APPLYING PUBLIC SPEAKING ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: This paper is a project report on the experiment of an English public speaking and debating course with advanced level English majors in College of Arts and Science, Yangtze University. The paper analyzes the validity of the course, introduces the design rationale, the design and experiment process, and students' responses. The paper suggests that with further development, English public speaking and debating course could be considered as a basic oral training course for advanced-level English majors.

Key words: Oral course for English majors, Public speaking, Debating.

In view of the reality that even some English majors could hardly speak decent English despite years of spoken English training, this essay explores the ways to develop English speaking and debating courses aiming at helping English majors break through the bottleneck in oral English communication and obtain their ability on consecutive speaking in public . The author has written this essay on the basis of the preliminary conclusions drawn through trial courses commenced in Yangtze University since 2007 as well as in its subsidiary Independent College since 2008, that is, that strict and systemic training through English speaking and debating courses helps students develop logical reasoning and English speaking competence. Public speaking refers to the speaker's action in which he/she , as the center in the communication process, addresses the audience consecutively(Carlin 1995). It is an indispensable part of human activities, such as students answering questions in class or demonstrating ideas on certain topics, teachers holding lectures, and, as in working environment, work reports, production releases and introductions, commercial negotiations, meeting addresses, discussions and communications as well as commenting on certain topics in daily life . The author proposes the development of public speaking courses among hi-grade English majors based on the following theory and reality: Speaking course is the integration of language drilling and context-based teaching: speaking course not only helps students learn the language, but improves their reasoning ability. Our spoken English teaching for English majors, ranging from low graders' spoken course to hi-graders' intepretation

course, still dwells on sole language drills, students cultivated by this monotonous approach, though fluent at daily conversation, regrettably fails to meet the standard required by complicated circumstances, that is, they are still unable to utilize English as a tool for sound and sufficient communication under various circumstances, especially formal ones. The author has assumed a sample survey among students at each grade in the university's independent college English Department in May 2007 (25% of each grade have been sampled and the total number of samples at 150), and its content surrounds effect of spoken courses, self-evaluation of spoken level, time and motivation spent in extracurricular spoken practice, obstacles to spoken expression, interests in speaking courses etc. The survey found that over 3/4 of hi-graders didn't think themselves to be able to communicate effectively in English; over 3/4 of the polled students reported the lack of improvement of spoken level; nearly 1/3 of 4th grader reported sliding spoken level; students are lack in motivation to practice spoken English after class, teachers complain students are hesitant to express themselves in public, even if expressed, in an illogical, blank, shallow and in-organized way. As a result, we could see students are still miles away from the requirements in National Syllabus for College English Majors. The author thinks the above-mentioned problems partly stems from the facts that our spoken English teaching, for a considerable period, only emphasized on the drilling of language forms and that the introduction for contextual teaching seemed superficial in which teachers only provide context such as a topic for them to address on while didn't assume rigid and systemic instruction during the process. As a result, students practiced English only for the purpose of the practice, without the knowledge on how to reason effectively, utilize evidences, organize opinions. If spoken teachingcouldn't break through the monotonous approach of language drilling, when students have accumulated certain degree of language skills, they will just become directionless on way to go on with improving spoken English. The public speaking course aims to enhance students' spoken English level through contextual teaching on the basis that they have acquired sufficient basic language skills. Its final goal is to cultivate students' ability to use language for communication flexibly in real-life contexts. The course not only takes language as means and socialization as end, but emphasize on the cultivation of various abilities during socialization, such as logic and innovative thinking, proof collection, analysis, synthesiz-ation, organizational structure, fast response, confidence building and appreciation and assessment abiities(Grice 1998).

