actual visual delivery style, which to this researcher is a key component of speaking skills, was not a part of the study; judges listened to tapes of the respondents rather than observing them in person. Although it appeared that three of four participants could demonstrate simple skills that were adequate, up to 37% could not adequately communicate the most difficult task of giving verbal directions. The results suggest that the efforts to improve basic oral communication skills are needed. Vangelisti and Daly reported that the concern lies not with the people who can communicate adequately on low level skills but "the most striking data is how many people are incapable of communicating orally. To find that even when the most difficult task is removed, close to 20% of the population is unable to adequately convey information orally is both discouraging and frightening..." (Vangelisti & Daly, 1989, p. 139).

**Oral Skills Needed in the Job Force**

Oral communication skills are not just basic in education, they are also necessary in the job force. Kenneth M. Frawley, an executive of the New York Telephone Company (as cited in Boileau, 1984, p. 1), stated that
"poor listening skills cost business somewhere between one and two-and-one-half billion dollars a year." Workers need to listen effectively, recognize when another person does not understand a message, express ideas clearly and concisely, express and defend with evidence a certain point of view, ask and answer questions effectively, give concise and accurate directions, and organize messages so that others can understand them. It is up to schools to teach these skills and prepare students for the world of work. Those who are able to formulate and express their views with clarity and precision are more likely not only to be more successful but also move up from entry level jobs (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 1984, p. 8).

**Oral Skills Needed in Society**

Listening and speaking skills are basic to citizenship and maintenance of daily living. People need to demonstrate basic communication competencies to function well in society, whether it be to understand oral directions from a judge to a jury, organize messages to explain a complaint to an elected official, understand a doctor's directions for taking prescribed medication, express and defend feelings in a family discussion, or explain appliance malfunction to a repair person. Furthermore, "people who speak well tend to be more active in community
organizations and tend to be more politically active" (Vangelisti & Daly, 1989, p. 141). Adults will experience success and mobility in citizenship and personal life through effective use of these skills. Communication issues, such as those that may be addressed in a basic speech course, have a major influence in people's lives.

**Oral Skills Needed in the Future**

Oral communication skills will also be at a premium in the future. As the Information Age progresses, much of students' "personal, social, and professional success will depend on their speaking and listening skills. Our new literacy will require instruction in oral communication" (Martin, 1987, p. 1). Students will need to be able to effectively communicate with an increasing number of audiences due to site-based decision making in the workforce, the need for problem solving strategies, higher technical literacy in society, and telecommunications technologies. Thus "as the satellite communication system increases our oral communication capability across the nation and around the world, the need for competency in the basic skills of speaking and listening becomes imperative" (Boileau, 1982, p. 31).
Specific Categories of Students Needing Oral Skills

Since oral communication skills are essential in school, in the workforce, and in society, there have been a myriad of groups which call for oral skills as one of the core competencies for all students. These skills, then, are not just for those going on to college but especially for those who do not and "may have less opportunity or time to acquire them" (Committee on Science, Engineering, and Public Policy, 1984, p. xii). All students need these skills and the literature indicates that general education students, vocational education students, at-risk students, female and minority students, and gifted and talented students need and can benefit from courses in speaking and listening.

General Education Students

General education students (including college preparatory students) can benefit from taking an oral communication course. People begin their communication though speaking and listening before they learn to read and write. These oral skills are the skills used to learn and some would say that they come naturally to people and everyone can orally communicate effectively. But research shows that few have training and those who are skilled in speaking and listening are also good at other skills. In Vangelisti and Daly's 1989 study of 21 to 25 year olds, skill in speaking
was significantly and positively related to how well the respondents did in other academic activities as reading, calculating, understanding documents, and comprehending prose (p. 141). Rubin, 1982; Rubin & Freezel, 1986; and Rubin & Graham, 1988 (as cited in Vangelisti & Daly, 1989, p. 141) found positive links between oral communication skills and performance in school (e.g., GPA and ACT scores) and Cronin and Spencer (1990) found that "the use of oral communication to learn is...one of the most effective methods of improving classroom instruction in all subjects" (p. 2). In Academic Preparation in English: Teaching for Transition from High School to College (1985) which was published as a follow-up to Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do (1984), speaking and listening were listed as a separate category because of the relationship between these skills and the development of skill in reading and writing (p.14). Because so much of learning involves speaking and listening, yet few are trained in these skills and many are apprehensive to speak in class, all general education students could benefit from a course designed to enhance their ability to communicate effectively.
Vocational Education Students

Vocational education students also can benefit from oral communication skills; however, research has shown that these skills are not always taught in votech schools. Mester and Tauber (1990) researched oral communication skills in vocational education in Eirie County Pennsylvania. They found that minimal direct instruction of oral skills was taking place (p. 15) even though English teachers, instructors at the county technical school, co-op students, home-school teachers, and employers all asserted the importance of oral communication skills to the future success of their students. The study used open-ended interviews concerning the 24 skills taught, perceived as helpful, and most often used in the categories of "data", "people", and "things". One particularly interesting finding of this study was that teachers typically devote 41% of class time to lectures and 55% to practice. However, in some follow-up interviews, it was revealed that the teaching of communication skills was actually quite incidental as compared to the teaching of mechanical and qualitative skills (p. 15). According to the teachers and employers involved in the study, so much of vocational enterprise requires a command of speaking and listening skills and this study found that these students were not receiving adequate instruction in these skills. They
suggested that "votecch graduates need oral communication skills virtually as much as they need mechanical skills and significantly more than they need quantitative skills" (Mester & Tauber, 1990, p. 10).

**At-Risk Students**

At-risk students also need speaking and listening skills. Chesebro et al. (1992) studied 2,793 at-risk students from 14 urban, large, predominantly minority middle and junior high schools throughout the U.S. To this researcher, this study was important because of the large size of the sample population which might enhance the validity of the findings. The researchers found that "effective oral communication is likely to play a critical role in reversing the outcome predicted for at-risk students" (Chesebro et al., 1992, p. 345). Forty-four percent of students perceived their communication competence as lower than the national norm of 16.7% (p. 351). Because their perceived skills were lower, they were found to ask questions and orally respond to teachers' questions less frequently, thus limiting their learning experiences. And because these students perceive their communication skills to be lower, they are less likely to take an oral communication course even though they would benefit from such a course. Indeed, the researchers' number one recommendation was to design and offer courses in speaking and listening skills for these
students.

