

Oral Communication In the Common Core

Training for Public Life

Orality in the Rhetorical Tradition

- Primacy of orality in the Classical Greek and Roman rhetorical traditions
 - Think about *The Phaedrus* as, in part, a commentary on the dangers associated with the rise of writing (what John Durham Peters calls “loose coupling”)
- Rise of writing generated significant shifts
 - Peters traces how technological shifts changed not only how we define “communication” but also what we expect from it

So where does that leave the oral rhetorical tradition?

Why Care?

- The practice of oral rhetoric remains essential to our personal, professional, and public lives
 - Platforms and contexts have changed--this calls for re-evaluation about our delivery practices and expectations
 - These changes, arguably, reinforce the need for solid foundational skills in oral rhetoric (tools to adapt)
- A few pragmatic considerations
 - A brief review of recent news items, trade items, etc., demonstrates that employers' consistently rank oral communication among essential skills for employees
 - Multiple media platforms expand opportunities for both self-expression and socio-political engagement, with expansive audiences

Classical Roots and Contemporary Contexts

- Reimagining “public speaking” classes as rhetorical training for public life helps us re-engage the Jesuit Rhetorical Tradition
- Shifting focus away from isolated speeches allows us to partner oral skill acquisition with both written and information literacy skill acquisition
 - Encourage students to develop a broad set of foundational (and transferable) skills

Topic-Based Approach

- Require engagement with topics that are tied to social issues and are ripe for deliberation and discernment
 - Thematic by course (e.g., a course could focus on homelessness, environmental justice, etc., with students selecting related sub-topics)
 - Driven by student topics at an individual or group level
 - Individual level
 - Group level (each group selects a topic and members focus on sub-topics)

- Series of integrated (oral/written/information literacy) assignments that require students to explore a topic over an entire course
 - Topic Exploration and Selection
 - Topic Research
 - Identifying stakeholders, interests, issues, and spheres of engagement
 - Identifying a rhetorical project (e.g., advocate for “X”)
 - Audience and sphere of engagement analysis
 - Rhetorical artifacts and performances

- **Assignment Design**

- **Topic Exploration, Selection and Research:** impromptu speeches, “informative” speeches, descriptive writing, research briefs
- **Establishing a Rhetorical Project:** “elevator” speeches, mini-debates, annotated bibliographies, argument papers
- **Audience and Sphere of Engagement Analysis:** “tell it/re-tell it/tweet it”
- **Rhetorical Artifacts and Performance:** funding/development pitches, policy debates, alternate side-persuasive speeches, PSA’s, blogs/vlogs

- This approach foregrounds oral communication within a context of informed engagement across multiple platforms/spheres
- Public speaking skills are acquired through frequent, but varied forms of engagement

Training for Public Life

Eloquentia Perfecta as a model for engaging oral communication within our curricula

- Topic driven approach
- Integrated assignments that emphasize transferable skills
 - Rather than learning “how to give a speech” students learn “how to speak in public”
- Capture student interest and encourage engagement with Mission