3. Course design and practice 3.1 Teachers and students' attitudes toward the course The 2007 survey showed that 93% of surveyed teachers considered it's necessary for students to acquire English speaking capabilities, 83% agreed that it be established in the English Department as a course, and also 77% of the surveyed students were willing to attend such kind of classes, which in turn boostered the author's determination to try on this course. 3.2 The accessibility assessment First of all, Universities and colleges generally have obtained the basic teaching tools needed in this course such as recorders, monitors, video recorders, projectors . It will be ideal if camcorders are available. Secondly, though still short of suitable public speaking textbooks in market, we have sufficient foreign and local resources to refer to and revise as seen necessary, moreover, we can also find abundant English public speeches via internet. 3.3 Reference books and teaching materials The author has referred to related foreign textbooks (see References for their range),among them English Speaking and Debating course(JiYuhua, 2001) is mainly concerned, which, taking into account factors like Chinese cultural background and students' characters, comprises 15 units with each unit covering a single theme and aims to develop students' preliminary speaking skills on a graded basis. Its specific contents include general theory on public speech, techniques for effective listening, basic models for speeches OPAM(Occasion, Purpose, Audience, Method), analysis on audience demands, topics and arguments structuring, material selection and integral structuring(topic opening, argument developmenst, topic concluding,transition), argument underpinning, language styles, body language application, tonal exercises(distinct tonal changes), information-driven speeches, persuasion-targeted speeches, ceremonial speeches, impromptu speeches and fast thinking, debating knowledge and techniques etc. After systemic learning of the textbook, students are supposed to master the basic skills to think logically, express substantively and justifiably. 3.4 Application of Audio-visual materials As newbies in learning English public speaking, students need be shown some successful precedents to reflect and make up for their own shortcomings. For techniques, such as tonal character and body language, that are hard to be communicated to students in words, AV materials is a better way. For instance, the students having attended this course ,after hearing Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, were most impressed by his tonal character. 3.5 Analysis on students' speeches through feedback sheets When analyzing speeches, if there's no detailed criteria, feedback provider can only talk blankly and receiver get less information. In order for students to be clear about the

principles and criteria to comply with, the textbook offers a series of feedback sheets to assess speaker in terms of body language, speech structure, persuasion power, verbal expression ability and general effect. Teachers should instruct students in using feedback sheets to analyze their own and other members' speeches. 4. Class design and practice 4.1 Design of public speaking class The author, since 2007, has been authoring an spoken English course for seniors in Yangtze University with a duration of 1 semester, and a speaking course for juniors of Yangtze's independent college English Department. The courses are proceeded as following: 2 students make prepared topic speeches before the whole class each for 5 minutes, then the teacher lead the whole class to analyze the speeches using relative feedback sheets and raise suggestions to the speakers. In the following hour the teacher introduces certain techniques concerning speech-making existing in a certain unit such as linguistic characters, body language etc. in a form of two-way communication, meanwhile playing corresponding AV materials. And If time still allows, divide the class into several groups(4,5 persons for each group), led by a leader, to practice in groups. In this we have borrowed from some practices done at foreign speech club-Toastmasters Club: theteacher has to designate the leaders for groups in next class as the current class ends. Before the class group leaders shall get prepared with topics with developing potential, that is, ones everyone is able to have a say on (such as "smoking") , and inform members about the topic so that they can collect materials for it. When group activities begin, the leader assigns different sub-topics to members based on the main topic (such as "We smokers want our rights!""We non-smokers want our rights!""Is smoking really bad?"), and then invites members for formal impromptu speech (each with time limit of 3-5 min.). The leader records his/her own observation on feedback sheet. As each speaker finishes, the leader organizes discussion on that and gives 2-3 minutes' feedback comments. After the group activity finishes, the leader will make a conclusive speech and also be responsible for a summary report submitted to the teacher after class listing the speaker's advantages and disadvantages. The role of group leader will be rotated by students. The group activities mentioned above aim to cultivating students' observation and leading abilities. Based on what the teacher observed, students quite enjoy this approach. In these groups students participate, listen and analyze speaker's language use, observe his/her body language,give sincere feedbacks, and meanwhile develop their organizing and leading abilities through rotating as group leaders. 4.2 Design of Debating class Based on classes' student number, divide them

into several teams, with 4-5 students in each team. After confirming the team members, teachers instruct them to decide on topics through brainstorming approach, whose purpose is to let students join in debate actively. Each team chooses at least 5 topics and report the choice to the whole class. Each topic is numbered for teams to choose at random. Thus topics and teams for the 1st round of debates appear. Each team prepares their debating presentation after class and contend with the rival one in the next class by means of single-cycle or double-cycle competition forms. The champion of a class's debating competition is the team that never loses. However, the actual procedure of the debate can be varied to adjust to students' levels, and so does the time limit.

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