

“CAN WE HELP?”: STUDENTS’ REFLECTIONS ON THEIR PUBLIC SPEAKING
ANXIETY AND TEACHER IMMEDIACY

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“Can We Help?”: Students’ Reflections on Their Public Speaking Anxiety
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ABSTRACT

Public speaking is one of the most common anxieties for the average person, with many even ranking it as a more significant fear than death. Even though several people suggest that they would rather be the one in the casket than the one giving the eulogy at a funeral, public speaking courses are required at almost all colleges and universities. Public speaking anxiety is particularly real for most college students, meaning that it is important for public speaking teachers to develop andragogical strategies to help students alleviate their public speaking anxiety. Thus, the purpose of the study is to observe if students' perceptions of their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy influences students' public speaking anxiety.

Using Emotional Response Theory (ERT) as the conceptual framework, I applied a phenomenological analysis that explored students' lived experiences and perspectives in their college public speaking course. Twenty-one students enrolled in a Fall 2017 public speaking course at a Midwest University participated in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews about the students' anxiety of public speaking and their perceptions of their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy.

Students' responses suggested their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy helped decrease their public speaking anxiety. In particular, students indicated when a teacher demonstrated positive verbal and nonverbal behaviors, the students' public speaking anxiety decreased. In addition, new themes emerged on the matter: the teacher self-disclosing about their own public speaking anxiety, mistakes, and current status, classroom activities, peer-to-peer interactions, timely detailed feedback, and class-wide feedback. Some students noted that being graded and the using of timecards did increase their public speaking at times. Even though some students' public speaking anxiety increased during those specific circumstances, all the students

stated their public speaking anxiety decreased during the semester. This study concludes with recommendations for how public speaking teachers can address students' concerns about public speaking anxiety by applying verbal and nonverbal immediacy strategies in their public speaking courses.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Floyd (2017), 91% of American adults think that their communication skills are above average. Many people believe that because they can talk, they are already effective communicators, and they are surprised when told otherwise. At the same time, there is an aspect of communication about which many people will admit feeling apprehensive: public speaking (Bodie, 2010). Brewer's (2006) research found that respondents were more terrified of public speaking than death, indicating people would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy at a funeral. Another study found public speaking and speaking in a class or meeting were the top two greatest fears in social situations (Ruscio et al., 2008). Although public speaking is one of the top fears for many individuals, it possesses numerous benefits that can be enriched through coursework offered at the college level. By taking a public speaking course, students can learn several useful life skills. Students who have taken public speaking classes tend to perform better in other courses, become better listeners, learn to manage anxiety, and build their self-confidence (Bodie, 2010; Massengale, 2014). College graduates who were required to take a public speaking course are 48% more likely to speak at a meeting and 38% more likely to give a presentation compared to 22% and 19% for high-school graduates (Hancock, Stone, Brundage, & Zeigler, 2008). The skills learned in a public speaking course can help students stand out during a job interview and at their place of employment because public speaking is one of the most desired skills for employers (Mohammadi & Swift, 2013; C. Myers, 2015).

The numerous benefits of public speaking have lead the majority of universities to require public speaking as a required course, even though it is the most dreaded class for many students. What makes the public speaking course unique when compared with other general-education courses is that many students have limited public speaking experiences. For instance,

public speaking typically is an optional class in high school or just a section in another class, not a requirement (Education Commission of the States, 2007). A lack of experience may be one reason that students fear public speaking. Mohammadi and Swift (2013) state “Many students are so frightened of public speaking that they put off the course until it is no longer available. Other students fail the course once or twice because they give up early in the term” (p. 21). Much of the scholarship on public speaking focuses on ways that students can reduce anxiety. Some techniques to reduce anxiety may be outside the students’ control, such as the teacher’s behaviors in communication interactions with the students. This situation raises the following question: Are there approaches that the teacher may utilize in order to help reduce the students’ anxieties in public speaking courses?

Using qualitative methods, this dissertation emphasizes the importance of analyzing how students feel about their public speaking teacher’s verbal and nonverbal immediacy in the classroom. Teacher’s immediacy in this case involves what Richmond, McCroskey, and Hickson III, (2012) define as “the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between two people” (p. 368). Teachers who are verbally and nonverbally immediate can develop a liking with their students and can encourage students to actively participate in classroom activities (Richmond, 2002). Immediacy can be created through the teacher’s verbal and nonverbal communication. This study employs emotional response theory (ERT) as a means to analyze teacher’s immediacy issues. Greatly influenced by Mehrabian (1981), ERT anticipates that the teacher’s communication stimulates the students’ emotional responses which guide their behaviors (Horan, Martin, & Weber, 2012). According to Russell and Barrett (1999), because there are a wide range of emotions that can be expressed at any given time, researchers must decide which specific emotions and contexts to examine. For this study, the teacher’s

communication and the students' emotional responses were narrowed to the teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy and the students' communication apprehension in a public speaking classroom. This study includes the rationale for studying the teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy in a public speaking course by creating a healthy classroom which can reduce students' anxiety.

Creating a healthy classroom, a teacher is tasked with recognizing students are not empty vessels without opinions, thoughts, or personal problems that need knowledge poured into their brain (hooks, 2003). Failure to recognizing this often leads to authoritarian education which can undermine the freedom of expression and the joy of learning (hooks, 2003). When an authoritarian hierarchy is used in the classroom, a teacher with power and control encourages fear-based learning. hooks (2003) states:

Too many professors of all races, the classroom is viewed as a mini-country governed by their autocratic rule. . . subordinated by a hierarchal system early on, letting them [students] know that their success depends on their capacity to obey, most students fear questioning anything about the way their classrooms are structured. In our so-called best colleges and universities, teaching is rarely valued. (pp. 85-86)

When fear is associated with the teacher and attached to learning, students are afraid of failing and doubt their ability to successfully complete the course. Instead of being interested in learning about the topic, students want to know exactly what they need to do to acquire the desired grade (hooks, 2003). An authoritarian educator may also create a competitive environment that encourages viewing their peers as opponents who are fighting to be the "smartest" student in the class (hooks, 2003). Authoritarianism often tends to remove freedom of expression, dehumanize students, and ruin the fun of learning.

Contrary to authoritarianism, democratic education provides students with the freedom to express their thoughts, opinions, and feelings in the classroom. Through conversation and sharing information, democratic education creates an open, healthy classroom environment. A democratic teacher acknowledges that students are unique individuals with past experiences that must be incorporated in the classroom (hooks, 2003). The teacher creates a wanting to learn in the students by respecting their values and perspectives (Galbraith, 2003). Nel Noddings (2003) states:

The teacher as one-caring needs to see from both her perspective and that of the student in order to teach—in order to meet the needs of the student. Achieving inclusion is part of teaching successfully, and one who cannot practice inclusion fails as a teacher. (p. 67)

One of the teacher's roles as an adult educator is to facilitate a diverse, loving environment that empowers and respects learners. Every student has gifts and talents that need to be nourished. Helping students develop a love and respect for themselves is a major step in the education process. The classroom should be a safe environment for students to express themselves without the fear of judgment and should provide tools for the students to be successful in life. According to hooks (2003), one of those tools is love. Love is "a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust" (p.131). When love is expressed to the students in the classroom, they can tackle their fears while accepting encouragement and support from their peers in the classroom. The teacher often recognizes students' strengths before the students do themselves. Recognizing that they have the teacher's support, they can grow. hooks (2003) states, "They [teachers] must nurture the emotional growth of students indirectly, if not directly. This nurturance, both emotional and academic, is the context where love flourishes" (p. 130).

When a teacher demonstrates love for the subject and the students, an emotional connection creates an inclusive learning community. For love to be present between the teacher and the student, care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust must work interdependently (hooks, 2003). Along with caring, teachers should be willing to serve the students. Serving can be as simple as asking the students “How can I help you learn?”

Serving and demonstrating love to students are often looked down upon by some in the learning community because being “too close” emotionally can challenge the teacher’s sense of objectivity (hooks, 2003). A teacher who strictly values objectivity is more concerned with sharing their knowledge than creating a classroom where optimal learning can occur. A teacher can be objective and loving by setting expectations and boundaries in the classroom (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Being proactive, the teacher should let their students know that their grade is exclusively determined by their work, not the loving relationship. A teacher does not give students a grade, but rather the students earn their grade. It is crucial for the students to make responsible decisions, while also being able to accept the consequences of their actions (hooks, 2003). One of bell hooks’ students stated, “the more you loved us, the harder we had to work” (2003, p. 137). When teachers choose to love their students, they open a world of possibilities for the students and themselves. The lack of a caring classroom environment, especially for public speaking can be a detriment to the students.

Significance of the Problem

Public speaking has evolved from being speaker-centered, with the speaker having the most significant role with a passive audience, to being audience-centered, with the audience having the most significant role (Businessstopia, 2017; Lucas, 2015; Winans, 1915). Mirroring the shift in public speaking approaches, who teaches public speaking and how it is taught have

also evolved. The original model for teaching public speaking was the faculty running a self-contained classroom that featured lectures, classroom activities, and grading speeches (Duke University, n.d.). Due to budget cuts, some colleges have created mass-lecture/lab public speaking courses where students attend a biweekly mass lecture, usually taught by a professor or doctoral teaching assistant, and a smaller lab class taught by graduate teaching assistants (GTA) (Arizona State University [ASU], 2008; Morreale, Hugenberg, & Worley, 2006). It is in the course's lab section where students present their speeches to their peers and GTAs. This system preferred approach has proven to be problematic for the students, as having two teachers with two teaching styles often causes more anxiety for the students.

Given that public speaking is usually a required course, playing a crucial role in students' academic and personal success, it is important for public speaking teachers to demonstrate immediacy in the classroom (Drexel University, n.d.; Duke University, n.d.). As new teachers with little-to-no experience, GTAs are typically concerned with the day-to-day basics (grading and core content) of teaching more than the relational skills (Atkins-Randle, 2012 & Williams & Roach, 1993). One relational skill that is often skipped or is reduced to a minor part of the teaching training process is verbal and nonverbal immediacy, as well as how that immediacy affects students' emotional responses and anxiety. Due to their limited experience and training, many GTAs do not feel that learning to become verbally and nonverbally immediate is a major concern for their teaching (Williams & Roach, 1993). Becoming verbal and nonverbally immediate is also difficult for many GTAs because they only meet the students approximately once a week. Once GTAs feel comfortable with the day-to-day basics of teaching, their relational skills better develop (Williams & Roach, 1993). A teacher's lack of relational skills,

particularly verbal and nonverbal immediacy, can manifest itself in the students' performance and participation.

GTAs own limited experience with teaching is typically coupled with students own limited experience with speaking publicly, which may lead to increase anxiety for teacher and students. Poor self-esteem and a lack of support are two major reasons for public speaking anxiety (Shi, Brinthaupt, & McCree, M 2015). A teacher demonstrating verbal and nonverbal immediacy can boost students sense of support and self-esteem – reducing public speaking anxiety (Ellis, 1995).

Despite the vast quantitative research on the relationships between a teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy and students' emotional responses, there is a gap in the qualitative research relating to students' public speaking anxiety. Most previous research has been conducted with surveys that limited student's public speaking experiences to simplified numerical likert-style data (Ellis, 1995; Goldman & Goodboy, 2014; Jensen, 1999; Mazer, Mckenna-Buchanan, Quinlan, & Titsworth, 2014; Mottet & Beebe, 2002). While quantitative research provides important statistics, it does not allow for in-depth analysis. It is important to expand the research by exploring, through the students' experiences, if a teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy can reduce the students' public speaking anxiety.

Qualitative data from this study can provide detailed insight about how a teacher can assist with reducing students' public speaking anxiety. Additionally, this study has potential to reveal ways that teachers can create a healthy classroom environment by recognizing the students' public speaking experiences. The qualitative data collected from this study may encourage GTAs to understand the importance of teacher immediacy and lead communication departments to revise their GTA training to emphasize immediacy. This study expands on the

current quantitative research about teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediacy, as well as the students' experiences with their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to determine how a public speaking teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy influences students' public speaking anxiety. More specifically, the study explores the students' experiences with a teacher's verbal (addressing students by name, praising their work, self-disclosure with personal examples, respecting and encouraging students' opinions, using humor, using "we" and "us," taking ownership of the message, and engaging in conversations before and after class) and nonverbal (smiling, voice, gesturing, eye contact, moving around the classroom, appropriate touch, and appearance) immediacy behaviors. This qualitative study provided students opportunities to express their public speaking experiences and how their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy influenced them.

Research Questions

In order to better learn about this topic, these questions guided my research:

1. What are students' experiences of their teacher's verbal immediacy regarding their public speaking anxiety?
2. What are students' experiences of their teacher's nonverbal immediacy regarding their public speaking anxiety?

Definitions of Terms

Teachers. Due to inconsistent labels in the research reviewed, faculty, professors, lecturers, instructors, and GTAs are referred to as "teachers" in this study.

College. Universities and four-year colleges are referred to as a "college" in this study.

Students. "Student" is defined as a person who attends school, college, or university.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is crucial when conducting a qualitative analysis that describes and explores a phenomenon, including education (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). Emotional response theory (ERT) is a framework that specifies a cohesive theoretical perspective which can explain the relationship between a teacher's immediacy and the students' emotional responses, as well as how that relationship influences the students' behavior (Zhang & Zhang, 2013).

Organization of the Remaining Chapters

In Chapter 2, the Literature Review discusses the Background of Public Speaking, ERT, the Teacher's Communication Style, Verbal and Nonverbal Immediacy, and the Students' Emotional Responses. Chapter 3 presents Phenomenology Perspective, Role of the Researcher, Research Site, Selection of Participants, Interviews, Transcribing, and Coding. Chapter 4 reviews the findings. Chapter 5 summarizes the study and provides future research recommendations.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this Literature Review is to synthesize an integrated examination of how a public speaking teacher's communication style impacts the students' emotional responses through the lens of emotional response theory (ERT). Four aspects of the Literature Review provide a strong foundation to examine the link between students' emotional responses and a teacher's communication: Background of Public Speaking, Emotional Response Theory, Teacher's Communication Style, and Students' Emotional Responses.

Background of Public Speaking

Public speaking has been taught and studied for thousands of years. From Aristotle to the early 1900s, public speaking functioned as a means of oratory and elocution (Keith & Lundberg, 2014). In other words, public speakers were more focused on pronunciation, articulation, and eloquence. Public speaking was guided by Aristotle's Model of Communication (Figure 1). The model was divided into five components: speaker, speech, occasion, audience, and effect. As a one-way communication process, the speaker had the most important role with a passive audience (Businessstopia, 2017).

In the early 1900s, the ways that public speaking was taught began to change gradually. Students started to express their desire for audience-centered public speaking. In his book *Public Speaking, Principles and Practice*, Winans (1915) emphasized the importance of engaging the audience, being practical, and creating a conversational framework. The shift went from speaker-centered with a passive audience to audience-centered and conversation (Figure 2). Since then, most universities' public speaking courses have shadowed Winans' book and focused on audience-centeredness (Lucas, 2015).

In the early 1900s, the public speaking course was only required for certain majors: engineering and architecture (Winans, 1915). Today, public speaking is required at most junior and community colleges as well as universities (Morreale et al., 2006). Morreale et al. (2006) discovered that 62% of the colleges required public speaking as a general-education requirement and that 28% required a hybrid communication course which included public speaking, interpersonal, and group communication as general-education requirement. Current public speaking courses follow the extemporaneous style, as evidenced by the books that colleges are using for those classes. After surveying 306 faculty members and administrators online, Morreale et al., (2006) reported that the text-books that colleges required were audience-centered writings and the most used book was Stephen Lucas' (2015) *The Art of Public Speaking* which focuses on extemporaneous speech and stresses audience-centeredness. Overall, the text was similar to the content that Winans (1915) taught.