**Female and Minority Students**

Along with at-risk students, females and minorities can benefit from utilizing skills learned in an oral communication course. Females and minorities have typically faced inequities in the classroom in part because they are called on less and often respond less on their own to teacher-generated questions. Because communication courses have had a positive differential impact (Zabava-Ford & Wolvin, 1993) on communication skills and perceived communication skills, females and minorities who have received training in such skills feel more confident in asking questions, responding to teacher directed questions, and presenting information orally. In 1988, Corson (as cited in Cronin and Spencer, 1990, p. 8) contended that oral communications techniques, when applied in meaningful applications, can provide practical solutions to many learning problems. Cronin and Spencer (1990) found that in mathematics and sciences courses, two subjects in which many females and minorities tend to do less well as compared to males, the use of oral communication to learn, while valuable for all elementary and secondary school mathematics and science students, addresses the special needs of females, minorities, individuals with
limited English proficiency and gifted and talented students. They can utilize oral communication to construct their own understandings of mathematics and science and at the same time improve their oral communication skills (p. 8).

**Gifted and Talented Students**

Finally, gifted and talented students can benefit from oral communication courses and activities involving speaking and listening. Nevins and Book (1990) offered a five week summer session in oral communication at Michigan State University to academically talented high school students. Students were invited to attend the session if they had taken the Scholastic Aptitude Test as seventh graders, and if they had obtained a minimum score of 450 on either the verbal or math portion and a total score of 850 or more. They also had to have a minimum of a "B" average in their school courses. Minority students were especially recruited, although the demographics of the types of students involved was not provided in the paper presented by the researchers. Nevins and Book suggested that both elementary and secondary educators should be encouraged to be aware of, and to provide students with even more accelerated opportunities for gifted and talented students because oral communication courses provide students with experiences in speaking and
listening which are immediately useful to them in all areas of education and of life. Students had to research one socially significant issue and deliver one informative and two persuasive speeches on their topics. They also studied and critiqued famous and peer speeches and were encouraged to recognize the important social responsibility that accompanies oration because as gifted and talented students, they will most likely be leaders. While this paper presented no statistical analysis, in a follow-up survey the students reported that this class had already helped them in other communication situations.

In South Africa, the Herzzlia Extended Learning Program (H.E.L.P.) required written and verbal presentations by its gifted and talented students. In a paper presented at the International Conference: Education for the Gifted Ingenium 2000, instructor Juliette Peries spoke about the program. Students were to conduct their own research and report on it both in written form and in oral presentations to their peers, teachers, parents, and community. Oral presentations were required because professionals use such venues to present their findings to their colleagues and communities and gifted and talented students were perceived by the program's instructors as needing to learn and practice these skills. The oral presentations fostered their educational opportunities because
through the presentation process the students were provided with immediate feedback, improved self-image, confidence in defending their views in front of a varied audience, and they learned to express themselves clearly. Peires stated that "if we wish our gifted and talented pupils to become leaders in the community, they must be able to talk in public" (Peires, 1984, p. 5). Because of programs like the one at Michigan State University and the Herzzlia Extended Learning Program, it appears that students in other gifted and talented programs can benefit from such activities which involve students engaged in oral presentation of research.

**Current Status of Communication Education**

The evidence indicates that attention to oral communication skills has not been given its rightful place in the high school curriculum. In many schools, today's students are not required to take a communication course. Gustav W. Friedrich's study in the late 1970s (as cited in Martin, 1989, p. 1) concluded only 25% of American secondary students were required to take a speech course. And in 1982, another study indicated that "although students spend 75 percent or more of their communication time speaking and listening, only 60 percent of high schools offer some classes in speech communication and less than 20 percent require such
classes" (Boileau & Wallace, 1982, p. 31).

In 1984, a West Virginia survey was developed to determine how many West Virginia students were receiving specific instruction in oral communication whether through separate courses or integrated skill instruction within the English language arts classes. The survey was given to undergraduates in seven colleges who had already finished their high school education since the state had included speaking and listening skills in the West Virginia High School Graduation Requirements. While 50.4% of students received oral communication instruction in an English/language arts class (Swanson, 1984, p. 6) and the research showed improvement from a 1979 survey, to this researcher the response is still far below what it should be and suggests that a specific course requirement in oral skills is needed to ensure that the other 49.6% of the students receive the necessary training. The study also could be strengthened because the survey did not clearly distinguish between speech classes and oral communication instruction in the English/language arts classes so there is no way of knowing which type of instruction was more effective. Additionally, the survey did not distinguish between out-of-state respondents and West Virginia students. Those schools offering oral communication should have been specifically
identified. To give the researchers credit, however, they did recommend
that all graduates should receive specific instruction in speaking and
listening, that all needed a developmental program in oral education that
would go far beyond the average six weeks of instruction which was
currently being offered by those teachers who integrated speaking and
listening skills in their classes, and that all students needed a qualified
oral communication teacher. Furthermore, it was recommended that the
board should recognize speaking and listening skills as essential, and
should identify speaking and listening as deserving a year of
special attention (as reading, writing, and mathematics have been
for years... The educational system is operating with a critical flaw.
The challenge of creating excellence in education can be met only if
the skills of speaking and listening are included in a balanced
curriculum (Swanson, 1984, p. 8).

Furthermore, while schools may have oral communication courses as
electives, those courses often do not count toward fulfillment of college
requirements, and "speech is considered a minor part of the language arts
rather than a distinct or separate one of the arts" (Wilson, 1984, p. 3).
Even those schools which have incorporated speaking and listening units
into the English curriculum are insufficient because theses units are not
taught by certified speech teachers. Finally, integrated courses "do not provide adequate time-on-task and should be considered only as reinforcement, just as writing must be practiced in other composition courses" (Boileau, 1982, p. 37).