One notable difference between the early 1900s and the contemporary teaching of public speaking courses is that faculty taught the courses during the former period. Often, faculty teaching public speaking is no longer the case. Morreale et al., (2006) found that most of the instructors teaching public speaking courses are graduate teaching assistant (GTAs). GTAs are graduate students who teach a course alongside a professor or teach the course by themselves (Duke University, n.d.). The original model for teaching public speaking was the faculty running a self-contained classroom that featured lectures, classroom activities, and grading speeches (Duke University, n.d.). Now, some colleges are creating mass-lecture/lab public speaking courses. The lectures and classroom activities are managed by faculty and meet once-to-twice a week; then, the students are divided into smaller labs, taught by the GTAs to grade the speeches (Arizona State University, 2008).

There are mixed reviews on self-contained vs. mass-lecture/lab public speaking courses. Supporting the mass-lecture/lab, Kryder (2002) found that 90% of the students enjoyed the mass-lecture and felt the quality was equal to self-contained classes. In contrast, some researchers discovered that mass-lecture were not as effective: students were less involved in the class, academic achievement was lower, long-term learning outcomes diminished, and student-teacher interaction was reduced (Cuseo, 2007; Glass & Smith, 1979; Todd, T.S., Davidson Tillson, L., Cox, S.A., & Malinauskas, B.K., 2000). Most recently, Wildermuth, French, and Fredrick (2013) researched the difference between self-contained and mass-lecture/lab classes and found that there was no significant difference for the students' performances on quizzes and final grades. However, the mass-lecture/lab students did perform poorly on the first speeches compared to students in self-contained classes. The mass-lecture/lab students had a higher performance level on the last speech compared to the self-contained students. One reason for the performance difference may be that a comfort level was already established in the self-contained classroom because they met frequently, while the mass-lecture/lab took longer to create a comfort level because the lab did not meet as frequently (Ellis, 1995; Wildermuth et al., 2013). Regarding teacher evaluations, the teachers for the mass-lecture/lab received lower evaluation scores, while the GTAs' evaluation scores were above the mass-lecture teachers' averages (Wildermuth et al., 2013). Despite mixed reviews, more colleges are transferring to the mass-lecture/lab format (Morreale, Hanna, Berko, & Gibson, 1999; Wildermuth et al., 2013).

One of the reasons that public speaking courses are switching to the mass-lecture/lab format may be financial. According to Coplin (2006), one of the ways that colleges can reduce costs is by hiring GTAs, instead of faculty, to teach public speaking labs. Wildermuth et al., (2013) found that using GTAs to teach 30 public-speaking courses can save as much as \$70,730

per year. Some institutions, such as Arizona State University, will staff each public speaking lab with two GTAs in the classroom. Even having two GTAs in every lab saves the university money (Arizona State University, 2008). The GTAs can save the college money, but they lack experience and training. To address the lack of teaching and training, colleges have increased the training for GTAs.

GTAs are composed of master's and doctoral students. Most master's students only have their bachelor's degree and little-to-no experience in teaching (Jensen, 1999). Therefore, many colleges have created training programs for the GTAs. For example, Kent State University (n.d.) offers online training in Blackboard with a series of tests that the GTAs must pass with an 80% or better. Various institutions that offer training programs or certifications teach course design; assigning speeches, papers, and tests; evaluation; and grading (Duke University, n.d.; Mississippi State University, n.d.). To be consistent with lab classes, the training must be structured (Wildermuth et al., 2013). Williams and Roach, (1993) found that communication GTAs believed the most crucial issues for training programs were as follows: grading, planning the first day of class/week, and lecturing. Even though the communication GTAs stated that they were anxious when transitioning from student to teacher, they did not feel that interpersonal skills, students' emotions, and ethical issues were immediate concerns for the training program (Williams & Roach, 1993). Most research about students in a public speaking course focused on reducing their anxiety. Because GTAs have little experience and limited training, they are more concerned with learning the basic needs rather than the relational aspect of teaching. According to Richmond (1990), communication techniques must be taught to the teachers to build a better student/teaching relationship. Going beyond the basic training for GTAs and including interpersonal skills with the training are crucial for GTAs and students' success in the classroom.

Emotional Response Theory

Our emotions can greatly influence our behaviors, even in a classroom (Floyd, 2017). Nearly 40% of people's emotions explain human behavior (Biggers & Rankis, 1983). Emotions are greatly linked to forming and maintaining interpersonal relationships, and relationships between students and instructors tend to be inherently interpersonal (Houser, 2015). According to Mottet, Bainbridge, Frymier, and Beebe (2006), students' behavior is theoretically linked to the students' emotional responses to the teacher's classroom communication. Greatly influenced by Mehrabian (1981), emotional response theory (ERT) foresees that the teacher's communication stimulates the students' emotional responses which guide their behaviors (Horan et al., 2012). However, theories regarding emotional responses towards education existed before Mehrabian.

How emotions influence human behavior has been discussed since *Aristotle's Rhetoric*. One of Aristotle's core rhetoric tenants is pathos: the appeal to audiences' emotions (Mottet et al., 2006). He believed that, when the presenter employs emotions, the audience would be more likely to accept the presenter's opinions (Gebhardt, 2002). Notable classical rhetoric scholar George A. Kennedy contended that Aristotle advocated pathos as "awakening emotion (pathos) in the audience so as to induce them to make the judgment desired" (1991, p. 119). Aristotle believed that true education is to feel pleasure and pain, which creates happiness and the good life. He believed that the community and the teacher should inspire students, through education, to obtain the good life (Robb, 1943). Like Aristotle, humanistic philosophers also believed that the community has an important emotional influence on students' learning.

Humanistic philosophers contributed to understanding the importance of emotions in education, humans are not innately good or bad. Rather, people's behavior is learned through

environment and community. For example, if students are given a loving environment, they are more likely to grow academically (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Nakamura, 2000). Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, famous humanistic philosophers, “see education as a means of fostering self-actualization and fully functioning individuals” (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 125). Because students’ emotions can influence behavior, it is critical that teachers create an emotionally supportive environment where students can grow. Drawing from Aristotle and humanistic philosophers, the role of the teacher is to facilitate a diverse, loving environment that empowers and respects the students (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Nakamura, 2000).

Mehrabian advanced ERT by suggesting that human emotional responses can predict if students will approach or avoid teachers (Mottet & Beebe, 2002). According to ERT, students will likely approach an instructor if positive emotions are created by the instructor, yet they will typically avoid the instructor if negative feelings are created (Goldman & Goodboy, 2014; Mottet et al., 2006). Mottet et al. (2006) argued that there is a link between a teacher’s communication and the students’ emotional responses to learning. The teacher’s communication gives students permission to approach or to avoid the teacher (Mottet et al., 2006). Student responses to their teacher can be described in three ways: pleasure-displeasure, arousal-non-arousal, and dominance-submissiveness (Mehrabian, 1981).

The adjectives that define the pleasure-displeasure facet are happy-unhappy, pleased-annoyed, and satisfied-unsatisfied. Within this pleasure facet, the teacher’s communication creates feelings of happiness, and satisfaction, and there is a greater liking between the students and the teacher (Mehrabian, 1981). When students experience pleasure, they are typically willing to participate in classroom activities. When students experience feelings of unhappiness

and annoyance, they tend to avoid the teacher and participation (Houser, 2015, Mottet & Beebe, 2002).

Next, the adjectives that define emotional arousal-non-arousal are stimulated-relaxed, excited-calm, and frenzied-sluggish. Within arousal, the teacher's communication stimulates, excites, and elicits physical activity (Mehrabian, 1981). Students who experience arousal are motivated to participate in classroom activities (Mottet & Beebe, 2002). Students' motivation for approaching the teacher and participating in the classroom decrease when sluggish feelings are triggered (Houser, 2015; Mottet & Beebe, 2002).

Last, the adjectives that define dominance-submissiveness are bold-meek, domineering-helpless, and powerful-powerless. Dominance tasks the teacher's communication to create boldness and power, eliciting greater empowerment (Mehrabian, 1981). When students experience empowerment, they typically have the confidence for classroom participation and interaction with the teacher (Mottet & Beebe, 2002). However, the students' confidence decreases when meek, helpless, and powerless feelings are evoked (Houser, 2015; Mottet & Beebe, 2002).

Titsworth, Quinlan, and Mazer (2010) expanded on ERT, determining that students have higher or lower levels of emotional support that are triggered by the teacher's communication style. "Teaching with love – brings us the insight that we will not be able to have a meaningful experience in the classroom without reading the emotional climate of our students and attending to it. In some cases that may require becoming more emotionally aware of psychological conflicts within a student's capacity to learn" (hooks, 2003, p. 133). According to Titsworth et al., (2010), emotional support is when the students believe that the teacher's communication is positive, creating a desirable outcome, less stress, coping tactics, emotional health improvement,

and a supportive interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the student (Mazer et al., 2014). Agreeing with Titsworth, Mazer et al. (2014) stated “Classroom emotional support reflects the extent to which students perceive that their instructor is available and able to provide emotional support about topics that are directly and indirectly related to school” (p. 151).

When interacting with the teacher, students have a higher or lower need for emotional work, controlling their emotions in social settings (Mazer et al., 2014; Titsworth et al., 2010). People may display inauthentic emotions in order to be perceived as socially acceptable. In the classroom, students cue off the teacher’s communication to determine the accepted emotional response. These responses may include suppressing authentic emotions: “Teachers who are more effective at communicating with students could create environments in which students are able to be more authentic with their emotional displays, thus reducing the amount of work required in the class” (Titsworth et al., 2010, p. 433). When teachers clearly present their communication competence and are immediate, students need to manage their emotions less (Titsworth, McKenna, Mazer, & Quinlan, 2013). The more emotional support and less emotional work, the greater the chance a student will experience pleasure, hope, and pride regarding his/her learning (Mazer et al., 2014).

Previous research using ERT as the conceptual framework is varied: how swearing impacts students’ emotional responses as well as students’ learning and motivation; how students’ emotions are created by teacher confirmation; and how the teacher’s nonverbal immediacy, clarity, and communication competence impact the students’ emotional response. Houser’s (2015) quantitative study suggests that there is a continuing trend of negative student responses when teachers use swear words in the classroom. Scholars have found that swear words can arouse the receivers’ emotions (Janschewitz, 2008). As stated previously, there is a

link between students' emotional responses and their motivation (Horan et al., 2012; Mottet & Beebe, 2002; Titsworth et al., 2010). Using ERT as her conceptual framework, Houser (2015) found the students' emotions dictated their approach/avoidance behavior. When a teacher's swearing was directed towards the students or an assignment, there was a drop in the students' performances, creating avoidance. In contrast, other research claims that swearing, especially used with humor, can foster a positive perception which may motivate students to pay more attention because the swearing sways from the classroom norm (Generous, Frei, & Houser, 2015; Kearney, Hays, & Ivey, 1991). Houser's (2015) research found, that when a teacher uses swearing with humor, the students felt that the teacher was more approachable inside and outside the classroom.

Goldman and Goodboy's (2014) quantitative study researched the connection between teachers' confirmation and students' emotional responses. Past research indicated that there was a positive link between teacher confirmation and positive emotional outcomes. Students' motivation and learning tended to be higher when a teacher exhibited confirmation (Ellis, 2000). Goldman and Goodboy (2014) stated

the general conclusion drawn from more than a decade of teacher confirmation research in that instructors who engage in confirming behaviors in the classroom tend to enhance students' perception of themselves, their abilities, and their overall outcomes in the course. (p. 270)

Confirming messages that a teacher may exhibit to create positive emotional responses are responding to students' questions, showing an interest in their learning by listening, and having an interactive classroom. The study found that, the more a teacher expresses interest in his/her

students, there is less emotional work for students and more genuine emotions in the classroom (Goldman & Goodboy, 2014).

Titsworth et al., (2010) researched the link between students' emotional responses and three teacher variables: nonverbal immediacy, clarity (verbal immediacy), and communication competence. Regarding nonverbal immediacy, the higher the teacher's level of nonverbal immediacy, the more students felt positively towards the class and less emotional work (Titsworth et al., 2010). Chesebro's (2003) quantitative study found that, when teachers use nonverbal immediacy, they have a perceived effect. In contrast, Titsworth et al., (2010) discovered that a teacher's clarity produces higher levels of student apprehension. Previous research by Glaser-Zikuda and Fuss (2008) had the same results. One of the reasons for increased student anxiety may be because high verbal clarity reduces the students' freedom to express themselves and may create more emotional work (Titsworth et al., 2010).

In the same study, Titsworth et al., (2010), found a strong, positive correlation between encoding and decoding, and positive emotional responses. Communication competence is the perceived ability to encode and decode messages effectively (Titsworth et al., 2010). Previous research suggests that there is a correlation between the way a teacher decodes (listening to the student) and encodes (responding to the student), and the students' emotional responses (Glaser-Zikuda & Fuss, 2008). Students perceived a higher level of support and positive emotions for the class when a teacher demonstrated effective communication practices.

In summary, ERT is a theoretical framework that specifies a cohesive theoretical perspective that may explain the relationship between a teacher's communication and the students' emotional response as well as how that relationship influences the students' behavior (Zhang & Zhang, 2013). Mottet and Beebe (2002) stated, "Emotional response theory suggests

that an individual's emotional response to stimuli influences his/her behavior" (p. 78). Similarly, when the teacher's communication style creates positive emotions for the students, the students are more likely to be successful in the classroom. The literature on ERT and learning presents a strong justification for further research studying a public-speaking teacher's communication and the students' emotional response.

Teacher's Communication Style

Teachers are important! According to research conducted by Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005), teachers have one of the most important roles in students' learning. Jensen states, "Next to peers, teachers are the biggest influence in an undergraduate student's success or failure in college" (1999, p. 231). Humanistic philosophers believe that one of the major principles in education is to form a healthy relationship between the teacher and the students (Elias & Merriam, 2005). A teacher's communication and behaviors may play a crucial role in fostering a learning environment (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005). Similar to humanistic philosophers, Nakamura states, "One of the teacher's goals should be to encourage students to develop social skills for social interaction" (2000, p. 25). When a teacher creates a healthy environment, students are more likely to participate in their learning experiences in and outside the classroom. Healthy environments are not always available for the teacher or student.

The traditional teacher-student relationship has, historically been autocratic: the teacher was authoritative, and students had to conform to the teacher's communication style. The teacher was the only source of knowledge: "image of drilling a hole into the student's head and inserting a funnel, and pouring knowledge into this funnel" (Bork, 1991, p. 5). However, significant changes occurred and have affected teacher-student relationship. Democratic advancements have moved society towards treating all people equally (Nakamura, 2000).

Regarding the teacher-student relationship, equity is about students deserving respect, dignity, and human worth. A teacher has the unique opportunity to make a difference for students by empowering, instilling values, and teaching them to explore (Nakamura, 2000). A teacher may have more knowledge and expertise, yet the students should not be perceived as inferior (Nakamura, 2000). Students develop a positive or negative emotional reaction to learning through the teacher's communication and behaviors in the classroom (Titsworth et al., 2010). Moving away from the autocratic style, the teacher's goal is to create a healthy interpersonal relationship with students.

To create a healthy interpersonal relationship, teachers and students go through a process of meeting one another, exchanging information, and adjusting and developing expectations. In other words, communication is an important part of teaching. According to Mark Knapp's Stages of Relationship Development, all relationships evolve over time and should follow a sequence of stages for the relationship to be successful, but some relationships skip between stages or skip certain stages altogether (Floyd, 2017). On the first day of a public speaking class, the teacher and students start at the initiating stage: making eye contact and stating their names. Through an introduction speech, the relationship moves to the experimenting stage, where the students and teacher learn more basic information about each other. For some people, the experimenting stage is the farthest their relationship will go. For the most part, it is now up to the teacher because he/she holds the power to move the relationship into the intensifying stage: becomes less formal and strengthens interpersonal communication. (Richmond, 1990). Through the teacher's communication style, students will determine the relationship and their comfort level.

A positive teacher-student relationship facilitates affective learning which, in turn, enhances cognitive learning (Bloom, Hasting, & Madaus, 1971). Affective learning is how a student deals with emotions, which impact cognitive learning and knowledge development in the classroom (Clark, 2010). While students are still able to learn cognitively when negative emotions are expressed in the classroom, the students' willingness to apply the information and knowledge is quite low. If teachers want their students to apply and to value the material presented in class, teachers need to be concerned with affective learning. The success of a teacher-student relationship depends upon on how the teacher understands the students' feelings and uses that understanding to motivate and to guide students. When a teacher communicates confidence in his/her students, students may contribute extra effort to their learning (Nakamura, 2000).

One approach for understanding relationship development is to recognize the applied communication skills (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Communication occurs when individuals simultaneously send, receive, and interpret messages through symbols, signs, and/or behavior (Nelson, Titsworth, & Pearson, 2014). Each relationship has a communication climate, the emotional tone of the relationship. The communication climate is usually created by communication codes: the verbal and nonverbal communication that is relayed between communicators (Floyd, 2017). What people say, how they say it, their body language, and their listening skills dictate a relationship's communication climate. Behavioral communication patterns that facilitate the learning process may or may not emerge, depending on the teacher's communication methods (Urea, 2012). Nakamura (2000) states, "Healthy and effective communication is one of the most important skills in teaching. Success depends on how well a teacher listens and communicates his or her thoughts and feelings" (p. 165). Through positive

verbal and nonverbal communication, a teacher is able to create a healthy communication climate with his/her students (Nakamura, 2000). The teacher's communication is the way a teacher interacts with students via different aspects: verbal and nonverbal immediacy (Goldman & Goodboy, 2014; Horan et al., 2012).

Immediacy

It is well known that “students do not care what you know until they know you care” (Roberts, 2017, p. 1). Immediacy can be a way for teachers to show they care. Conceptualized by Mehrabian, immediacy is defined “as the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between two people” (Richmond et al., 2012, p. 368). Through communication interactions, teachers will display basic behavior patterns that either draw students towards the teacher or students away from the teacher (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000; Richmond, 2002). In other words, students will approach a teacher they like and to whom they feel a closeness, and they will avoid a teacher who creates a fear or dislike. Immediacy draws students to the teacher, and the teacher has a positive behavioral control (Richmond, 2002). Students' evaluations tend to be higher when a teacher displays positive nonverbal behaviors, such as walking around the room and smiling (Richmond, 2002). Past research on teacher immediacy found that immediacy has a positive effect on motivation and reducing communication apprehension. (Frymier, 1993; Mehrabian, 1981). According to Dalonges & Fried (2016), “Exceptional educators are not remembered because of an interesting lesson, but by how they made the student feel” (p. 223). At times, students' feelings can be influenced through the teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy. A teacher does not need to demonstrate all the verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors to affect the student; whatever the teacher is comfortable expressing will help.

Research, examining both nonverbal and verbal immediacy, often reveals that a teacher's nonverbal immediacy impacts learning and motivation more than verbal immediacy (Jensen, 1999). Contrary to most research, Christensen and Menzel (1998) found that, with small classroom sizes, verbal immediacy created the approachable vs. avoidable behaviors. Either way, it is clear that verbal and nonverbal immediacy can have a positive effect on learning, motivation, and teacher-student relationships (Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Jensen, 1999; Myers & Knox, 2001). Verbal and nonverbal immediacy is commonly thought of as one concept; however, they are two distinct concepts and can be studied separately (Robinson & Richmond, 1995).

Verbal immediacy. Being the less studied of the two, verbal immediacy is the spoken behaviors that teachers display in the classroom, creating a closeness or disconnect between the teacher and the students (Jensen, 1999). Verbal immediacy examples are addressing students by name, praising their work, self-disclosure with personal examples, respecting and encouraging students' opinions, using humor, using "we" and "us," taking ownership of a message, and engaging in conversation before and after class (Jensen, 1999; Myers & Knox, 2001). When students perceive their teacher as verbally immediate, the students may feel a connection in the classroom and a relationship with the teacher; those students may generate further verbal immediacy behaviors (Gorham, 1988).

However, verbal immediacy is not always expressed in the classroom. At times, a teacher's verbal communication can be a detriment to the students. Verbal aggression is communication that dominates or possibly damages another person's self-concept (Rocca, 2004). Lying, teasing, insulting, profanity, and character attacks are examples of verbal aggressions. Studies confirm that verbal aggression creates a defensive climate in the classroom, making

students less likely to attend class, to ask questions, and to approach their teacher (Rocca, 2004). Also, lower motivation, lower cognitive learning, and higher emotional work are reported when negative verbal immediacy is demonstrated (Myers & Knox, 2001; Rocca, 2004; Titsworth et al., 2010). With time, students will go beyond avoidance and completely refrain from any communication with their teacher (Mottet & Richmond, 1998).

Ego support, communication that guides students to believe in themselves, should be presented by the teacher through praise, encouragement, and confirmation (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Doing so will help students feel motivated and empowered (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Mottet & Richmond, 1998). Teachers should go beyond content-driven classrooms to incorporate relational communication by praising students for their work (finding the good in an assignment before correcting the mistakes), answering questions without implying that students are “stupid,” recognizing people (calling students by name), acknowledging students for their behavior and class contributions, and expressing genuine concern about the students’ personal and professional success (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Goldman & Goodboy, 2014). Facilitating a positive environment through ego support is crucial for students’ affective and cognitive learning as well their success in the classroom (Stoltz, Young, & Bryant, 2014).

Another way to create verbal immediacy is self-disclosure: intentionally sharing information about oneself that most people do not know or cannot obtain (Floyd, 2017). Self-disclosure is reciprocal; students are more likely to share information when the teacher is willing to share appropriate information (Floyd, 2017). Self-disclosure can create a positive relationship between the teacher and the student. When teachers practice self-disclosure, they can create a trusting, caring, and developing relationship between themselves and the students (Dalonges & Fried, 2016; McCroskey & Richmond, 1977). There is a positive link between a teacher’s self-

disclosure and affective learning: viewing the class as a healthy environment, having students who are willing to approach the teacher, and having students who believe that greater success is achievable (Cayanus & Martin 2008; Stoltz et al., 2014). Along with positive relationships and healthy classrooms, a teacher's self-disclosure increases when the teacher's credibility is aligned with the course material and students' goals, not just the teacher's personal opinions and identifications. Even though research has found that self-disclosure can build credibility, some teachers are resistant to self-disclose due to the concern about losing credibility and respect among peers (Miller, Katt, Brown, & Sivo, 2014). Such teachers may be unaware of the pragmatic ways to implement self-disclosure and appropriate strategies. Some techniques to self-disclose include sharing personal information to find common ground with students, giving personal examples to explain the content, and utilizing humor (Miller et al., 2014).

Positive humor is an important component of verbal immediacy by improving attention, establishing interest in the class, motivating students, and creating a relaxing and comfortable environment (Dalonges & Fried, 2016; Richmond, 2002). Teachers can use humor to build rapport with students (Finn et al., 2009; Gorham, 1988). Research has determined that positive humor releases endorphins, relieves tension, alleviates boredom, improves mood, lessens embarrassment while communicating, and "opens up" the classroom (Fovet, 2009; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Neuhoff & Schaefer, 2002). Humor can be an invitation for starting conversations with students, creating verbal immediacy, and encouraging participation (Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Richmond, 2002). Also, Gorham and Christophel (1990) and Christensen and Menzel (1998) discovered that, when other immediacy behaviors are used, humor is more effective and that it is not the quantity of humor used in the classroom, but the quality. Although humor can create verbal immediacy, students often feel that not all teachers have the humor skill

and it is impossible for the teacher to learn to apply humor in the classroom. If a teacher attempts to use humor ineffectively, the outcome is the risk of being counter-productive. However, if students feel that their relationship with the teacher is genuine, humor is not always needed (Fovet, 2009).

Nonverbal immediacy. A popular aphorism is that, “it is not what you say; it is how you say it.” Nonverbal communication conveys meaning without using words; nonverbal communication may be intentional or unintentional (Khan, Mohammad, Shan, Irfanullah, & Farid, 2016). Nonverbal communication transmits 65-70% of the meaning in a communication interaction (Floyd, 2017; Lucas, 2015) Along with being more persuasive than verbal communication, nonverbal communication greatly influences the feelings that stimulate affective learning (Floyd, 2017; McCroskey, Sallinen, Fayer, Richmond, & Barraclough, 1996). Nonverbal immediacy refers to the nonverbal behaviors that teachers enact to reduce psychological distance as well as, to increase warmth, friendliness, and closeness in the classroom (Mazer et al., 2014; Mehrabian, 1981). Nonverbal immediacy behaviors include smiling, voice, gesturing, eye contact, moving around the classroom, appropriate touch, and appearance (Rocca, 2004). Such nonverbal behaviors signal a teacher’s enthusiasm and expressiveness and are a way to gain the students’ attention and to contribute to their success.

Some of a teacher’s most used nonverbal behaviors are gesturing and movement, eye contact, and vocal variety. Kinesics is a systematic mode of studying body movement (Floyd, 2017; Lucas, 2015). A common movement is gesturing, using the hands and arms to communicate, and when gesturing is used effectively, it can convey positive emotions and a liking by the students (Floyd, 2017; Mehrabian, 1981). Useless gestures, including waving arms meaninglessly, twisting hair, standing stoic similar to a statue, hiding behind a lectern, or

utilizing very few gestures may distract the students (Carlson, 2012; Lucas, 2015; Richmond, 2002; Rocca, 2004). Although there are many gestures used in the classroom, illustrators and regulators tend to be more common. Illustrators, gestures that match your verbal communication, clarify the teacher's message. Another common gesture is regulators, controlling how the conversation flows between students and the teacher (Floyd, 2017). Simple body movements, such as stepping away from the lectern, walking around the room, and using natural arm gestures, demonstrate the teacher's confidence (Carlson, 2012; Floyd, 2017; Lucas, 2015; Rocca, 2004).

Facial expressions communicate more than any other nonverbal behavior. Eye contact is the facial expression that communicates the most (Floyd, 2017; Khan et al., 2016). Speakers, including teachers, are perceived as distant, insincere, dishonest, and not interested, when they do not look others in the eyes (Lucas, 2015; Richmond 2002). When eye contact is used effectively, the person is perceived as trustworthy, kind, and credible. Longer eye contact can build students' sense of confidence, getting them to participate and creating instant rapport (Khan et al., 2016). These positive traits can build a connectedness between the teacher and the students (Floyd, 2017). Along with eye contact, a genuine smile elicits positive emotions and improves mood (Neuhoff & Schaefer, 2002). A teacher's smile may create a safe environment which allows the freedom to ask questions and empowers students' learning (Ghiora, 2010). A smile and eye contact express the teacher's positive emotions which may establish an invitation to approach the teacher.

A teacher's voice (pitch, rate, volume, and pauses) are known as vocalic communication. Students interpret messages through a teacher's vocalic communication (Lucas, 2015; Pearce & Brommel, 1972). As students listen to the teacher, they are influenced five times more by the

voice than the spoken words; i.e. “it is not what you say, it is the way you say it” (Geertshuis, Morrison, & Cooper-Thomas, 2015, p. 228). A monotone voice can come across to the students as boring, lacking interest in the topic, and nonimmediate (Richmond, 2002). Students may not retain or understand a message when a teacher drones on or speaks too fast. Lucas (2015) states, “Just as variety is the spice of life, so is it the spice of public speaking. A flat, listless, unchanging voice is as deadly to a speechmaking as a flat, listless unchanging routine is to daily life” (p. 245). Speaking a little faster and louder can build excitement in the classroom discussion while slowing down and being quieter can indicate that the topic is very important. A teacher can enhance his/her effectiveness in reaching the students by varying his/her rate, pitch, pauses, and volume (Lucas, 2015).

Mazer et al. (2014) found that nonverbal immediacy plays a large part with students’ affective learning. When a teacher appears nonverbally nonimmediate, it can create an emotional range that includes shame, boredom, anxiety, and anger for students. With these negative emotions, the students’ levels of emotional work are higher (Mazer et al., 2014). In contrast, when a teacher is nonverbally immediate, students often demonstrate positive emotional behaviors as well as increased liking for the subject matter, assignments, and teacher (Mazer et al., 2014; Titsworth et al., 2013; Witt & Wheelless, 2001). Witt and Wheelless’ (2001) research discovered that, when a teacher demonstrates higher nonverbal immediacy, the students have greater recall, less learning loss, and greater affective learning, while also perceiving their teacher as competent, caring, sensitive, less intimidating, and respectful. Richmond (2002) claimed “Immediacy has a plethora of positive results” (p. 79). Immediacy should be used to help create students’ positive emotional responses.

Along with verbal and nonverbal immediacy, a teacher's written feedback is a demonstration of immediacy. It is pivotal for a teacher to convey positive written feedback that motivates students, improves their performance, and builds their self-esteem before giving negative feedback (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Hu & Choo, 2016; Orrell, 2006). Research has determined that successful written feedback should focus on tasks which students can change, give details and specifics, and have a balance of positive and negative feedback (Evans, 2013; Hu & Choo, 2016;).

Students' Emotional Response

Within the classroom, students experience many emotional responses which can help explain the students' behavior (Biggers & Rankis, 1983). One of the most common emotional responses for students is anxiety, which can cause communication apprehension. According to McCroskey and Richmond (1977), communication apprehension is a "broad-based fear or anxiety related to the act of communication held by many individuals" (p. 43). Most recently, communication apprehension has been defined as a trait-based perception with either real or anticipated communication that hinders communication interactions in various situations, such as a job interview, meeting someone for the first time, the first day (weeks) at new job, and public speaking (Cole & McCroskey, 2003; Daly & McCroskey, 1984; Rubin & Rubin, 1989). Biggers and Masterson (1983) state that emotional responses can explain communication apprehension. Most people with high apprehension have less contact with teachers, interact less with strangers, avoid public speaking, and choose careers that involve little social interaction (Rubin & Rubin, 1989). Due to these behaviors, people with high communication apprehension tend to be viewed by others as having negative personal traits and being poor communicators (Goberman, Hughes, & Haydock, 2011; McCroskey & Richmond, 1977).

Communication apprehension is often confused with shyness (Cole & McCroskey, 2003). Defined by McCroskey and McCroskey (2001), shyness is the “actual frequency of a person talking, and thus represents behavioral patterns, and not a person’s preference toward communication or a person’s anxiety about communication” (p. 21). Shyness is a personality trait, while communication apprehension is not part of a student’s personality. Rather, communication apprehension, the fear of communicating in certain situations, is a recognizable behavioral trait (Cole & McCroskey, 2003; Daly & McCroskey, 1984). Even though communication apprehension is identifiable, the cause is not clearly known.

Communication apprehension, as far as public speaking is concerned, is commonly referred to as stage fright, public speaking anxiety, or glossophobia. Hancock, et al., (2008) define glossophobia as “a type of social phobia resulting in an extreme avoidance of speaking in front of people because of fear, embarrassment, or humiliation” (p. 302). According Clevenger (1955), there are three factors that contribute to public-speaking anxiety: behavioral, physiological, and cognitive. The behavioral factors may be avoiding or dropping the class, having unnatural body movements, reddening of the face and neck, trembling of the voice, and breathing heavy. Physiological factors include an elevated heart rate as well as increased blood flow and blood sugar (Clevenger, 1955). Most physiological factors tend to go unnoticed by the audience. Cognitive factors can be known as a state rather than a trait, referring to a student’s assessment of oneself and their public speaking experiences. When the students’ assessment is positive, their experiences tend to be positive (Clevenger, 1955).

McCroskey and Richmond (1977) argue that there is a significant relationship between self-esteem and communication apprehension. Self-esteem is a “subjective evaluation of your value and worth as a person” (Floyd, 2017, p. 82). The benefits of having a high self-esteem

include, more comfort in social settings, a willingness to approach the teacher, a drive for success, emotional intelligence, finding positives in others, and lower levels of communication apprehension (Daly, Caughlin, & Stafford, 1998; Stets & Burke, 2014). Individuals with low self-esteem tend to have a negative attitude, higher communication apprehension, a lack of emotional intelligence, and an expectance of rejection (Daly et al., 1998; Pearson, Child, DeGreeff, Semlak, & Burnett, 2011).