**Educational Trends in High School Communication Courses**

While some schools have oral communication courses as a requirement for graduation, others have relegated speech communication instruction to either an elective course or extra curricular activity (Brooks, 1969; Book & Pappa, 1981; Rubin, 1985; Rhodes, 1987) and this may continue to be the status of oral communication in the future. In *The Futurist* (1990) Certron and Evans-Gayle projected educational trends for American schools. One of those trends is that "a core curriculum for all students will emerge as parents, teachers, business leaders and other stakeholders debate what is important for the learning enterprise: Basic skills versus arts or vocational education versus critical thinking skills, for example will be a major part of the debate" (p. 40). Because the arts are not currently viewed by some schools as "basic", the oral communication course is in danger of remaining in elective or extra-curricular status as compared to other language arts courses.
Still others will continue to assume that students either already know how to speak and listen competently or that they will receive training in basic college courses. Indeed, in 1985, Gibson, Hanna and Huddleston surveyed the status of a basic speech course in U.S. colleges. Their results showed that the basic oral communication course "remains a vital component of American higher education...reflecting a societal trend to prepare students for skilled oral presentation of ideas in a competitive society" (p. 290). But not everyone goes on to college and if this course is vital to college students, it may be even more vital to those not entering higher education who need speaking and listening skills. Speaking and listening skills should be viewed as basic skills which all high school students should be able to perform effectively both now and in the future.

Studies of Course impact

In 1992, Zabava-Ford and Wolvin studied the impact of a basic college introductory speech course on students' perceptions of their communications competencies in class, work and social settings. They found significant positive changes in student's perceptions of their communications competencies during the semester in which they participated in a basic speech course. Perceived communication competence is important to student's education as related to all
educational classes students take because the higher they perceive their competencies, the more they chose to speak up in class and they will avoid oral participation whenever possible if they perceive incompetence. The most significant changes in perceived competence in this study were in presentation skills, communication comfort, and interviewing. Although this study only dealt with perceived communication competence and not specifically oral communication training, it is noteworthy because when students perceive their communication skills as higher they engage themselves more often in the learning process.

Again in 1993, Zabava-Ford and Wolvin assessed the impact of a basic speech course on perceived communication competence of 344 students enrolled in a basic communication course at a large public university. The researchers updated and improved their previous 1992 survey. They found that the course had a "positive differential impact based on communication context" (p. 215). Students indicated significant improvement in perceived communication competencies, in the semester course (p. 222). This researcher found that limitations of this and the previous 1992 study included the fact that the pre- and post-test surveys were given to students of only one university and in the 1993 study many of the students (45.3%) had previously taken a speech course in high
school which may partially account for positive results in both pre- and post-test surveys. Also, there was not a control group, which does not inform about whether students in other courses would have gained in perceived communication competence without the basic course. In addition, it was not determined which, if any, students were engaged in other extra curricular activities which would have bolstered their confidence in communication situations. Finally, since perceived communication competence must be measured by the students themselves, there is always the danger that students did not rate themselves objectively, although the researchers stated they "had no clear reason to believe that [respondents] were not equally subjective at the time" (p. 222) of both pre- and post-tests.

Despite their limitations, these studies by Zabava-Ford and Wolvin show that continuing communication research is needed. More importantly, they show that basic oral communication courses help students improve their perceived skills and this may lead to greater success in other courses and may further reinforce communication competencies in work and social contexts.
State of Michigan Objectives

In Michigan, guidelines for oral communication skills have been set up by the State Board of Education. The report of a task force of citizens and educators, "The Common Goals of Michigan Education" (as cited by Boileau, 1984, p. 1), states that

Michigan education must assure the acquisition of basic communication, computation, and inquiry skills to the fullest extent possible for each student. These basic skills fall into four broad categories [among them which are]: (1) the ability to comprehend ideas through reading and listening; (2) the ability to communicate ideas through writing and speaking..."

Michigan also has speaking and listening objectives for K-12 students which have been in place since 1972 and were updated and expanded in 1987 (Rhodes, 1987, p. 25). In a 1987 survey of Michigan teachers, Rhodes found that "regardless of how important the objectives were perceived to be, the percentage of teachers currently teaching by the objectives was lower than expected. Also, regardless of the respondents' current practices, many of them felt the need to have more support materials provided" (p. 38). Unfortunately, Rhodes did not provide statistics regarding the number of teachers surveyed nor the number
teaching or not teaching by the objectives. Additionally, although the speaking and listening objectives have been in place for over 20 years, according to this researcher's findings in a small public school district in Michigan, those objectives are not necessarily taught across the curriculum or in English/language arts courses and many teachers are unaware that the objectives even exist. Therefore, these objectives need to be taught in a specifically designed oral communication course to ensure they are being taught by competent speech educators.

**Summary of Literature**

Commissions, committees, states, and professional organizations urge that oral communication skills are imperative for today's high school students. The studies cited consistently document that students have demonstrated a lack of basic skills, among them speaking and listening skills which are significant factors in all stages of education. Students need to become effective communicators in the workforce, in citizenry, and for the maintenance of daily living. As we progress through the Information Age, these skills will become even more imperative for success and mobility. The literature indicates that all students need these skills and specific training in oral communication has been found to benefit general education students, vocational education students, at-risk
students, female and minority students, and gifted and talented students. Empirical studies show that required courses in oral communications better equip students with speaking and listening skills than teaching integrated units of speech instruction in other courses. Since educators' goals are to meet the needs of students and prepare them for the future, "an independent course in oral communication, taught by a qualified instructor, is most likely to achieve the desired goals" (Boileau & Bath, 1987, p. 1). Clearly there is a need to assess the current state of instruction, evaluate its impact on student skills, and design and implement an oral communication course which is required for all high school students.
Chapter Three: Project Report

Statement of Purpose

While high school students have received instruction in reading and writing, few have received much formal instruction in speaking and listening. Units of oral communication skills may or may not have been taught in courses where public speaking is a requirement. But these units have proven to be insufficient in preparing students to use oral communication skills effectively. The proposed solution is to require all high school students to take a course in oral communication. Prior to adopting such a solution, it is important to gain data about the value and effectiveness of such a course.