Self-esteem is formed by a person's perception of another's communication and behavior interactions towards his/her, known as reflective appraisal. When students are treated with love, respect, and appreciation in their community and classroom, their self-esteem tends to be higher. In contrast, students who are treated poorly tend to have a lower self-esteem (Floyd, 2017). Nakamura (2000) states, "a student's positive or negative behavior is often related to his or her self-concept, perception of himself or herself and others, and the methods of finding a place for himself or herself in the classroom and society" (p. 16). When a teacher creates a caring environment through verbal and nonverbal immediacy, the students' self-esteem in the classroom tends to be higher and may produce positive results in the class (Myers & Knox, 2001).

Miller (1987) determined that the lower the student's self-esteem, the higher the levels of public speaking communication apprehension. Supporting this study, Ellis (1995) reported that students' levels of public speaking competency indicated their communication apprehension. Likewise, the higher the communication apprehension, the more likely the student will negatively self-disclose and avoid communication altogether (McCroskey & Richmond, 1977). Along with self-esteem, Shi, Brinthaup, and McCree (2015) found, through their quantitative research, that self-talk and negative thinking greatly affect students' public speaking anxiety levels. When students frequently think negatively and use critical self-talk, their public-

speaking communication apprehension is higher (Shi et al., 2015). When communication apprehension was higher, students described less satisfaction with their communication situation and performance (Rubin & Rubin 1989). Ellis (1995) claimed that students are less apprehensive around people they like, and verbal and non-verbal immediacy may reduce students' anxiety.

Mottet and Beebe (2002) contended that a teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy affects the students' emotional responses, including communication apprehension. Research found that students are more motivated to communicate in class when the teacher is verbally immediate by praising students' work, calling them by their names, using humor, and asking students questions (Christensen & Menzel, 1998; Jensen, 1999). If a teacher is perceived as not verbally immediate, students may lack self-esteem, be afraid to ask questions, and be hesitant to communicate in the classroom (Myers & Knox, 2001). Ellis (1995), along with other researchers, reported that a teacher's lack of verbal and nonverbal immediacy may cause higher communication apprehension for the students (Frymier, 1993). The more immediate the teacher, the lower the students' levels of public speaking anxiety: 45% lower for verbal immediacy and 35% lower for nonverbal immediacy (Ellis, 1995). Ellis' (1995) research also discovered that helping students raise their self-esteem through immediacy behaviors, praising students, engaging with students inside or outside the classroom, and the teacher's self-disclosure lowers students' public speaking anxiety. Ellis (1995) stated, "Immediacy may be associated with reduction of anxiety since people are generally less apprehensive around people the like" (p. 68). Verbal and nonverbal immediacy is one of the most important communication tools that teachers must reduce students' public speaking anxiety.

Summary

Even though public speaking is one of the most dreaded classes for many students, it is a general-education requirement for most colleges. Due to state educational cuts, many institutions are transitioning from self-contained classrooms to mass-lecture/lab public speaking classes. Most teachers for the public speaking labs are GTAs who have limited teaching experience. Many GTAs complete teacher training; however, most training programs do not include materials on reducing the students' anxiety.

Being heavily researched, there is a connection between verbal and nonverbal immediacy and student motivation, affective learning, and a reduction of communication apprehension in the classroom. When a teacher is verbally and nonverbally immediate, students are likely to approach the teacher and to actively participate in their learning. Due to the strong connection, teachers have a responsibility to examine their verbal and nonverbal immediacy, especially in a public speaking class. Public speaking teachers should continue to learn ways to reduce a student's public speaking anxiety through their immediacy behaviors.

Although there is a plethora of literature related to immediacy and the students' classroom emotions and behaviors, most of the research has been quantitative, primarily focusing on either verbal or nonverbal immediacy. The quantitative studies do not investigate why a certain phenomenon is occurring. Very little research has given the students a voice regarding their perception of a teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy as well as how that interpretation affects their public speaking anxiety. A qualitative study will provide a voice for students regarding their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy in a public speaking class. This study's conceptual framework indicates the importance of understanding how the teacher's immediacy creates the students' emotions, thus affecting their public speaking experience.

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

As discussed in the Literature Review, a teacher's immediacy or lack of immediacy greatly influences the students' motivation, affective learning, communication apprehension, and success in the classroom (Dalonges & Fried, 2016; Frymier, 1993; Goldman & Goodboy, 2014; Jensen, 1999; Mehrabian, 1981; Mottet & Beebe, 2002; Richmond et al., 2012; Titsworth et al., 2010). Although there is a plethora of literature related to the teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy, as well as the students' classroom emotions and behaviors, most of the research has been quantitative. Very little research has given students a voice regarding their perceptions about their public speaking class experiences. Since public speaking is a required course for most colleges and provides useful life skills to students, capturing students' voices may present strategies to improve their public speaking experiences. These experiences include students' perception about the teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy and the students' public speaking anxiety. Thus, there is a need to conduct a qualitative study in order to add an important dimension to the existing quantitative research. Qualitative research provides a voice for the participants that cannot be obtained with quantitative survey tools. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) defined qualitative research as a method that "draws strongly on direct experience and meaning . . . an in-depth, intricate, and detailed understanding, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors" (p. 219). Qualitative research examines the how and why of human behavior and decision making, helping to build an understanding of complex issues by talking directly to those persons who are involved in the situation (Creswell, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

Because it affects all aspects and phases of the research process, my positionality must be examined. Foote and Bartell (2011) state, “the positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes” (p. 46). I am not separate from the social world that I am researching. I must acknowledge the connection to the research and understand my influences on the research.

I was greatly impacted by my 6th grade teacher’s lack of verbal immediacy in the classroom. At age of 11, I was a new student to Washington Elementary school in Moorhead, MN. I left Edison Elementary school which I loved and where I had many friends. Being shy, I had not made many friends. I often went to the nurse’s office pretending to be sick, so I could go home. My teacher called me Andy instead of Andrea, and I hated it! Yet, I was too shy to correct her; I did not want any extra attention. However, one day I received unwanted attention. My teacher asked me to write “hospital” on the chalk board. When I misspelled the word, my teacher said in a condescending tone in front of the class, “You don’t know how to spell that word? How stupid are you?” My self-esteem plummeted. In my adult years, I learned that I had and still have dyslexia, yet that was not discussed or tested for at my school at that time. Because of my dyslexia, I was regarded by myself and teachers as stupid. This belief of being stupid carried over into my high school years and my first attempt at college.

I still struggle with reading fluently, spelling words correctly, writing complete sentences, and explaining my thoughts sequentially, especially when I am nervous. Pursuing my adult education, I remained fearful of being embarrassed by my perceived lack of knowledge. Years later, an undergraduate communication professor, Brenda Kaspari alleviated

my fear of education and increased my self-esteem by her supportive, non-threatening teaching environment and effective communication skills. I realized that I was not stupid; I learn differently than what was taught in elementary and high school. Mrs. Karspari opened my eyes to another world of learning. When I began to teach at the college level, I knew I wanted to follow her teaching style.

I started teaching public speaking face-to-face and online in 2003 at Minnesota State Community and Technical College (MSCTC). I have since taught public speaking every semester for numerous colleges full-time and part-time: MSCTC, Glendale Community College (GCC), Prince Williams Community College (PWCC), The Art Institute of Arizona, North Dakota State College of Science (NDSOS), North Dakota State University (NDSU), and currently at Concordia College. Even though in the past I taught at the Midwest University that this research was conducted, I have not been connected with the university or the Communication Department in over four years. When I left the program, public speaking courses were taught as a self-contained class. Since then, the public speaking course has changed to a mass-lecture/lab classes. Therefore, I do not have extensive knowledge on the current public speaking course set-up (mass-lecture/lab).

Since I have taught public speaking for 14 years, I have a personal connection with the research topic. I have witnessed students struggle with the fear of public speaking. As a teacher who is verbally and nonverbally immediate, I have seen how immediacy can greatly reduce students' anxiety. Students have often commented that my caring environment, which is created by verbal and nonverbal immediacy, reduces their anxiety. My teaching experiences led to my researcher interests; I wanted to see if other students feel that their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy affects their speech anxiety.

Phenomenological Perspective

With an interest to examine a variety of lived experiences and perspectives, I, the researcher, am using a phenomenological analysis that explores the students' experiences in a public speaking course. Based upon the work of Husserl, a phenomenological methodology allows the researcher to capture what students think about their public speaking experiences and the teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy; the students' narratives will capture these ideas (Finlay, 1999). In other words, a phenomenological perspective describes a first-person report of the participants' life experiences; through everyday life experiences, a person classifies and organizes their everyday world (Cohen et al., 2011). Phenomenology is concerned with how a person lived through and interpreted the phenomenon retrospectively (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). The study must take place after the participants have experienced the phenomenon, so the person's narrative describes how they lived through the situation. Therefore, this study captured students' first-hand perspectives on their public speaking experiences.

Being committed to narrative, intentionality is fundamental to phenomenology. Finlay (1999) describes intentionality as, "the life world is not an 'objective' environment' or a 'subjective' consciousness or set of beliefs; rather, the world is what we perceive and experience it to be" (p.302). Each person identifies situations differently, depending on past experiences. Therefore, in order to understand the phenomenon, it is important to collect several individuals' perceptions of the lived situation to determine what they all have in common. Creswell (2007) states, "phenomenologist focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon" (p. 58).

Moustakas (1994) claims *heuristic* research, a phenomenological research model, is critical in studying research participants' experiences. In *heuristic* research, the participants are

the only ones that can elucidate their perception of the experience. In order for *heuristic* research to be successful:

only the co-researchers' [research participant] experiences with the phenomenon are considered, not how history, art, politics, or other human enterprises account for and explain the meaning of the experience. The life experience of the *heuristic* researcher and the research participant is not text to be read or interpreted, but a comprehensive story that is portrayed (Moustakas, 2017 p. 19).

In other words, the researcher must tell the participant's story of the phenomenon only through the participant's perspective.

When the researcher has a connection to the phenomenon, he or she needs to make an effort to set aside their biases. Epoché and phenomenological reduction both stress the importance of the researcher setting aside their biases, prejudgments, and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Finlay, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). Epoché, or otherwise known as bracketing, requires that the researcher remove preconceived ideas about previous experiences with the studied phenomenon that may impact the interpretation of the interviews (Creswell, 2007 & Moustakas 1994). Finlay (1999) claims, "our understandings are being continually modified as we move back and forth looking at the whole parts in dialectic between preunderstandings, interpretation, sources of information, and what is revealed" (p. 302). To be objective and non-judgmental, I followed Giorgi and Giorgi's (2008) advice by being self-aware of my biases. In efforts to be as objective as possible in recording data, I probed for further examples from students to clarify meanings of words, set aside preconceived notions by bracketing as well as accepting what the participants said, and had data reviewed by advisor, committee member, and colleague to check for accuracy and bias.

Even though it is important for me to set aside biases, Moustakas (1994) states that the researcher's knowledge and experiences and the participant's story can be a reciprocal relationship; each story can be related. According to Schutz (1967),

If I look at my whole stock of your lived experiences and ask about the structure of this knowledge, one thing becomes clear: *This is that everything I know about your conscious life is really based on my knowledge of my own lived experience. My lived experiences of you are constituted in simultaneity or quasisimultaneity with your lived experiences, to which they are intentionally related. It is only because of this that, when I look backward, I am able to synchronize my past experiences of you with your past experiences* (p.106)

My experiences as a public speaking teacher, not the student, combined with my awareness and interest in public speaking anxiety enriched my understanding of the students' stories.

Data Collection

For most phenomenologists, interviewing is the primary method for collecting data (Creswell, 2007). In the current study, I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with public speaking students who attended a Midwestern University; the interview process helped narrate their experiences.

Selection of Participants

This study required students who have experienced the college public speaking phenomenon. I used homogenous and convenience sampling to recruit students who were enrolled in a public speaking course at the Midwest University. According to the Midwest University's Communication Department, 55 public speaking sections were offered during Fall 2017, and each lab had 22 students (C. Sullivan, personal communication, January, 2018). The initial goal was to interview 20 students who were enrolled in a public speaking course at the

Midwest University; however, due to the large number of responses, 21 students were interviewed. The average age of the students was 19, with 18 being the youngest student and 22 being the oldest. There were thirteen freshmen, five sophomores, two juniors, and one senior. The interviews were conducted after students completed two or three speeches in their lab section.

Once approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Midwestern University's Communication Department, a recruitment letter was posted in the Communication Department's Blackboard page requesting participation, a brief description of the study, informed consent form, and my email address and cellphone number to contact me. After receiving many emails and text messages, I scheduled interviews for the first 21 students and put other students on a waiting list. Because four students did not show up for their interviews, four students from the waiting list were interviewed in their place. Participants were given a participation letter that fulfilled their 10 course-requirement research points.

Research Site

The research was conducted at the Midwest University that has approximately 15,000 students. The interviews were conducted at the Midwestern University's library graduate conference room. The purpose of conducting the interviews at the library was to increase the students' environmental comfort so that their narratives were captured as authentically as possible.

Interviews

Prior to interviewing the participants, I piloted interview questions with students enrolled in a public speaking class at another college. Pre-testing allowed students in similar situations as

the formal research participants to evaluate my original questions. After conducting the pre-test, only minor changes were made to the interview questions.

After students agree to participate in this study, the interview began with a social conversation to create a relaxed and safe atmosphere. According to Moustakas (1994), “The interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively” (p. 114). Once the relaxed climate was created, the informed consent forms were explained and signed. The students were then told that the interviews would be audio recorded, and that I would be taking handwritten notes.

The one-on-one, semi-structured interviews began with demographic questions before moving into in-depth questions about the students’ public speaking experiences. The demographic questions addressed the following: credits completed in college, age, and major and minor subject areas. Because of my public speaking teaching experiences at the college level, it was essential that the questions allowed me to hear the phenomenon from a new perspective. Therefore, the in-depth questions involved the following: the students’ anxiety of public speaking, their perceptions about taking a public speaking course, their perceptions of their teacher’s verbal and nonverbal immediacy, if their public speaking anxiety decreased or increased since the beginning of the course, and what they think caused this decrease or increase. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they had any questions, and then thanked for their participation. Once the interviews were completed, each participant was given a pseudonym, the data were transcribed, and coded to uncover the emerging themes and patterns.

Data Analysis

The following sections detail my study's data analysis process. First, I read through the handwritten field notes and transcribed the interviews from the audio recordings. After transcribing each interview, the data were then coded into themes.

Transcribing

Each interview was recorded on my cellphone using the REV app, a technology voice recorder platform that transcribes recorded interviews. After completing each interview, REV then transcribed said interview. I then read through parts of transcriptions while listening to its recording, verifying the accuracy. The interviews were transcribed word-by-word, including filler words (um, and, like, uh, etc.), laughter, and citing pauses and sighs. Each interview was transcribed with the student's pseudonym. Once the interviews were transcribed, the coding process began.

Coding Process

The essential idea of qualitative analysis is to read and re-read the field notes to develop themes in order to help discover collective findings. Using Moustakas' (1994) to analyze the data, I first read through the transcripts without coding to become familiar with the data. The second time reading through the transcripts, journal notes were written to determine the significance of each statement and to further determine which segments of the stories were essential to the research. Horizontalization, according to Moustakas (1994), is the first step in analyzing the data, which includes writing memos when reading the typed transcripts for the first time and underlining significant statements that describe how the participants experienced the situation. Next, I grouped the statements into codes by using open-coding: as I read through each quote or paragraph, I labeled the data into broad and specific categories. Through the

coding process, more particular categories began to emerge through repetitive experiences. I then clustered the categories into themes. Finally, the themes were synthesized into a description of the students' experiences, including verbatim statements (Creswell, 2007). All of the students' textural-structural narratives were integrated into a universal description that were deemed representative of the participants as a whole group. Once the data were coded and integrated into universal descriptions, they were interpreted to explain the themes to academic audience.

Meet the Students

For this study, the sample included 21 students enrolled in a Fall 2017 public speaking course at the Midwestern University. Thirteen of the students were freshman, five sophomores, two juniors, and one senior. The average age was 18.75: ten 18-year olds, eight 19- year olds, two 20-year olds, and one 22-year old. As seen in Table 1, there were a variety of majors and past public speaking experiences. All the students said the reason they chose to take a public speaking class in Fall 2017 was because the class was a requirement; many also claimed that they wanted to complete the "hardest" class right away. Participant 9 (P9) explained,

Well, a lot of people say it's one of the hardest classes, maybe because of the anxiety, so a lot of people like to get it over with as soon as possible. Since it's required, I was like, well, 'just do it first and get it done.'