To gain this information, this project will examine the hypothesis that students enrolled in a communication course will achieve higher perceived oral communication skills and less apprehension about speaking in public than other students in subsequent courses where public speaking is a requisite. The project will include a definition of terms, describe a series of inquiries headed by a research question, then present a description of the subjects, procedures, findings and analyses. Limitations, plans for dissemination and project conclusions are also included as part of the project.
Project Components

Hypothesis

The research problem is that of determining the effects of an oral communication course on the perceived oral communication competence and apprehension levels of those students in subsequent courses as compared with those who have not taken this course. Does a semester course in oral communication have an effect on students perceived oral communication competence and apprehension levels in other courses? Are those skills adequately taught in other courses where public speaking is a central part of the course? The research hypothesis is:

H: The high school students who are currently enrolled in the one semester communication course will show greater self-efficacy in perceived communication competence and less apprehension about speaking in public in other courses than those who receive only informal training in communications.

The study included 11th and 12th grade students in a case study in a small (Class B - 500 students) high school. Participants (n=22) in the oral communication course were required to keep journals about their speaking experiences and perceived communications skills (Appendices A and B). Students' perceived communication competence and apprehension level
about speaking in public was determined by comparing student narratives after an extemporaneous speech assignment was given to both the control group (n=18) and the experimental group (n=74) in four other courses where the teaching of oral communication skills were integrated and public speaking was required (Appendix C). Course evaluations by former oral communication students were also used to determine the effects of the course (Appendix D). Teachers (n=29) in this high school were surveyed concerning the oral communication activities in their classrooms to determine from which courses the students should be compared. This faculty survey (Appendix E) was also used to determine how many currently teach oral skills, how many require formal oral presentations, and how many are aware of and/or use the state speaking and listening objectives (see also Appendix F). The teachers of those classes were interviewed about their training in teaching oral communication skills. And other area school districts were also surveyed to determine how many require an oral communication course in the curriculum (Appendix G).

**Research Questions**

Four research questions guided the study:
RQ: Do students currently enrolled in an oral communication course see benefits of the course?

RQ: Do students currently enrolled in an oral communication course respond with more self-confidence and less apprehension when asked to give an extemporaneous speech?

RQ: Do students value and/or recommend the oral communication class at the end of the semester?

RQ: Do teachers

a) perceive the value of oral communication for students?

b) perceive the value of oral communication in a required course?

c) Do teachers who value oral communication have adequate training in teaching oral communication and do they provide opportunities for students to develop speaking and listening skills according to the state objectives?

**Definition of Terms**

High school students: A heterogeneous group of students (including general education, at-risk, college preparatory, and female and minority students) in grades 11 and 12 whose grade point averages range from 1.876 to 4.000.
Informal training: This refers to the integrated training teachers provide to the students in communication skills in their classes where public speaking is required for various projects (book reports, debates, informative and persuasive presentations, etc.).

Other courses: This term refers to those classes where public speaking is required as part of a student's grade. For this study, these courses were determined by a survey of the faculty on the types of assignments they used where public speaking was a requisite of a class.

The oral communication course includes units of instruction on how communication affects one's life, effective listening, one-to-one communication, group discussion, public speaking, debate, and radio and television broadcasting. It is an elective course and may be taken by 10th through 12th grade students, though it is not currently a requirement. It is presently being taught by this researcher.

In order to gather data pertaining to the research questions, the role of this researcher was to design and administer speech journal surveys to the students in the present oral communication course; design and present procedures for other teachers to follow regarding the extemporaneous speech experiment and Student Writing Assignment; collect former
students' responses to the Course Evaluation Form; design, administer, and collect the Faculty Survey; and to call area schools to find out which schools require an oral communication course.

**Research Question One**

RQ: Do students currently enrolled in an oral communication course see benefits of the course?

**Subjects**

The sample for the first two research questions included 22 general education students in grades 10 through 12 who were currently enrolled in the oral communication course. The sample was considered heterogeneous because the school practices inclusive education and one special education student was in the course. The school also disbanded its alternative (at-risk) program one year ago and one student from that program was involved in this part of the study. And although no gifted and talented program exists at this school, 8 students from the honors English (college preparatory) courses were part of the study.

**Procedure**

Speech journal surveys were given to students prior to their first graded speech (Appendix A) and mid-semester (after nine weeks in the course). The entire class of 22 students was present and wrote the
journal entries on the days the surveys were given. Each student had approximately 15 to 20 minutes to write these journal entries.

**Findings and Analysis**

The findings showed that all oral communication students felt varying degrees of apprehension about speaking in front of others in formal presentations at the beginning of the study. As they recorded their progression through the course, they perceived their communication skills improved as the degree of their apprehension decreased. After having previously given two ungraded speeches, when reflecting on their feelings about their first graded speech in the course on question 1 in the Speech Journal (Appendix A), one student responded, "I'm a little less nervous than the last speeches because I've been up in front of these people before so it's not as bad." Another student wrote, "I'm less nervous because I have given two speeches before and I get better as time goes by. With each speech, I have felt a little less nervous because it's something I've done before, I am better prepared each time, and have gotten better critiques of my speeches each time." Their responses were typical of the 22 students in the class. Seventeen felt less nervous about the third speech whereas four felt more nervous and cited the fact that this was the first graded speech as the cause for their apprehension.
Regarding the second question from the first Speech Journal about what students have learned thus far in the course that will help them to deliver this speech with confidence, many wrote that learning in class how to control stage fright and how to organize a speech were very helpful. Comments ranged from "Realizing everyone has stage fright makes me realize I'm not alone and helps me to try to improve my speech by keeping my stage fright in check" to "The most important thing that I've learned about delivering a speech with confidence is that if you are well-prepared and you know you are, you will have a lot more confidence in front of others."

On the Speech Journal - Follow Up Survey (Appendix B) which was given mid-semester (after nine weeks in the class) 100% of the 22 students perceived their skills as having increased throughout the course. At the end of this study, 100% would recommend this course to another student. Most students listed the perceived improvement in their speaking skills and the gain in self-confidence as the main reasons for recommending the course to others. One wrote, "Not only do you learn how to present a speech, you build self-confidence and self-esteem. This course has done so much for me that I've already recommended it to my friends." Seventy-one percent would recommend this course as a
requirement for future students. Many wrote that they would need speaking skills on the job and in the future. Four wrote that their perceived improvement in oral communication skills has helped them in other classes and these skills could help others, as well. One insightful response was "I would require this course because a lot of people need help in this area but don't want to talk in front of people so they don't take this class." Another response was "Yes, communication is important. Even though you may not give a speech again, the communication skills will be used." Of the 28.6% who wrote that they would not make the course a requirement, most wrote that some people are already good at public speaking so they would not need it and others wrote that not everyone will have to speak in front of others so they would not need the course.