All students expressed anxiety prior to taking a public speaking class. However, all students' anxiety decreased at the time of the interviews. Participant 15 (P15) illustrated the range of public speaking anxiety as,

I thought [public speaking] was going to be terrifying. I no longer really have anxiety preparing for speeches or do I feel super anxious, even in the middle of my speech, like I

did before. I will still get nervous getting up in front of the class or just knowing I am next. But I think it's really gotten better.

The reasons for students' public speaking anxiety before taking a public speaking class differed, along with the reasons their anxiety decreased. The next section will examine the different reasons students experienced both an increase and decrease in public speaking anxiety.

Table 1

Student Information

| Student | Age | College Credits | Grade | Major/Minor | Previous Public Speaking Experience |
|---------|-----|-----------------|-----------|------------------------------------|---|
| P1 | 18 | 24 | Freshman | Agribusiness | Little Experience - High School English Course |
| P2 | 18 | 0 | Freshman | Food Science | Little Experience – National Honor Society |
| P3 | 18 | 0 | Freshman | Undecided | None |
| P4 | 19 | 0 | Freshman | Animal Science/Pre-Vet | Little Experience – Book Reports |
| P5 | 19 | 31 | Sophomore | HDFS/Social Work | Little Experience – Group Work in High School |
| P6 | 18 | 0 | Freshman | Elementary Education | Little Experience – English Class in High School |
| P7 | 19 | 16 | Sophomore | Finance and Minor Communication | None |
| P8 | 18 | 19 | Freshman | Physics and Computer Science | Forensics Team and Section in High School English Class |
| P9 | 18 | 0 | Freshman | Business | Little Experience – English Class in High School |
| P10 | 18 | 0 | Freshman | Psychology or Social Work | Speech and Debate and Musicals |
| P11 | 19 | 0 | Freshman | Psychology and Spanish | Communication Class in High School and Leadership Conferences |
| P12 | 18 | 30 | Freshman | Psychology and Minor in Statistics | Little Experience – English Class in High School |
| P13 | 18 | 15 | Freshman | Pre-Pharmacy and Microbiology | Little Experience – Class in High School |
| P14 | 19 | 0 | Freshman | Business | Public Speaking Class in High School |
| P15 | 19 | 31 | Sophomore | Psychology | Communication Class in High School |
| P16 | 20 | 52 | Junior | Mechanical Engineering | None |
| P17 | 22 | 120 | Senior | Civil Engineering | Speech Class in High School |
| P18 | 19 | 6 | Freshman | Pre-nursing | Little Experience – English Class in High School |
| P19 | 20 | 60 | Junior | Business | Little Experience – Sports Captain |
| P20 | 18 | 0 | Freshman | Undecided | None |
| P21 | 19 | 30 | Sophomore | Undecided | Little Experience – English High School Class |

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The purpose of chapter four is to introduce the participants of this study and provide significant themes that are important for the readers and researcher to understand the students' experiences regarding public speaking anxiety. Phenomenological research is interested in first-person narratives of the participants' life experiences and retrospectively interpreting the phenomenon (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Based on the saturation of data from the 21 interviews, those interviews that most clearly illustrated the findings will be discussed.

Summary of Results

Feedback is Important

The results revealed that students perceived their teacher's feedback influenced their public speaking anxiety. Two themes that emerged after analyzing participants' responses to feedback were: Feedback to Class, Not Individually and Detailed Feedback. The students' responses that particularly reflected these themes will be discussed.

Feedback to class, not individually. Many students expressed the importance of receiving feedback from their small group teacher to the whole class, rather than specifically being "called out" in front of their peers. All of the students felt their public speaking anxiety decreased when their small group teacher provided feedback to the whole class. For example, participant four (P4) stated:

She [Small group teacher] always compliments the class, like, 'oh most of your guys were all within the timely manner that you were supposed to be, and you all did great in eye contact.' She always compliments us and supports us in that way.

Participant 13 (P13) was very anxious before taking the public speaking class. Being a pre-pharmacy major, she knew the importance of obtaining and retaining a 4.0 GPA; her

potential grade for the class was her primary anxiety. She also discussed her public speaking anxiety lowering due to the small group teacher's feedback to the class. P13's small group teacher discussed sections of the speeches that went well and things they could work on the next class period. As P13 stated, "He [small group teacher] would give positive [feedback to the class] then things to improve on." P13 was relieved her small group teacher did not call her out individually; the feedback was always as a class. She did not want to be the only student "called out." P13 also stated each speech improved because of her small group teacher's feedback to the class, "I use it [feedback] to improve my next speech." When she practiced prior to presenting the speech, she focused on the teacher's feedback.

Participant two (P2) was concerned that she would be specifically be called out in the class on the things she needed to work on, which would reflect a poor grade. Prior to class, she associated constructive feedback with bad grades. Thus, P2 was pleasantly surprised that the teacher's constructive feedback was discussed as a class, rather than individually and "then next time we have breakout groups, we all go over what we did bad, what we did good, and then we learn how to fix what we did bad." Since the teacher discussed what everyone needed to work on as a class, P2 felt her anxiety lowered because she realized was not the only person struggling.

Participant 17 (P17) also commented that hearing the teacher sharing class-wide positive feedback helped reduce his anxiety, especially if this positive feedback was immediately followed by constructive feedback. He expressed:

So he'll say something like almost of you guys did such and such pretty well. If it's volume, 'the whole class could hear you well, or I saw lots of eye contact on the second speech, which you guys didn't have on the first speech, which I really liked.' And then he

goes into some of the picky things: ‘A few of you did this, a couple did this.’ That [constructive feedback] was easier to take then.

By providing the positive feedback first, the teacher’s constructive feedback was presented in a helpful tone, rather than harsh criticism. Most of the participants appreciated the teacher discussing the items they needed to work on as a class. For example, participant 6 (P6) stated, “The next week, she’ll [small group teacher] give what the class did overall as really good and then what we can work on. Then, she’ll talk about different things like that. That helps a lot [reduce public speaking anxiety].” She was surprised to see that she wasn’t the only one receiving constructive criticism on her rubric, “a lot of things to go over is stuff I’ve struggled with and the person next to me struggled with.”

Detailed feedback. Some students communicated the importance of receiving detailed verbal and written feedback from their small group teacher. P2 believed her public speaking anxiety decreased when the small group teacher provided specific detailed feedback; these organized instructions helped decrease P2’s anxiety. P2 explained, “She’s [small group teacher] very helpful, very entertaining, and she keeps you informed about public speaking. She tells you the knitty-gritty details: how to improve your speeches, a lot of hand gestures, and what you should do and shouldn’t do.” P2 thought her small group teacher was exceptional at verbally describing what needs to be done to deliver an effective speech. For instance:

The way how she tells us to [present the speech]. In public speaking, there’s three fundamental things she tells. She tells that we should tell them [audience] what we’re saying, say what we’re saying, and tell them again what we’re saying. That way, you get your message across people, so you’re saying it three times, declaring, saying your message, and I feel that’s very helpful when I publicly speak.

Receiving the detailed feedback was especially helpful for P2 because her first speech did not “go as well as a planned.” Knowing what specific public speaking elements she needed to work on reduced P2’s anxiety for the next speech:

I feel like her [small group teacher] telling us to draft an outline and really have a structure really helps some of your speaking. You’re just going all over the place. You’re actually connecting the dots, so people understand your speech, so that’s been very helpful. That helps me deliver something.”

P16 had similar positive experiences with his small group teacher’s detailed feedback on what he and the rest of class needed to improve with their speeches. He claimed:

[Feedback] is nice to hear because some teachers are like, ‘oh yeah, you did great,’ but he [small group teacher] actually goes through and says, yeah, here are a couple things need to work on, eye contact—scan around the whole room. He gives some constructive criticism, but not being mean about it in a relatable manner.

Likewise, participant 14 (P14) claimed detailed feedback to the class helped reduce his anxiety:

She makes a list, normally. Actually, last week, we did pre-speech, and then, she wrote down a list of everything that was not so great about everyone’s speeches, and then, we just talked about that, and be like, ‘make sure to hit these points in your speech next week, so you can really get a good grade on it.’ I think it [detailed feedback] gives me a sense of what I need to practice. Like when I’m practicing my speech, and if I need to stop using code words or have a transition here or whatever, it gives me more confidence.

Along with verbal feedback directed towards the entire class, the individual written feedback influenced the students’ public speaking anxiety. Every speech was graded on a universal rubric created by the Communication Department that the students could reference

when writing their speeches. The class period after their speech, the students would receive their graded rubrics with the teacher's written comments. Most of the students felt their small group teacher's written feedback on the rubrics did reduce their anxiety.

Having little public speaking experience, participant 1 (P1) was very anxious about taking a public speaking course; she was concerned about "giving a speech in front of a bunch of people you do not know, while being professional." She "really appreciated" the teacher's written feedback on the rubrics because it allowed her to see what she did well and work on for her next speech. P1 said, "Well on our rubrics, he'll write down certain things and then, sometimes ways to improve it." The written feedback also helped P1 determine what she needed to improve on when practicing for her next speech.

Along with P1, participant 16 (P16) also commented on the influence of written feedback: "He'll [small group teacher] write what we did good and what we can improve on. So that really helps. It decreases my anxiety because, sometimes I find out I did well on things I was stressing about all night." According to P16, the small group teacher's written feedback relieved some stress which greatly reduced his anxiety for the next speech.

Other participants discussed how written feedback on rubric helped decrease their anxiety. For example, participant 7 (P7) said "He'll [small group teacher] give us a sentence or two about his comments on our speeches like, 'nicely done or this really didn't sound like your outline. You should have stuck to this more, or it sounded really scripted', stuff like that." P7 would refer to the written feedback on the rubric when practicing for the next speech, which helped him feel more confident presenting his next speech. This confidence helped reduce his anxiety. P7 claimed, "On my first speech, I got like a 70%, really isn't good. After my second speech, I got like a really high A."

Additionally, P4 expressed, “she [small group teacher] writes [on the rubric] if something wasn’t clear. She’d tell you to make it just clearer next time and stuff like that.” When P4 was given specific written feedback, she knew exactly what public speaking elements she needed to improve upon for her next speech. Similarly, P1 stated, “I mean he [small group teacher] gets to the point, which is good because I want to improve my speaking.”

Being Relatable

Along with verbal, written, and detailed feedback, when the students thought they could relate to their small group teacher the students’ own public speaking anxiety decreased. The students conveyed the small group teacher was relatable when the teacher displayed the following: self-disclosed about his/her own anxiety, mistakes, and current status; used humor; and was approachable and likeable.

Small group teaching self-disclosing about anxiety. Most of the students believed their anxiety reduced when their small group teacher self-disclosed to the class. The most common self-disclosure by the small group teachers was expressing their own public speaking anxiety. Once the small group teacher self-disclosed about their own public speaking anxiety, many students’ own anxiety decreased. One of the most important feedback from P13’s small group teacher was restating that almost everyone has anxiety before a speech. P13 stated, “He [small group teacher] reiterated that it is normal to be nervous.” When the small group teacher discussed that being nervous is normal, P13 felt his anxiety decreased because he realized he was not the only one with public speaking anxiety. Additionally, P17 claimed:

I know he [small group teacher] has said, probably multiple times, that he gets nervous talking in front of us, even though he doesn’t show it . . . knowing that other people have

the same anxiety, it makes me definitely feel better that I'm not the only one who doesn't like giving speeches.

Participant 21 (P21) went on to say “[his teacher’s self-disclosing] makes me more relaxed because you realize it happens to everyone, even people that are getting paid for it.” P9 reiterated how the small group teacher’s self-disclosure decreased her anxiety:

She’s [her small group teacher] even said, ‘I get anxiety coming up here every day. It’s a completely natural thing. It’s not that you guys are the only ones that are experiencing it.’ And she really makes you feel a little bit more like you’re not alone when it comes to that feeling of anxiety when speaking.

Participant 18 (P18) also found comfort knowing her teacher was struggling with preparing and presenting to the class, explaining:

She’s [small group teacher] told us that herself; she doesn’t even like going up in the class and talking to us. Even that it’s nerve-wracking when she has to prepare what she’s gonna teach today. So just knowing that a teacher gets anxiety about that kind of helps some, too. Small group teachers expressing their own lack of confidence in public speaking also helped reduced students’ public speaking anxiety. For example, P7 voiced:

He [small group teacher] talks about how he would get anxious and how he’s not even a, like how he doesn’t even feel he’s a, good public speaker, yet. It just takes a long time to get used to it, and he just kind of reassures students that really aren’t all for it that ‘it’s okay, it happens.’

Some students stated that it is important for the teacher to verbally self-disclose, because their teachers’ nonverbal communication often did not demonstrate that they were nervous to the students. According to P1:

He [small group teacher] always reminds us that everyone has public speaking anxiety and stuff like that. He always reassures us that he has the same issue as us because he has to public speak a lot. He goes through a lot of the same stuff as we do. He [small group teacher] said he gets sweaty palms. It [small group teacher's anxiety] is reassuring and gives you confidence, just to make you feel better about the anxiety you encounter.

P1 said she had never noticed her small group teacher's public speaking anxiety through his nonverbal behavior, noting, "I never noticed his palms were sweaty." By not noticing their teachers' nonverbal cues, the students were not aware of the teachers own anxiety unless the teachers verbally self-disclosed.

A teacher self-disclosing can also build a positive relationship between the student and teacher. For example, when P21's small group teacher self-disclosed, his public speaking anxiety decreased because it built a positive relationship with him and his small group teacher.

P21 explained:

She's [small group teacher] really relatable, I guess. Because she always had the anxiety, too, and she said she still does sometimes. She gets nervous for each class in general. Just the fact that she disclosed that [his teacher's fear of public speaking], she's a comfortable person to be around, I guess. She's real calm about everything, positive.

Small group teaching self-disclosing about making mistakes. Along with self-disclosing about their own anxiety, teachers admitting that they made mistakes in grading and evaluating a student's performance also helped reduce some students' public speaking anxiety.

Participant four (P4) clarified:

If you have a concern, she'll [small group teacher] think about it, and then, she'll be honest with you and say, reassure you with your concern and say, if she did something wrong, she'd be like 'okay, I won't do that again if it bugged you.

Knowing a teacher was willing to admit her mistakes, P4 felt more comfortable approaching her teacher thus reduced her anxiety.

Participant 10 (P10) felt comfortable approaching his teacher to contest a grade on a speech because his small group teacher expressed previously in class that grading mistakes may occur. Encouraged by his teacher's self-disclosure, P10 met with his teacher during his office hours to discuss a speech for which he received a C:

And then [after setting up an appointment], we went back into the speech, and we relaunched it, and he corrected some things that actually bumped my grade up to a B. So, it was really nice to actually confront him and be like, 'okay, I think this got misunderstood or messed up.' And the way I did it wasn't the same as the outline should have gone, but I still covered all of it, so he gave me the points back, which was nice.

Discussing his concerns with his teacher over one speech, reduced P10's anxiety on the next speech knowing that the small group teacher would make effort to be as fair as possible in grading.

Small group teaching self-disclosing about current status. Some students felt that the teacher's self-disclosure about their age and current student status assisted in reducing their anxiety. P7 claimed:

The fact that he's [small group teacher] closer in age to us probably helps a lot. The fact that he's a college student and we're college students, it just makes you feel that much more comfortable around him, whereas if some 65-year-old man that has his master's and

a Ph.D. were to come in and start talking to us and telling us how to public speak, we'd obviously listen, but we wouldn't feel as comfortable with him. I feel like that helps a lot [reducing public speaking anxiety].

P7 felt because their ages and student status were similar, he was more comfortable with the small group teacher, which decreased his public speaking anxiety. P1 felt the same way, "It [having age and student status in common] is reassuring and gives you some confidence, just to make you feel better about the anxiety you encounter. He is like a peer."