From these results, it appears that the oral communication students see benefits of taking the oral communication course and perceive themselves to have improved their speaking skills. It further appears that they support the idea of requiring this course for future students.

**Research Question Two**

RQ: Do students currently enrolled in an oral communication course respond with more self-confidence and less apprehension when asked to give an extemporaneous speech?
Subjects

The population from which the sample was taken included 11th and 12th grade students, since the public speaking class cannot be taken by 9th grade students. The communication course presently consists of only one 10th grade student, and upperclass courses were found to be more likely to require student oral presentations. The population was considered heterogeneous because the school practices inclusive education and four special education students were involved in the experiment. Six students from the former alternative education (at-risk) program were involved in the experiment. And although no gifted and talented program exists at this school, an honors English (college preparatory) class of 29 students was part of the study.

Samples were randomly selected from four classes of approximately 25 to 30 students each, one a non-tracked 12th grade English class, one a non-tracked 11th grade government class, one an 11th grade honors (college preparatory) English class, and one a non-tracked 11th and 12th grade sociology class. The study involved 92 students, 18 students who were currently enrolled in the oral communication course and the other 74 who had not previously received formal instruction in oral communication. The control group received only informal training in oral communications.
and the experimental group received formal training in the one semester communication course. Subjects were selected at the beginning of the semester from the oral communication classes and from four of their other classes in which oral communication projects were required. These classes were selected as a result of a faculty survey to determine which teachers required public speaking assignments in their classes. During the middle of the second semester (after nine weeks in the classes) the perceived oral communication competence and apprehension levels of the students in those four classes were compared.

**Procedure**

For the comparison between the oral communication students and those who had not received formal training in oral communication on perceived oral communication competence and level of apprehension, an assignment which called for the students to present an extemporaneous speech was used. Prior to actually giving the speech, students were asked to write about their perceived oral communication competence and apprehension level at the time they were about to give the presentation. The four teachers were informed of the purpose of the study prior to giving the assignment to their students. They were told to give the following false cue to each class in which the study was conducted:
"Today's assignment is to give a two to four minute extemporaneous speech on something you have learned in this unit of study. Include specific examples to support your point. Your speech will be graded on content, delivery style, and whether or not it meets the time limits. You have two minutes in which to prepare."

Teachers were allowed to modify the false cue by specifying something in particular to fit the unit of study in which the students were currently engaged. They had all students prepare actual speeches for two minutes before giving them the Student Writing Assignment on oral communication competence and apprehension (Appendix C). All students were lead to believe that the speeches would take place immediately following the completion of the writing assignment before giving their speeches.

**Findings and Analysis**

Seventy-eight of the 92 students in all four classes expressed anger and frustration with having to give an extemporaneous speech. On question 1, they cited the fact that they were not in a speech class and shouldn't have to give speeches at all. One control group student's response seemed typical:

"I feel this doesn't have to do with this class. If anything, we
should have been told. This class is too complicated to expect people to be prepared to speak at a moment's notice. This is not a speech class and to be assigned something that will be graded on our delivery style is unfair!"

Another echoed that sentiment: "What is this, speech class? If I wanted to speak in English class, I would have taken a speech class, but that doesn't count for English credits so now I am being forced to speak anyway." Others in the control group were upset because they either had not done a previous assignment about which they were supposed to speak or they complained about the short amount of time they had to prepare.

Of the 18 students who were currently enrolled in the oral communication class, 17 wrote that they were not apprehensive about delivering this speech. (The one that was apprehensive may have been due to not having done the previous assignment). This experimental group overwhelmingly wrote comments such as, "I'm not really nervous because I have the oral communication class and now I feel comfortable talking about things in front of others" and "When I have to do impromptu speeches in the oral communication class, I do just fine so I'm not very nervous. I guess the more you do something, the easier it becomes." Two students wrote that they enjoy the challenge of public speaking.
In writing about their ability to speak in public with only a few minutes to prepare (question 2), only 8 of the 74 students who had not received formal training in oral communication wrote that they could speak competently in front of others with short notice. Sixty-six wrote that they always feel nervous in this type of speaking situation. Several students wrote that they do not feel competent in public speaking even when they do have time to prepare. Others wrote than when they have more time to prepare, they feel less apprehensive than on this assignment yet still feel nervous speaking in front of groups.

All 18 of the students currently enrolled in the oral communication course wrote that they do not get nervous in front of others when speaking extemporaneously. Many cited the practice they have received in the oral communication course as the reason for their level of competence. One student wrote, "I think my speaking ability is pretty good. I have the oral communication class, which makes my other classes easier because I have more confidence to speak out on different issues." Another wrote, "The oral communication class has helped me learn how to think on my feet and to say what I have to say in a better, more organized way. It doesn't matter if I have five days to prepare or five seconds. I'm always ready."

From the results, it appears that students currently enrolled in an
oral communication course responded with more self-confidence and less apprehension than those who have not taken the course when asked to give an extemporaneous speech.

Research Question Three

RQ: Do students value and/or recommend the oral communication class at the end of the semester?

Subjects

The sample included 24 students from the previous year's oral communication course. This was also a heterogeneous group consisting of general education, special education, alternative (at-risk) education, and honors English (gifted and talented) students from the 10th through 12th grades.

Procedure

The students were required to fill out the Course Evaluation (Appendix D). Since all the students were present on the day the evaluation was given, return rate was 100%. Students had approximately 45 to 55 minutes to write their answers.

Findings and Analysis

According to the written responses elicited in previous course evaluations given at the completion of the oral communication course, in
general, the 24 former students perceived their communication competence as becoming higher and felt less apprehension about public speaking as a direct result of the course (question 6). One student wrote, "At first I was really scared to give my speeches. Now I actually like giving them and think I have improved my skills a lot. Giving lots of speeches probably helped the most because it got us used to speaking in front of a group." Still others felt their skills had improved not only because of the practice they had had in giving speeches but also because of the instruction in nonverbal communication, listening skills, supporting ideas, group communications, interpersonal communications, and utilizing organization skills. Students gave the fact that they had to deliver so many speeches, each rising in degree of difficulty, as the number one way in which they were best helped to understand the principles of communication (question 4). All of last year's oral communication students stated that they would recommend the class to a friend. Fourteen students commented on the fact that their confidence had grown as a direct result of the course. As one stated, "I was scared to death of public speaking when I came in this class. I didn't even like to read out loud from a book if my teacher called on me. Now I realize that I can do it and it's not so bad anymore. My face still turns red but at least I know I
can do it!" Another wrote, "If it hadn't been for...this class, I'd still be a quiet and shy person. Now I can speak with confidence about almost anything!"

It appears from these findings that at the completion of the oral communication course students value what they have learned and would recommend the course to other students.

**Research Question Four - a**

RQ: Do teachers perceive the value of oral communication for students?

**Subjects**

The total population of 29 teachers from all subject areas in a small high school of approximately 500 students where the case study was conducted were surveyed on the frequency with which they require skills to be used in their classes per week (Appendix E).

**Procedure**

The survey was given to the teachers at a faculty meeting and collected at the conclusion of the meeting as teachers exited, thus assuring a 100% return rate on the surveys.

**Findings and Analysis**

Eighty percent of the teachers perceived oral communication skills
to be very important or extremely important to the needs of their students. Forty-three percent never or very infrequently taught oral communication skills in their subject area as opposed to 56% who sometimes or very frequently did. Sixty percent required students to speak informally in class in such exercises as answering questions and in small or large group discussions whereas 40% never or very infrequently required students to do so. Twenty-seven percent very frequently or almost always required formal oral presentations such as debates, informative and/or persuasive speeches, 27% sometimes gave this type of assignments, but 47% never or very infrequently gave this type of oral communication assignment.

Sixty percent would find a required oral communication course very or extremely helpful, 23% would find it helpful and only 17% would find a required course somewhat helpful or not helpful at all. Finally, 87% of teachers in this school were not aware of the *Minimal Performance Objectives for Communication Skills*, published by the Michigan State Department of Education. Only one had recently read about them but does not teach them and three teachers (10%) know what they are and reported that they teach those skills.

The results suggest that most teachers perceive the value of an oral
communication course and would perceive the course to be beneficial for their students. Though some teachers require formal speaking assignments in their classes, it appears that the majority of the teachers are not aware of the state speaking and listening objectives.

**Research Question Four - b**

RQ: Do teachers perceive the value of oral communication in a required course?

**Subjects**

The total population of 29 teachers from all subject areas in a small high school of approximately 500 students where the case study was conducted were surveyed on whether or not the oral communication course should be required for all students at this school. Twenty-one area school districts were also included in this part of the study to determine which districts require the course. The schools surveyed were both public and parochial high schools in the area.

**Procedure**

The faculty of the high school in which the study was conducted were surveyed on whether or not the oral communication course should be required for all students at this school (Appendix E). Twenty-one area high schools were called and guidance counselors were asked two
questions: "Does your school district offer an oral communication course to its students? If so, is this course an elective or is it required for graduation?" All schools contacted responded to this survey.

Findings and Analysis

Sixty percent of the teachers surveyed would find a required oral communication course very or extremely helpful, 23% would find it helpful and only 17% would find a required course somewhat helpful or not helpful at all.

Of 21 area schools, seven districts (33%) required an oral communication course although nine schools (43%) offered it as an elective. Five schools (24%) integrated oral communications as part of the curriculum in six- or nine-week units taught in the freshman or sophomore year and students must pass that part of the course in order to receive credit for the English course (Appendix G).

The findings suggest that the teachers at the school where the study was conducted perceive the value of a required course in oral communication. It appears that most schools offer an oral communication course to students, though do not necessarily require this for graduation.

Research Question Four - c

RQ: Do teachers who value oral communication have adequate
training in teaching oral communication and do they provide opportunities for students to develop speaking and listening skills according to the state objectives?

**Subjects**

Four teachers were identified in the faculty survey as currently teaching and/or assigning students to give formal oral presentations in their classes. These were the same teachers who willingly volunteered their classes to the experiment to measure perceived communication competence and apprehension levels of both students who had received training in oral communication and those who had not.

**Procedure**

The four teachers in whose courses oral communication skills were integrated were interviewed by this researcher as to their training in teaching oral communication skills. They were asked, "What formal training- such as college courses, in-services, or conferences- have you received in teaching oral communication?" They were also asked if they had knowledge of and/or used the state speaking and listening objectives to teach their students.

**Findings and Analysis**

One of the teachers interviewed had received specific training in
oral communication. This teacher minored in communications in undergraduate work and had coached a forensics team for two years. Another had taken a public speaking course in college but along with the other two teachers had no specific training in teaching oral communication. Only one of the four teachers had knowledge of the Minimal Performance Objectives for Communication Skills published by the Michigan Department of Education. However, that teacher had only recently read about them in a professional journal and does yet not use the objectives to teach oral communication skills in class.

The findings suggest that the three of the four teachers who value oral communication do not have adequate preparation in teaching oral communication skills. It appears they do have knowledge of nor provide opportunities for students which follow state objectives.

Limitations

Although selection per se is not an internal validity problem because subjects were not assigned for the purpose of the experiment and the groups which received experimental and control treatments were chosen randomly, the interaction of selection and maturation and interaction of selection and experimental variable may have posed internal validity problems. For example, it is quite possible that those who had elected to
take the one semester communication course were generally more concerned about their oral communication skills and were therefore more likely to show greater gain in perceived communication competence and feel less apprehension about public speaking because of their desire to perform better on oral projects in other courses. However, randomized heterogeneous selection of subjects served to reduce the extent to which experimental differences can be accounted for by the initial differences between the groups.

There was also the limitation of external control in reactive experimental procedures. Subjects may have known about the study, although confidentiality was strictly adhered to by this researcher. The students in the oral communication course were asked to fill out the journal pages (Appendices A and B) as required assignments. The false cue of an impromptu speech and the subsequent writing assignment (Appendix C) was given to all students during the same class period to prevent knowledge of the study from becoming known to the participants. However, it is this researcher's opinion that the students' main concern was not about the study, if they did know about it, but about simply doing their best and answering the written assignments honestly.