Used humor. Many students believed the public speaking anxiety decreased when their small group teacher used humor in the classroom. P7 stated, "He's [small group teacher] a really nice guy. I really like him. He's funny, cracks jokes; he makes it [public speaking class] really lighthearted for the whole class. I really enjoy him. I kind of look forward to going to his class." Prior to taking a public speaking course, P13 thought the class would be rigid. He was not expecting his public speaking teacher to be humorous; however, the teacher's humor set the tone for a more relaxed environment, which reduced P13's anxiety. P13 commented:

Honestly, he just makes the atmosphere more enjoyable. He tries, I don't know, he's kinda humorous. So that kinda brings down the anxiety of the whole room, too. He always brings up funny examples, so then, it will just be like more relaxed with everything else. You'll feel more comfortable if you say something funny and the rest of the class laughs at you as well.

P21's teacher not only used jokes to demonstrate class concepts, but she also used humorous videos. For example, "She always tries to make jokes. She'll always take a funny video or something if we have a lot of extra time. We watched *The Office* one time." The

teacher's jokes and use of video humor, lightened the tone of the classroom, which reduced P21's public speaking anxiety.

Using humor can also reduce a student's public speaking anxiety before delivering a speech. P9's public speaking anxiety was high on the days she delivered her speeches. However, when the teacher would use humor prior to P9's speeches, her public speaking anxiety decreased. To illustrate using humor on speech day, P9 stated:

She [P9's small group teacher] uses bits of humor and things like that you know. I mean, of course, a lot of public speakers do that, you know, in a good way to ease a little comic relief to get the anxiety gone. If we're working on giving a speech that day and maybe I'm feeling the anxiety getting worked up and then she cracks a joke or something on it, then everyone's like, 'oh, okay, it's not gonna be too bad.'

Some students felt that the humor was a way the teacher self-disclosed. By using humor to self-disclose, P7's small group teacher alleviated some of the public speaking anxiety. P7 articulated, "I think he [small group teacher] basically just said he's a student, too. He kinda cracked some jokes about being a poor college kid and kinda lightened up everyone." A teacher's humorous self-disclosure surprised some students. For example, as a senior in the Civil Engineering field, P17 was not used to teachers using humor in the classroom. He said:

He [small group teacher] uses goofy examples that everyone finds funny. I guess, at first, I just thought that it [small group teacher's humor] is a little weird. But I think it probably has [reduced P17's public speaking anxiety]. Because if he can stand up there in front of a bunch of kids and do something dumb and stupid, then I can go up there and say something serious. You know?

According to P10, when teacher uses humor, the students felt more comfortable expressing themselves through their own humor in speeches. P10 stated:

He [small group teacher] is pretty funny sometimes. Because of that [small group teacher's humor], I feel, in the class, you can say what you want, but as long as it's not offending anyone. Me and my partner, we made an impromptu about marijuana. It was a joke kind of thing; we came up with our own problem/cause/solution. 'Do you have back pain? Well, marijuana will help you,' kind of as a joke, you know what I mean? He laughed, which was really nice. He was not like, 'that was bad,' or anything, which is really cool is that we're adults. We can joke about stuff like that.

P13 suggested his small group teacher's humor would not be funny if he was monotone, "Without it [vocal variety] in the jokes, they wouldn't be as funny." P2 also expressed the importance of vocal variety in humor, "He's [small group teacher] always smiling. He's a pretty happy guy. He's never just up there straight face, monotone. He's always articulating and smiling, laughing at himself, using goofy examples that everyone finds [funny]."

Approachable and likable. All students reported they liked their small group teacher, particularly citing their teacher's approachability, which helped reduce their public speaking anxiety. For example, Participant 5 (P5) stated:

Mostly, he [small group teacher] answered [when P5 approached his small group teacher] any questions that I have, really supportive as in he [small group teacher], all of his students in a way, what are the words, in a way he wanted us to feel more comfortable, and he wanted to help us not be so anxious about it [public speaking]. He supported us in that way. I felt like I was an individual and he cared about me, and I could come to him

for concerns. I mean it really helped me. I didn't just feel like just another student.

Yeah, that helped a lot.

When asked if he felt comfortable approaching his small group teacher, P17 said, "Definitely. I think he [small group teacher], himself, seems to be a pretty good teacher." In addition, P6 stated, "I think her tone is very approachable, so it makes it easier for us to understand and for us to be comfortable to ask her questions, for her being approachable." Likewise, P2 said, "I felt very comfortable [approaching small group teacher]. I would just ask a question, and even without raising my hand or just blaring out." P2 conveyed the value of being able to approach her small group teacher outside the classroom:

I have approached my instructor multiple times outside the classroom. You know, asking advice, or homework help, and hard homework. It's [approaching the small group teacher outside the classroom] been helpful that we can understand the course more, and you're able to build a relationship with your teacher.

P5 felt her small group teacher's dedication to the classroom's environment reduced her public speaking anxiety, noting:

It [public speaking anxiety] decreased just because I'm not nervous about meeting his expectations, but he's related to us knowing that everybody has speak anxiety for the most part; not everyone's going to be a Comm major when they get out of class. He's really easy to relate to in that aspect. So, he's definitely decreased it [public speaking anxiety] just because I'm not; just the overall environment is better and that sort of thing and just how he's presented the class and that sort of thing.

When asked about her small group teacher, P18 stated, "I like her. She's really nice. I think it [decrease public speaking anxiety] is mostly our TA [Teacher Assistant]." Likewise, P13's

perception of his public speaking anxiety greatly changed thanks to his small group teacher, “just my public speaking [improved], [because of] small group leader, he’s really good, and I like that.” In addition, P4 claimed her public speaking anxiety decreased due to her teacher’s likable manner, “She [small group teacher] really is nice. She like really relaxed tone and manner when you’re around her. So that really does relax you as it doesn’t seem so uptight when you’re giving a speech.”

Teacher approachability was also important when confronted with students’ outside commitments. For example, due to student-athlete commitments, P21 needed to approach his small group teacher about being late for class. He said that he felt “completely comfortable” approaching her, and that “she understood [P21 being late for class because of a practice]. She kind of figured that we had morning workouts, so she understood. She just asked us to look in, make sure no one was talking before we walked in.” P12 also had to approach her teacher because she was gone for a week:

I asked her questions, or I’ll email her, too, because I was gone last week. I was on a trip, so I had to talk to her about that stuff, and it was totally fine. She worked with me around everything; everything worked.

Effective teacher approachability also displayed itself during teachers’ office hours. For example, even though P9 did not miss a class, he still approached his small group teacher about assignments and other class matters outside the class, “A little bit, here or there, maybe on an assignment. Not so much on public speaking though, just maybe clarifying on an assignment.” One of the reasons P9 felt comfortable approaching his small group teacher is because he felt his small group teacher was, “Nice young lady, very helpful. Very good teacher. She helps us learn very well, very hands on.”

A teacher's approachability was also very important when interacting with students with mental and learning disabilities. For example, P16 admitted he was nervous to approach his small group teacher due to his autism. P16 stated:

Yeah, I mean, I'm a little anxious about approaching any professor in general. I had to tell him [small group teacher] that I was on the autism spectrum, so some of my speeches might turn out a little bit differently just because I am not as good at some things, like eye contact. And he was actually really nice about that. I thought he wouldn't believe me.

P16 elaborated that the small group teacher was supportive, and that receiving this support helped decrease his public speaking anxiety.

Some students expressed their teacher's nonverbal communication helped make their small group teacher approachable and likable, which reduced their public speaking anxiety. P4 stated:

She [small group teacher] really has a relaxed tone and manner when you're around her. So that really does relax you as it doesn't seem so uptight when you're giving the speech. She just smiles at you when you are talking, makes eye contact, and like looks right at you, and her body language is very relaxed towards you and not upright instead.

Likewise, P21 claimed that when her small group teacher made herself approachable by displaying a positive attitude through smiling and using certain gestures, "She [small group teacher] smiles and nods her head; she always gives a positive attitude [through her nonverbal]. She'll always look up and smile. I really haven't seen her with a straight face." Similarly, participant 11 (P11) discussed how her small group teacher's gestures created an approachable environment, "His [small group teacher] posture is pretty like welcoming, if that makes sense. Like he doesn't stand on the offense."

Additionally, P17 stated that his small group teacher's gestures and voice helped keep him interested in the class:

I think he [small group teacher], himself, seems to be a pretty good speaker. When you're just sitting there in class, it's hard to take your eyes off him because he always has meaningful hand gestures and speaks clearly. He's definitely talking to everyone; he's not just at the podium talking to the people in front of him. He's not talking to the board. He has meaningful movements that keep you, you know, on him.

P5 felt that the small group teacher's gestures indicated how he was paying attention to the students, stating, "Yeah, just nonverbal cues, I feel like he's nodding and he's paying attention. He's a good professor that way." Similar to P5, P13 said her small group teacher's gestures and eye contact showed he was attentive to the students:

More like nodding and intently listening to your speech so you know he's [small group teacher] paying attention to you. He's [small group teacher] watching you, like a lot of the students like heads down or you can tell they're not paying attention, but he's [small group teacher] definitely paying attention to your speech.

Additionally, P18 thought her small group teacher's gestures and eye contact indicated that P18 was speaking effectively, "when she [small group teacher] nods and looks at you, she noticed a good transition in your speech or something."

Some students mentioned that their small group teacher was approachable due to their small group teacher's voice. For instance, P18 stated, "She's kind of quiet. But she's still very, she's not boring, so I wouldn't say monotone, but she's a softer voice, kind of, calming." P6 stated:

I would say she [small group teacher] knows how to keep your attention by, she's not monotone at all. She is very engaging with the class. She's not boring. You're not bored. I think her tone is very approachable, so it makes it easier for us to understand and for us to be comfortable to ask her questions, for her being approachable. It is just how she talks. She's very comfortable with us. She wants us to be comfortable with her.

The students felt when their small group teacher's nonverbal communication supported them, their small group teacher was approachable.

Supportive Environment

Many of the students expressed their initial public speaking anxiety stemmed from the fear of the "unknown" – not knowing their speeches would be delivered in the smaller, more intimate environment of the small group classroom, rather than the large lecture hall. P21 described his initial public speaking anxiety came from, "the unknown. A new experience. You don't really know what to expect." Similarly, p8 expressed, "I was unsure because I didn't know how it was gonna work. I kinda got that there's an online portion, and then that there was a large group."

Those students that did have expectations for the class often assumed they would be presenting in the large lecture, which created more anxiety. When asked about his initial perceptions of taking a public speaking course, p2 stated, "anxiety, people staring at you, standing still in front of a crowd of hundreds of people [large lecture]."

However, many students noted their public speaking anxiety decreased as they recognized that the small group classroom allowed for a more supportive environment. P14 described:

It wasn't specifically the teacher or the students; it was just kinda like, the overall environment. She's up there, teaching, and she's a nice person, and she is doing everything [conducting class activities, grading, and teaching] well, and all the students are being respectful.

According to the students, a supportive environment was created through classroom activities and peer-to-peer interaction.

Classroom activities. Throughout the interviews, most students commented on the importance of classroom activities reducing their public speaking anxiety. For example, on the day of speeches, P13's small group teacher would perform breathing activities with his students that P13 thought lowered his anxiety, "Before class, we kinda do exercises, like a breathing exercise or just standing up and opening up, so we feel more comfortable type of thing." P6's small group teacher also taught a breathing activity:

The first day, when we first were giving speeches, she [small group teacher] taught us how to stand up and take deep breaths to physically help your anxiety, but I think most of it was mentally, that it's all in your head that I think that helps with anxiety.

Numerous students mentioned impromptu activities helped reduce their public speaking anxiety. For example, P16 said, "He [small group teacher] does tend to put us off in smaller groups for doing little impromptu speeches that are not graded. I think it helps reduce it [public speaking anxiety]. I just know I am not being graded." Similarly, P17 discussed the importance of non-graded activities:

During class, we do some of these goofy little impromptu things where he puts us in a group with people that we don't know, really for a minute or two. And then, we have to come up and give a two-minute skit persuasion or something. I think that helps [reduce

his public speaking anxiety]. Those are just activities for us to get in front of our classmates and do something. And those are usually pretty loose and fun, and don't really carry anything. So, doing the non-graded things in class have helped [reduce public speaking anxiety].

One teacher did grade the impromptu activities, but graded activities did not increase P10's public speaking anxiety. P10 felt these activities helped build a community in the classroom. By building this community, p10 felt more relaxed when delivering his graded speeches, commenting:

We do activities for groups. So, we'll do practice speeches which count as activity points, five points or something like that. So not actual speeches, but they're random activities that we'll do each time. Different times, we'll have different people in our group, so that's nice, cause we can meet with different people. It's not just the same group at the same time; you also work with people who might be really good in a certain area and speech that might go have something to offer to the group, and it's not just the same over and over again and repeating people.

Most of the teachers utilized various impromptu activities. For example, P9 claimed: I know we've done little impromptu exercises in methods. There was this one where you had to pull a little sheet out of a bag, and it just had a completely, not so much funny, but like a common mistake people do, but it was exaggerated to a point. So, then we had to go up there with a paragraph that we had written, and we had to use whatever the slip had gave us, like maybe it was like, oh, walk around while giving your speech. So that it showed you all the different things that people do that will help ruin their speech? To me, that kind of helped me with my speech anxiety.

P4's small group teacher also used impromptu activities to help students feel more comfortable delivering speeches, stating:

One impromptu [activity] that we did was, we had to say our self-reflection, but he [small group teacher] gave us different things you shouldn't do in a speech, like touch your hair or talk too quietly. Then, the audience had to pick out what you were doing wrong so that you could see them as an audience and know when you're saying things wrong. She'll have some fun activities to do. Like we did a word-association game and persuasive games and stuff.

Even though P7's small group teacher employed different impromptu activities than P4, they still reduced P7's public speaking anxiety:

The last two weeks, we've had to do an assignment where we research a public speaking YouTube video or a Ted Talk and write down what we think the writer or speaker did well, and then, we'll come and present it to the class for 30 seconds to a minute what we wrote down about our homework assignment. I kind of like stuff like that. It makes you feel more comfortable.

P9 expressed similar feelings:

We meet weekly, every time we meet there, we have an assignment where we do little short speaking; maybe she'll [small group teacher] just say, find an article of a pop-culture effect, and analyze a persuasive method they have and be prepared. Just one or two paragraphs and present it in class. So, there's always a lot. It really helps you get engaged with the speaking as much as possible, and like that kind of setting is very nice to me because you're coming in on something you studied, something you know a lot about, so you feel a lot more comfortable speaking to your peers about it and especially

when you get to pick a topic of your own. It's something you obviously have some sort of interest in.

Along with the other students, participant 12 (P12) explained how impromptu activities built a relationship among the students, which helped reduce their public speaking anxiety, stating:

We [class] always have conversations and always do a thing; we have an assignment and we present it. And we always present it in an odd way, to help us reduce our anxiety and stuff like that. Or in a bad way, so we know not to do it and things like that.

P15 also discussed how impromptu activities created deeper relationships with his peers, commenting:

The activities, sometimes they're [activities] kind of fun to just go up there and talk about something random. Or one activity was to learn how to construct our references pages in APA format, so that was really helpful. We really had a chance to get into group with different people, so we've basically been in groups with each other, just all around. And just kind of talking casually, I think that helps. Just to know that we're on each other's sides and we're there for each other. It's like a support group. So, it really makes it easier to just get up in front of the class and speak.

Another activity the all small group teacher implemented was timecards. The timecards, which can be held by the small group teacher or another student, alerted students how much time they had left on their speeches. For example, P13 claimed:

For me, it [timecards being raised] would decrease [her public speaking anxiety], just cause then I know where I'm at, so I can pace myself type of thing, so I don't get anxious. Like if I had no idea where I was at in my speech, then I would be a little more nervous, so the time cards definitely help.

P6 also appreciated the timecards, stating:

I like that [timecards], because then you know, 'oh okay, I'm at three and a half minutes. I better hurry up.' If you just hit three minutes, then you're okay. You know what I mean? I like that because, when I'm giving my speech, I notice it, and then, I am aware of what the time is.

Along with P13 and P6, other students voiced their appreciation of timecards. P5 stated, "That way, I know I'm on track, and I'm not speaking too much and kind of rambling or just being too generalized, I guess. It keeps me in a nice variable time I guess." Similarly, P4 noted, "I like it [teacher raising the timecards] because it shows me where I'm at and where I should be in my speech."

Peer to peer interaction. Some of the students claimed it wasn't just the small group teacher that reduced their anxiety, it was also their peers. P21 discussed that not only did his small group teacher create a supportive environment, so did the other students. He felt his small group teacher created a safe environment that allowed the other students to open up as well. For example:

Her positive attitude and trying to get everyone talking. Then you know you have the few people that are always loud, but then I guess because everyone is comfortable around each other, it just kind of created that environment where everyone's safe.

When many of the students felt the environment was safe, their anxiety decreased. Thus, they were better able to communicate and to provide better feedback and support for one another.

When discussing how her public anxiety decreased, P15 said, "I think both [small group teacher and peers]. Really, I think more so the classmates than the teacher." P1 also thought her public speaking anxiety decreased because of both her small group teacher and peers, "It's not as

bad [public speaking anxiety] as it was when I started. I'm getting to know my small group better and our instructor." P12 added, "Just us all hanging out [with peers] kind of reduces it [public speaking anxiety] because we're getting to know each other better as we're doing all the work. So that helps, too." P10 commented on his peers' mutual support for one another, stating:

Everyone's really nice. There's no, 'I'm better, I'm not as good,' kind of thing. Cause there is this one time where this girl really kept starting over. She's like, 'can I start over?' And I felt so bad; I was like, 'oh my gosh.' But no one judged her or laughed or anything like that. We shouldn't, but no one was like, 'oh my gosh, she keeps messing up.' They were just accepting cause they have the exact same problem with speech anxiety.

When asked about public speaking anxiety eight weeks into the semester, participant 12 (P12) stated:

I think it's a lot better because, my first speech I did, I had a lot of anxiety, and I was struggling, but I think we [her peers] got closer as a class, and it was comfortable. And no one judges or anything, so my second speech I was a lot more prepared, and I practiced more, and so I was better about it, so I'm feeling okay.

Likewise, P14 conveyed support from his peers helped reduce his public speaking anxiety:

I think being in front of the small group helped a lot because, the more people you see in the crowd looking at you, the more nervous you get. I feel like, so I think having just those 15 -20 people, and being able to talk, helps a lot with the [public speaking] anxiety part of that.

P6 further explained his peers helped create a comfortable environment, “I really have gotten comfortable with my class and the people that I work with [peers]. I can see that my comfortability has grown, and I’m not as nervous as I was when I first gave my speech.”

Increased Anxiety

Although all of the students stated their public speaking anxiety had decreased since the beginning of the course, there were some situations that did increase their public speaking anxiety. First, academic factors affected some students’ public speaking anxiety. P2 stated a majority of her anxiety was about being graded:

I think the problem with public speaking in the classroom is that you’re graded, and that’s what makes you feel fear of public speaking, that anxiety. I feel like, if you are not graded, you’re more likely to do better than you are graded, because it’s a weight on your shoulders.

P13 was also anxious because the speeches were graded. However, after two speeches her public speaking anxiety decreased because of her grades:

I got my grades back on the first two speeches, so I was like more confident in myself, I would say, and I was gonna do well in the class. So, once I got those grades back, it kinda just left my anxiety a little bit.

P4 claimed not knowing what her small group teacher was writing on the rubric during a speech, increased her public speaking anxiety:

Mmmm, to me, especially maybe if I was talking and stumbled over a part and I immediately saw her get to writing, I’d be like, oh, I messed up. That would increase it [public speaking anxiety] a little bit, so I think, yeah, I think it [increase her public speaking anxiety] would if I did see her writing.

Likewise, P10 claimed he experienced increased public speaking anxiety when he noticed his small group teacher grading on the rubric during his speeches, “When I am giving a speech, I’m wondering, ‘what is he writing down?’ As I am giving my speech, and sometimes, it’ll throw me off.”

Not every student found written feedback on the rubric to be helpful. For example, participant 8 (P8) experienced public speaking anxiety due to her confusion about her small group teacher’s written constructive feedback. P8 stated:

Most of the time, she [small group teacher] doesn’t write much. It is usually just she circles the different spots where you gain or lose points. She circles what you gained and lost and puts your grade on it. [I am] a little confused, just because, sometimes, the grade I get and then the grade that’s shown in the rubric kind of conflict each other, type thing. Some of the sections I lost what I thought was quite a few points on, but I had, like, a nine out of ten on the section, so I was kind of confused about that.

Participant nine (P9) did not feel her teacher’s written feedback helped either. In fact, p9’s public speaking anxiety increased when she received constructive written feedback,

When she grades me, yeah, she’ll leave little comments here like, oh, negative and positive comments, like ‘this could have used some work or great job with this, great job with that.’ I guess, in a sense, it [public speaking anxiety] decreases it when I see those positive [written feedback]. And, I mean, the negative [written comments], I will say increases it [public speaking anxiety] more, so something more to focus on later.

Even though the written constructive comments increased her anxiety, p9 knew the written constructive feedback was important for her to improve her next speech: “I knew coming

in there that public speaking isn't my best suit. When I go in there, I'm always willing to work on things, even if there's anxiety."

For some students, the holding up of timecards increased their public speaking anxiety.

For example, P2 noted:

[The small group teacher] holding up timecards to let us know how much time is left makes me more anxious. Let's say, I'm part way through my speech and the time cards come up saying, 'oh you're over the time limit,' and you have X amount of time, so you try to rush through, go through your speech."

P9 also expressed that his public speaking anxiety increased whenever the timecards were raised:

When they [small group teacher] hold up a card that says, 1 minute; 30 seconds; and of course, under some time pressure, you'll see that and be 'oh, I maybe have three more points to get across in 30 seconds' and you'll feel some anxiety there.

Waiting for the timecards made P8 especially anxious, claiming her anxiety would not be as high if there weren't timecards, "Like, at first, am I close to the time? It gives me a little more, just because it gives me more [public speaking anxiety] until the number goes up."

Likewise, P14 suggested the timecards increased his anxiety. He stated:

She [small group teacher] has someone with sticky notes, like in front. If it's [sticky notes being raised] toward the end of the speech and I know I have more to say, then yes [public speaking anxiety increases] because like, 'oh shoot, I have to finish it.

In this chapter, I described the themes that emerged from the data. In chapter 5, I will interpret and discuss those themes.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to analyze students' perceptions of their public speaking teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy, and if these immediacies influenced the students' public speaking anxiety. Chapter Five will elaborate on the results from Chapter Four by interpreting findings. I will summarize the research by comparing the literature review to this study. According to Moustakas (1994), "the researcher returns to the literature review and distinguishes her or his findings from prior research" (1994, p. 155). Therefore, the overview will be divided into major themes: Verbal Immediacy, Nonverbal Immediacy, Teacher Approachability, Feedback is Important, Being Relatable, Supportive Environment, and Increased Anxiety. After discussing the major themes from this study, I will conclude by presenting the Theoretical Implications, Future Research, Limitations, and Final Reflections.

Overview

Using ERT as the conceptual framework, I explored if a teacher's perceived verbal and nonverbal immediacy stimulated students' emotional responses, primarily public speaking anxiety. Many students conveyed that they shared similar experiences with public speaking anxiety, and that their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy helped this public speaking anxiety. Students' experiences echoed much of the previous literature on verbal and nonverbal immediacy; however, rather than specifically addressing the research questions that I posed earlier, I will describe how my findings address the broader purpose of this study: students' perception of their public speaking anxiety in the classroom. Ravitch and Carl (2015) state:

a more holistic picture is painted when findings are organized by and written in the structure of key themes that speak to your research questions but are not directly structured as a response to themes. It allows for you to articulate the major learning of

your study in ways that are more holistic and inductive rather than determined and shaped by the research questions, which can constrain the creative thinking and analysis by the researcher” (p. 279 and 280).

The discussion section will begin by analyzing the findings that were closely related to the initial research questions, verbal immediacy, nonverbal immediacy, and teacher approachability, followed by several new themes that emerged on the matter, including feedback is important, being relatable, supportive environment, and increased anxiety.

Verbal Immediacy

The public speaking students in this study expressed the importance of positive verbal feedback. The students stated that when their teacher complimented their speeches, their confidence strengthened, easing their public speaking anxiety for the next speech. Additionally, the students reported their communication apprehension in the form of public speaking decreased when they felt their ego was supported by their teacher. Students also reported that their public speaking anxiety decreased when they felt motivated through their teacher’s verbal feedback. Likewise, past research on a teacher’s verbal immediacy noted similar experiences, teachers demonstrating verbal immediacy helped decrease students’ general anxiety (Frymier, 1993; Mehrabian, 1981). The students’ positive response to their teacher’s compliments on their speeches also reflected Frymier and Houser’s (2000) contentions about the importance of ego support: the teacher praising the students through their verbal feedback. The results also echoed Goldman and Goodboy’s (2014) findings that when teachers displayed positive confirmation through their verbal feedback, students’ motivation tended to be higher.

A teacher’s utilization of humor was another factor that helped decrease students’ public speaking anxiety. Most students from this study stated their public speaking anxiety decreased

when teachers used humor to make the public speaking classroom environment lighthearted and enjoyable. Some students claimed they liked going to their public speaking class particularly because of their teachers' humor, which helped relieve their public speaking anxiety. Many students further expressed enjoyment of class when humor was used in lectures, through videos, or teachers' comments and examples. Students also felt their public speaking anxiety was reduced when they could use humor in their speeches as a way to express themselves when appropriate without judgement. In addition, the students suggested that when their teacher used humor specifically the day of speeches that their public speaking anxiety especially decreased. This finding reflected prior research stating that humor alleviates boredom, builds a rapport with students, improves mood, and relieves tension (Finn et al., 2009; Fovet, 2009; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Neuhoff & Schaefer, 2002).

This study revealed that most students felt their teacher's verbal immediacy helped to reduce their public speaking anxiety. When applied, verbal immediacy can create a comfortable environment and interpersonal relationship with students that has proven through this study to reduce students' public speaking anxiety. This suggests it is important for teachers to attempt to be verbally immediate in their public speaking classes. For many teachers, it is easy to verbally describe the course content to the students. However, in public speaking, describing course content is only a minor portion of the class. Not only do the students need to know how to write a speech, but they also need to have the confidence effectively deliver a speech. However, through verbal immediacy, teachers have the unique ability to help build students' confidence in public speaking. As a result, it may be beneficial for teachers to try to go beyond merely knowing the class content, and instead make continuing efforts to be verbally immediate.

Nonverbal Immediacy

Even though nonverbal immediacy has historically been studied more than verbal immediacy (Jensen, 1999), this study suggested that nonverbal immediacy had lesser impact on students' public speaking anxiety compared to verbal immediacy. When students discussed elements related to their teacher's nonverbal immediacy, it was overwhelmingly in relation to their teacher's verbal immediacy. For example, some students expressed their teacher's use of humor would not be "funny" or effective without the teacher demonstrating nonverbal communication to complement the verbal communication. The students emphasized the importance of their teachers avoiding monotone or straight-faced expressions when attempting humor. The students also stressed their teacher employing vocal variety in their humor, complemented by smiling, helped lighten the classroom, reducing their public speaking anxiety. The importance of a teacher's vocal variety reflects Richmond's (2002) contentions on the ramification of poor nonverbal communication; i.e., monotone voice comes across as boring, causing students to lose interest.

Some of the students expressed that their small group teachers' nonverbal communication helped build a safe environment, which reduced the students' public speaking anxiety. When a teacher made eye contact, smiled, or nodded at the students when they were delivering their speeches, the students' public speaking anxiety decreased. The students felt their teacher's nonverbal behaviors communicated that their speech was going well and receiving positive attention. These findings echo Khan et al.'s (2016) research about students' sense of confidence being built through longer eye contact from teachers.

A few students mentioned their small group teacher's posture and gestures created a comfortable environment. The students stated their teacher's posture was welcoming and "not so

uptight”, helping reduce their public speaking anxiety. Some students indicated it was enjoyable listening to class lectures because they could not “take their eyes off of the teacher” due to the teacher’s hand gestures and movements. This study reiterates previous research that found when a teacher walks around the room and uses natural gestures the students perceive the teacher as confident, which can send positive emotions to the students (Carlson, 2012; Floyd, 2017; Lucas, 2015; Rocca, 2004).

Teacher Approachability

Due to a teacher’s verbal and nonverbal communication, the students indicated that they felt comfortable approaching their teacher in the classroom or outside the classroom. In return, the students’ public speaking anxiety decreased. Likewise, as described in the literature, how a teacher communicates with their students will either draw the students towards or away from them. When students feel their teacher is approachable, the students’ communication apprehension decreases (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000; Richmond, 2002).

A majority of the students in this study stated their teacher was approachable through their verbal immediacy, and that the students’ public speaking anxiety decreased as a result. Many students in this study described their teacher as approachable because of their caring words and felt their teacher genuinely “cared” for them and wanted them to be successful, which created an interpersonal relationship between the student and teacher. The students’ sense of teacher approachability through verbal immediacy is concurrent with ERT’s concept that when positive emotions are created, the student is more likely to approach the teacher, thus creating less emotional work (public speaking anxiety) for the students (Goldman & Goodboy, 2014; Mazer et al., 2014; Mottet & Beebe, 2002). Similarly, the students’ sense of genuine teacher care

mirrored Ellis's (1995) findings that people experience a reduction in anxiety when they are around people with whom they like and have a supportive relationship.

It is important for public speaking teachers to learn how to demonstrate immediacy through their verbal and nonverbal communication. By learning to create positive emotions for the students, teachers can reduce students' public speaking anxiety. Since some public speaking teachers lack natural immediacy or may not be aware of how their immediacy influences their students, it is critical for immediacy education should be to include professional teaching materials and training.

When compared to previous literature, this study supports the notion that a teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy greatly influences students' emotional responses, including public speaking anxiety. However, three significant new themes emerged from the results: feedback is important, being relatable, and increased anxiety.

Feedback is Important

Previous research has emphasized the importance of teachers providing feedback to their students (Frymier & Houser, 2000; Hu & Choo, 2016; Orrell, 2006). In order for students to be successful in college, a teacher's feedback is crucial because it provides students the information needed to improve on future assignments. Even though the literature review briefly discussed the importance of feedback, the students in this study discussed specific aspects of feedback: feedback to class, not individually, and detailed feedback. Feedback is a particular way that teachers have and can demonstrate verbal and nonverbal immediacy

Feedback to class, not individually. This study found that students wanted and needed feedback on their speeches; yet, students generally wanted feedback directed to the whole class, rather than strictly individual verbal feedback. Many of the students were surprised to know

other students in their class were struggling with public speaking anxiety, too—students assumed they, themselves, were the only ones struggling. For class-wide feedback to be effective, the students must all have common goals, and one of those goals can often be to not be embarrassed. Since embarrassment is a public emotion that can alert the student that they failed and occurs in front of other people, it is an emotion students don't want to exhibit. Many of the students in this study, expressed if called out individually in front of the class, they would be embarrassed, which would increase their anxiety. Although not fully explored in the literature, it is likely that when a teacher broadcasts a specific student's weaknesses in front of an entire class, it commonly causes the student to experience embarrassment. However, the student may also experience embarrassment even when the teacher provides positive feedback to that student in front of the entire class. For the most part students do not like to be the center of attention among a group of people, including the classroom of their own peers. If the teacher is going to verbally provide positive or constructive feedback to students, it is important for the teacher to address the whole class, as doing so is more likely to reduce students' public speaking anxiety.

Contradicting Hattie and Yates's (2014) study which found teachers giving feedback to the whole class was irrelevant, this study found that when teachers provided feedback to the whole class, the students were comforted knowing they were not alone with their public speaking anxiety. The reason for the difference between this study and Hattie and Yates (2014) study was that their study was focused on students who had mastered the course content and thus were "bored" with class-wide feedback; however, in this study none of the students felt they had mastered the skill of public speaking. As a result, the majority of students from this study stated class-wide feedback was appreciated. In order for class-wide feedback to be effective, it must

capture the students' attention. Additionally, when students do not feel they have mastered the skill, they are more likely to acknowledge feedback (Panagiotidis, 2016).