Furthermore, limitations of the project included the low sample
number, which was due in part to the small number of teachers who required oral presentations in their classes. It is also clear that the students' perceived communication competence and their levels of apprehension did not directly result from taking or not taking the oral communication course alone but from other factors as well, although all four teachers did state that they saw definite and sometimes significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking skills and attributed this improvement to the students having received specific training in the oral communication course. And extra curricular communication activities of the students was not taken in to consideration in this project although this could be a determining factor on communication competence and apprehension level. However, because a random sample of students was used, it can be assumed that extra curricular communication activities were random among both the control group and the experimental group.

Project Plans for Dissemination

The Faculty

The best way to share the findings of this project is to first make a presentation to the faculty of the school. Teachers and administrators need to know that there are state objectives which are not being met, that
students need to be taught speaking and listening skills by certified speech teachers, and that all teachers need to create and expand speech opportunities for students in all subject areas. If schools are to equip students with core competencies, teachers must insist on mastery of skills across the curriculum, including speaking and listening, and administrators must support, insist upon, and directly monitor the teaching of these skills.

The School Board

The school board also should be made aware of the results of the study at a school board meeting because they determine the environments in which students learn. It is their responsibility to implement programs into the curriculum. School boards must set achievement standards and insist that the curriculum includes core competencies with oral communication skills as a vital component in which students need training. They must see the value of and need for oral communication skills and adopt an oral communication course as a separate and distinct language art.

Employers

Employers also play a role in the educational process. Results of the study should be distributed in a community newsletter to local businesses
in an effort to solicit cooperative efforts between schools and business. Employers must convince teachers and school administrators that standards need to improve and that including oral communication as a core competency is essential. Furthermore, they must impart the importance of oral skills not only to teachers and administrators but also to summer and after-school high school workers. Finally, they can work with local and state boards to insist on the need for all students to receive training in oral communication.

**Parents**

Parents must insist upon and fully support programs to achieve a high quality of education for their children. They must be made aware of the results of the study in parent newsletters, in school improvement meetings, and in other parent-teacher organizations. Since school and home relations can affect positive change, parent support is a necessary component in implementing needed programs in any school district.

**Students**

Students must be held accountable and are ultimately responsible for their learning and mastery of core competencies. The results of the study should be disseminated in the first class meetings of the school year. Students must also make responsible choices in the courses they
take and should plan to take an oral communication course sometime during their high school career, regardless of whether one is offered as an elective or is required by the school. Finally, students can take the initiative for improving their speaking skills by participating in extracurricular activities which promote speaking and listening.

**Speech Educators**

Finally, speech educators must work to insist upon requiring an oral communication course taught by certified speech teachers. The course must meet the state's objectives for speaking and listening. It should be developed to include interpersonal and group communication, formal debate, public speaking, oral interpretation, and listening skills. Students should be taught to evaluate messages, to understand how ideas can be distorted or clarified, and to explore the accuracy and reliability of an oral message.

**Project Conclusions**

It is heartening to note from the students journal entries that the students in the oral communication course perceived their skills to have improved, that so many would recommend the course to fellow students, and that they, too, appear to support a required oral communication course for all high school students. It was also important to note that the
students who were currently enrolled in the oral communication course felt less apprehension just prior to giving the extemporaneous speech than those students who had not taken the course. This appears due to the practice in public speaking that students in the course receive. Most heartening to note was the that the oral communication course appears to help students overcome their apprehension about public speaking in other classes. This may suggest with further research that they engage more often in the learning process by speaking more in other classes. The anger and frustration over having to give an extemporaneous speech, as cited by an overwhelming number of the control group, seems to indicate that students in other courses, even those in which public speaking is required, are not receiving the needed instructional support to be confident in oral communication. There appears to be strong support for requiring an independent oral communications course for students among the faculty at this school.

The course evaluation surveys were beneficial in determining that the course appeared to have helped students become more comfortable in other oral communication situations. Students who had previously been apprehensive about public speaking stated that the course helped them to develop self-confidence. Since all 24 former students would recommend
the course to a friend, it appears that students recognize the importance of an oral communication course.

Eighty percent of the teachers perceived oral communications skills to be very important or extremely important to the success of their students and 60% would find a required course very helpful for students. It is distressing to this researcher that only 27% require the more formal types of oral presentations as part of an assignment in their classes yet 87% do not know what the state's minimal performance objectives for speaking and listening are and do not teach them in their subject area. This enhances the research that calls for a separate communication course to be taught by certified speech teachers. It was interesting to note that some of the area schools surveyed required 9-week units integrated into the underclass English classes, units which the students must pass in order to receive English credits.

From the interviews with the four teachers who were involved in the experiment, it appears that three of the four do not have the sufficient training in teaching oral communication skills. Although there is some teaching of oral communication skills in other classes, the students do not report that it is. It is most disturbing to note that none of the four teachers who reported teaching oral skills in others classes currently are
aware of the 23 year old state objectives for oral communication in their classes. It appears that prepared teachers are needed to be effective oral communication teachers.

The findings suggest that students who take an oral communication course perceive their oral communication competence as higher and feel less apprehension about speaking in public in courses where oral presentations are required than those students who have not taken the course. Since this study included a heterogeneous group of students including special education, at-risk, and gifted and talented students, it appears that the oral communication class would be beneficial for all students. Oral communication skills are not being adequately taught by most teachers in this school although most teachers responded that oral communication skills were important to the success of their students. At present, the oral communication course is not a requirement for graduation. This is the only study of its kind which has been conducted at this school and its results support that a course in oral communication taught by a certified speech teacher is needed to ensure that students are receiving the proper training in speaking and listening skills.
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Appendix A

Speech Journal

1. You are about to give your first graded speech in this class. Please take a moment to reflect on your feelings and level of apprehension about this speech:

2. What have you learned thus far in the course that will help you deliver this speech with confidence?
Speech Journal - Follow Up Survey

1. To what degree do you perceive your communications skills to have improved by taking this class?
   - My skills have increased by taking this class.
   - My skills have stayed the same by taking this class.
   - My skills have decreased by taking this class.

2. Would you recommend the oral communication class to another student? Why or why not?

3. Would you recommend the oral communication class be made a requirement for graduation for future students? Why or why not?
Appendix C

Your name: ____________________________

**Student Writing Assignment**

Please take a few moments to answer the following questions as completely and as honestly as possible. You may use the back of this sheet if you need more room.

1. You are about to give an extemporaneous speech in this class and will be graded in part on the way you deliver a speech. Write about your feelings and level of apprehension in presenting this speech:

2. Write about your ability (competence) to speak in public with only a few minutes to prepare:
Appendix D

Course Evaluation Form

1. List as many activities/assignments as you can recall being engaged in this last semester. This can include speeches you have heard, speeches you have delivered, role playing, tag lines, charades, group activities, etc. Choose five that you feel helped you understand the principles of communication and put a star (*) next to them. Detail one activity that you feel taught you the most about communication.

2. Choose one speech that you heard that really impressed you. Explain what you found impressive about this speech. Critique both the delivery and content of that speech.

3. Choose one speech that you gave that you felt was your best. Critique your speech on delivery and content.

4. Explain the ways in which this course best helped you to understand the principles of oral communication.

5. Explain the ways in which you could have been better helped to understand the principles of communication.

6. To what degree do you perceive your communication skills to have improved by taking this class?

7. Would you recommend the oral communication class to another student? Why or why not?
Appendix E

Name: ____________________  Department: ____________________

Faculty Survey

1. How important do you perceive oral communication skills to be to the success of students?

1 ______ 2 ______ 3 ______ 4 ______ 5 ______
not not somewhat important important important important
important important important very extremely
important important important important important

2. How often do you teach oral communication skills in your subject area?
(Skills such as choosing an appropriate topic, formulating a thesis, providing support, introducing and concluding, expressing ideas clearly and concisely, and actual delivery of speech including eye contact, stance, posture, vocal qualities, etc.).

1 ______ 2 ______ 3 ______ 4 ______ 5 ______
never never very sometimes very almost
infrequently frequently frequently always

3. How often do you require students to speak in informal contexts in your classes per week? (Examples: reading orally from a text, small and/or large group discussion, reading student writing, answering questions, etc).

1 ______ 2 ______ 3 ______ 4 ______ 5 ______
never never very sometimes very almost
infrequently frequently frequently always
4. How often do you require students to use oral communication skills as part of an assignment in your classes per week (Examples: oral presentations, debates, role playing, formal presentations of findings, informative presentations, persuasive presentations).

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<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>very</td>
<td>almost</td>
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<tr>
<td>infrequently</td>
<td>frequently</td>
<td>always</td>
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5. Based on the needs of your students, to what degree would requiring a one-semester course in oral communications/public speaking be helpful for students?

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<td>helpful</td>
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6. Are you aware of and do you incorporate into your classes the *Minimal Performance Objectives for Communication Skills* published by the Michigan Department of Education?

_____ Yes, I know what they are and I teach these skills.

_____ Yes, I know what they are but do not teach these skills.

_____ No, I do not know what they are.

If you have any further comments about oral communications/public speaking skills and how they do/not impact your students, please include them in the space below:
Appendix F

Faculty Survey and Results

Name: ___________________________ Department: ___________________________

1. How important do you perceive oral communication skills to be to the success of students?

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<th>3.3%</th>
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<th>50%</th>
<th>30%</th>
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3. How often do you require students to speak in informal contexts in your classes per week? (Examples: reading orally from a text, small and/or large group discussion, reading student writing, answering questions, etc).

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never very sometimes very almost infrequently frequently always

5. Based on the needs of your students, to what degree would requiring a one-semester course in oral communications/public speaking be helpful for students?

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not somewhat helpful very extremely helpful helpful helpful helpful

6. Are you aware of and do you incorporate into your classes the *Minimal Performance Objectives for Communication Skills* published by the Michigan Department of Education?

10% Yes, I know what they are and I teach these skills.

3.3% Yes, I know what they are but do not teach these skills.

86.7% No, I do not know what they are.

If you have any further comments about oral communications/public speaking skills and how they do/not impact your students, please include them in the space below:
Appendix G

Survey of Area School Districts

Survey Question: Is speech or communication class a requirement for graduation in this school district?

**Required: 33.3%**

**Class A:**
- Grand Rapids Public
- Forest Hills Central
- West Ottawa Public
- Holland Public
- Rockford Public

**Class B:**
- East Grand Rapids Public
- Forest Hills Northern

**Elective: 42.9%**

**Class A:**
- East Kentwood Public
- G R Christian

**Class B:**
- Wyoming Public
- Middleville Public
- Godwin Heights Public
- Hudsonville Public
- West Catholic
- Catholic Central

**Class C:**
- Kelloggsville

**Integrated: 23.8%**

**Class A:**
- Jenison Public
- Grandville Public

**Class B:**
- Caledonia Community

**Class C:**
- Byron Center Public
- Coopersville Public
ED 695 DATA FORM

NAME:  Ruth Alice Vander Weide

MAJOR:  (Choose only 1)

   _____ Ed Tech        _____ Ed Leadership       ✓ Sec/Adult
   _____ Elem Ed        _____ G/T Ed              Early Child
   _____ Elem LD        _____ Sec LD              SpEd PPI
   _____ Read/Lang Arts

TITLE:  Oral Communication in High School

PAPER TYPE:  (Choose only 1)

   __ Project
   ✓ Thesis

SEM/yr COMPLETED:  Winter 1995

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL

Using the ERIC thesaurus, choose as many descriptors (5 - 7 minimum) to describe the contents of your paper.

1. Communication Skills
2. Speech Communication
3. Speech Skills
4. Verbal Communication
5. Language Skills
6. Speech Curriculum
7. Basic Skills
8. Core Curriculum
9. Educational Needs
10. Oral English

ABSTRACT:  Two to three sentences that describe the contents of your paper.

This paper supports the call for required courses in oral communication. It presents research on the need for oral communication skills and levels of apprehension, as well as perceived value of oral communication.

**Note: This page must be included as the last page in your master's paper.