Since most students entering college have little public speaking skills, it is important for the teacher to realize that the students have not yet mastered these skills. Thus, giving feedback to the whole class may help reduce students' public speaking anxiety because they receive assurance that they are not alone in their public speaking anxiety.

When public speaking teachers provided class-wide feedback, students preferred receiving positive feedback first, followed by constructive feedback. Even though most students stated that verbal praise was the main factor in decreasing their public speaking anxiety, they also noted the need for constructive feedback. When the positive feedback was explained first to the whole class, the students stated the constructive feedback sounded less "harsh." The students specifically wanted constructive feedback that suggested particular steps for improvement, possibly due to the confidence gained from the positive feedback. This confidence allowed students to recognize they are well capable of further honing their public speaking skills. Therefore, it is crucial that public speaking teachers to provide class-wide positive and constructive feedback prior to individual feedback.

All the students in this study mentioned their teacher provided class-wide verbal feedback on their speeches during the next class period. The students appreciated the immediate feedback because it better allowed them to quickly apply the feedback to their next speech. This finding suggests it is critical for timely feedback to become part of the classroom culture, so that students can properly process and employ the information in their work. This reflects Panagiotidis's (2016) study that determined:

It is crucial to provide feedback within several days of collecting an assignment for a student to gain the most benefit from it. If the process is fresh in the student's mind, he will remember it and want to learn from it (p. 27).

If students are given deadlines for presenting speeches, it is important for GTAs to have deadlines for grading speeches, as well. Since most speeches are graded when the students are presenting in the classroom, it is critical for GTAs to provide timely feedback. Untimely feedback is a common problem within the education system (Panagiotidis, 2016). Some teachers take weeks, even months to provide feedback to their students. This kind of teaching conduct is particularly problematic for public speaking students because it is common to have speech assignments aligned close together, even a week or two apart from each other. The students need the timely feedback in order to properly improve on their future speech assignments. If feedback is not timely, it loses its effectiveness; the information needs to be fresh in students' minds in order for it to be effective. Thus, it is crucial for public speaking teachers to provide feedback the next class period after the speeches are delivered because providing consistent and timely feedback can be significant means for reducing students' public speaking anxiety.

Detailed feedback. Most of the students from this study commented on wanting specific feedback from their small group teacher. This study suggests that public speaking course contents are new and intimidating for many students, which can lead them to have greater dependency on their teachers to provide effective feedback in order for them to be successful. The students from this study felt detailed feedback helped reduce their public speaking anxiety because they knew exactly what they needed to improve on for the next speech to earn a better grade. For some of the students, the small group teacher would write on the board what the students, as well as the whole class, could improve. Several small group teachers stressed the

importance of writing an effective outline and following the outline during their speech. The small group teacher provided specific feedback by writing the outline format on the board. Knowing what they needed to work on when practicing their next speech and that they were not the only ones needing to make improvements, reduced their students' public speaking anxiety.

Even though the verbal class-wide feedback provided guidance for the next speech, some of the students benefitted more from the small group teacher's individual written feedback on the rubric that provided specific information on what that student needed to work on for the next speech. Similarly, Bijami, Pandian, & Kaur Mehar Singh (2016) found written feedback helps students avoid making the same mistakes in future assignments because it highlights what needs to be fixed individually, which leads to improvement on future assignments.

To provide more productive feedback to a student, I would advise, if possible, for the public speaking teacher to go beyond circling a number or letter on a rubric. Teachers could provide specific written feedback in simple terms to clarify expectations that the students can review when preparing and practicing for their next speech. Lack of detailed feedback, such as, "great job" or "expand on this section" often do not provide enough information for the students to know how to improve their grade on their next speech. A public speaking teacher might also try to give detailed actionable feedback such as, "in the beginning of your speech, you want to relate the topic to the audience: why should the audience listen to your speech?"

It is important for teachers to focus on the behavior they want, instead of the behavior they do not want. For example, the teacher would be better serving a student by writing, "when making eye contact, make sure to look around the whole room," instead of "stop reading from

your notes and looking at the PowerPoint.” Such actionable feedback should be used so the students are better able to make appropriate changes for their next speech.

In addition, a public speaking teacher could elaborate on students’ strengths and weaknesses. Writing almost nothing on successful speeches does not necessarily help the student reduce their public speaking anxiety because the student often does not know what they did well. Providing specific positive comments such as, “your attention-getter related well to the audience; students tend to be interested in making more money without having scheduled hours” are another way the public speaking teacher can help boost the students’ self-esteem. The students stated that prior to the first speech, they stressed over certain aspects of their speech, but when they received positive written feedback on those pieces, they realized that their public speaking skills were stronger than they assumed and that they “worried for nothing.”

When a teacher writes an extensive amount of comments on a poor speech, students’ public speaking anxiety may increase because a student may feel they failed and doesn’t know where to begin to improve. It is important for teachers to try to be sensitive when providing constructive feedback, remembering that some students could see constructive feedback as failure. A teacher can gradually provide the constructive feedback. Allowing the student to focus on a couple of aspects at a time, instead of all of the feedback at once. When students practiced for the next speech, they tended to focus on the specific feedback the small group teacher provided. The students’ comments reflect Panagiotidis’s study (2016):

A valuable rule is to offer feedback that includes one fundamental change that will likely yield immediate and noticeable improvement. Students appreciate when given focused, directed guidance on how to meet a goal and often rely on feedback to enhance their performance (p. 28).

The above suggests that providing timely positive and then constructive feedback class-wide, along with written detailed feedback, are ways for a teacher to create effective verbally immediacy.

Being Relatable

Previous research has discussed that a teacher's ability to self-disclose can reduce students' communication apprehension (Frymier, 1993; Mehrabian, 1981). In this study, new themes arose specifically regarding a public speaking teacher's self-disclosure about their own public speaking experiences. Some of the students suggested that their public speaking anxiety decreased when the teacher self-disclosed about their own anxiety, mistakes, and current status.

Small group teacher reiterating his/her anxiety, mistakes, and current status. Most of the students from this study claimed their public speaking anxiety decreased when their small group teacher self-disclosed about their own public speaking anxiety. Some of the students particularly appreciated when their teacher reiterated throughout the semester that they, themselves, also experience public speaking anxiety. The students felt if their teacher, whom they regarded as an expert on the subject, also experienced public speaking anxiety, then having such anxiety is "normal." This concept is consistent with A.N. Miller, et.al.'s (2014) suggestion that when a teacher self-discloses on course material, the teacher's credibility increases, along with a positive classroom environment.

Along with self-disclosing about their own anxiety, when a teacher admitted to grading mistakes, students felt more comfortable approaching them. Knowing the teacher would be fair, students felt comfortable approaching their teacher about their grades or various other concerns (personal and professional), which reduced the students' public speaking anxiety. Furthermore,

students were more willing to accept constructive feedback and to recognize it as supportive when they knew their teacher was willing to admit to their mistakes.

Some of the students' public speaking anxiety also decreased when their teacher self-disclosed about their age and current student status. Because the small group teachers were GTAs, most of them were relatively close to their students' age and were students themselves. Thus, the teachers could sympathize with the students feeling emotionally and financially overwhelmed. Several students thought the teacher could well-relate to them, which created a comfort level that helped reduce their public speaking anxiety. Those students who specifically labeled their teacher as a peer were especially comfortable with the class. Likewise, Miller, et.al. (2014) posited certain self-disclosing techniques, such as revealing personal information, can establish a common bond between teacher and students.

This study shows it is important for teachers to self-disclose to their students to help reduce the students' public speaking anxiety. Self-disclosure does not need to be the teacher's life story; rather, a teacher expressing their own public speaking anxiety to the students often can ease students' own public speaking anxiety. I have witnessed this phenomenon in my own teaching experiences: even though I have been public speaking for years, I, myself, still experience public speaking anxiety before every speech, including the first day of classes. When I have self-disclosed, they recognize that public speaking anxiety is common. For example, I tell my students every semester about my own first public speaking class as a student. My first speech on "how to make guacamole" did not go well: I was shaking, stuttering, scarlet-faced, and scurried. I even struggled to actually make the guacamole itself during the speech. In fact, I spilled the lime juice all over the table.

I've had several students tell me that this story helped them feel more comfortable speaking because that they realized an "expert" like myself has had "growing pains" as a speaker. It is critical for students to hear such stories about their teachers' own public speaking experiences and anxiety; when teachers admit mistakes, the students may realize that everyone makes mistakes and perfection is not expected in their public speaking class, which can greatly reduce their public speaking anxiety.

As noted earlier, teachers who are close in age to their students and identify as students themselves, should embrace such common ground. When engaging in small talk with the students, the teacher may find it beneficial to discuss his/her own struggles as a student and employee because most of his/her public speaking students are experiencing similar situations. Through this study, we have learned students' public speaking anxiety decreased when their small group teacher was willing to discuss their current status as a GTA. Even though not all public speaking teachers are similar in age and academic status with their students, personal self-disclosure provides opportunities for common ground that can help reduce students' public speaking anxiety. For example, I often reminisce with my students about being a poor college student, working full-time, and raising a family all at the same time. I also disclose the mistakes I made at their age, such as poor sleep and study habits, which many students can relate to. When self-disclosing appropriate personal information about myself, I know I am building common ground which has proven to reduce my students' public speaking anxiety. Thus, college public speaking andragogy, in respecting the students as adults, should encourage self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is another form of creating verbal immediacy that can reduce students' public speaking anxiety.

Supportive Environment

For some of the students, the fear of the “unknown” before the course started increased their public speaking anxiety. It was not clear to them how the class would be conducted; some students thought they would present their speeches in front of the large lecture. The thought of presenting their speeches in front of hundreds of students increased their public speaking anxiety immensely. However, once the students learned they would be delivering their speeches in the small group class, their public speaking anxiety decreased. Along with understanding the public speaking class structure, their small group environment decreased their public speaking anxiety through course-specific classroom activities and peer-to-peer interactions.

Classroom activities. The students from this study described classroom group activities as one particular aspect that created a supportive environment. Through group activities, students can learn by reflecting on previous speeches and apply the information to their next speech. For example, some students discussed humorous impromptu activities, such as presenting ineffective delivery techniques that should be avoided in speeches, often resulting in class-wide humor. Other students mentioned they watched funny videos as a class, and then critiqued and identified the speaker’s mistakes. These humor-driven activities helped create a supportive learning environment, which helped decrease students’ public speaking anxiety. This finding further suggests that when group activities involving humor and multimedia are integrated into the class as performance feedback, students can experience continuous improvement on their speeches. According to previous research, when students are given a supportive environment, they are more likely to succeed in their educational experiences (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Nakamura, 2000). According to Nakamura (2000), to create a supportive environment:

means that you [teacher] must provide students with meaningful, valued activities and roles and give them opportunities to solve problems, set high but realistic goals, work with others, and make important decisions relevant to their own participation in the classroom (65).

As Tate (2012) suggests, there are many instructional strategies that a student's brain can learn best from, one being group activities.

A few students mentioned that breathing activities helped reduce their public speaking anxiety. Some teachers taught the students how deep breathing can physically reduce public speaking anxiety. The teacher would have the students stand and complete breathing activities before speeches began. Some students claimed that this activity created a relaxing and comfortable environment, which, in turn, reduced their public speaking anxiety both in general and for that day's specific speech.

My study showed it is useful to incorporate classrooms activities into public speaking classrooms in order to create a comfortable environment that helps reduce students' public speaking anxiety. With all this in mind, if classroom content must be taught through lecture, then a teacher may find it beneficial to consider lecturing for a set amount of time(s) and afterwards conducting group activities. For example, after lecturing on visual aids, the teacher can task students to create their own visual aids that they would incorporate into a speech and share them with the class. Incorporating classroom activities into the public speaking classroom reflects Nash, Crimmins, & Oprescu's (2016) study that found when students are provided opportunities to participate in public speaking group activities, students experience less anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion.

Peer to peer interactions. A majority of students from this study claimed building a relationship with their peers helped reduce their public speaking anxiety. Students from this study noted that once the teacher created a relaxed environment, especially through the group activities, the students felt comfortable communicating with their peers. Some teachers required changing small groups, so students worked with different classmates for each small group activity, allowing the students to communicate with everyone in the class. This class-wide interaction proved to be successful, as many students noted that the closer they became with their peers, the more their public speaking anxiety decreased. According to Holland & Eisenhart (1990), the biggest influence on students' college success is their peers.

Students in this study felt their peers were supportive, were non-judgmental, and wanted everyone to succeed. When students would make mistakes or continually start over, fellow students supported them by expressing their own struggles and providing positive feedback the next class period. Knowing they had peer support helped the students' public speaking anxiety decrease. Much like Cozolino's (2013) study that found students' returned peer support when they felt they were receiving peer support themselves, students from this study remarked that they felt comfortable sharing their own constructive feedback to peers.

As stated before, feedback is crucial for reducing students' public speaking anxiety. However, the feedback does not only need to come from the teacher. When working together, students critiqued each other's work when it was appropriate. Receiving feedback from a peer who is struggling with the same issue can benefit students. Sometimes students are more willing to listen to feedback from a peer, than their teacher. This peer feedback points to the need for teachers to foster students' relationships in a public speaking classroom. From time to time, this means "getting out of the way" and allowing students to participate in personal interaction with

each other. For example, in the beginning of class, when students are having personal conversations amongst each other, the teacher could occasionally start class formally a couple of minutes later than usual, so they can finish their conversations. I was taught in a “teach the teacher” class to arrive to my classroom early to suggest punctuality; however, occasionally throughout the semester, I choose to arrive just at the exact time class is formally slated to begin, allowing the students to build rapport without me there. Once a conversation starts between students, a relationship may begin; mutual support can develop; and the students’ public speaking anxiety may decrease. Through classroom activities and peer-to-peer interactions, the teachers can be more verbally immediate.

Increased Anxiety

As stated before, all the students revealed their public speaking anxiety decreased by the middle of the semester. However, not documented in the literature review, some of the students expressed that two particular situations especially increased their public speaking anxiety: grading and timecards.

Grading. Some students claimed being graded increased their public speaking anxiety; they wanted good grades to maintain a high GPA and knew public speaking was not one of their strengths; the stress they felt over their grade led them to struggle during their speeches. When students observed their teacher writing on the grading rubric while they spoke, their public speaking anxiety increased because the students assumed they “messed up” on their speech. At times, it was hard for the students to “get back on track” with their speech, which, again, increased their public speaking anxiety. Even though students stressed over their grades, causing more public speaking anxiety, it is important to consider that sometimes, such stress can provide motivation for students to perform quality speeches.

Some students' public speaking anxiety increased after they received feedback on the rubric. One of the reasons was the lack of feedback on the rubric. When the teacher would just circle a number on the rubric sheet without providing written explanation as to why the student received that grade, the student's public speaking anxiety increased. Such markings did not provide enough feedback for the student to know what to practice for on their next speech, thus their public speaking anxiety increased.

Even though grading is a requirement for a public speaking class, there are ways for a teacher to lessen students' public speaking anxiety in regard to grading. First, teachers could sit in a part of the room, so students could not see them grading, possibly in the front corner of the classroom. The students would be told that they are only required to make eye contact with the students, not the teacher. Therefore, the students would not see their teacher grading their speeches.

As stated before, teachers could provide more written feedback on the rubric, not just circling numbers. Colleges could also provide online grading options for the teachers to use in the classroom. For example, while the student is being videotaped delivering their speech in the classroom, the teacher can time-stamp their comments in most online grading options. Then while reviewing their speech online, the student can see exactly what they need to work on. The student will no longer be confused regarding the grading. In addition, teachers could reiterate that they are not expecting perfection from the students, so then the students realize making a mistake will not result in an unsatisfactory grade.

Timecards. All of the students' speeches referred to in this study had time requirements. The students were given a time-frame, i.e. five to seven minutes, with a 15 second grace period. If the students went over or under the time-frame, they were docked points. Typically, a teacher

or another student used timecards to display how many minutes were left in the speech. For some students, waiting for the timecards created more public speaking anxiety because they focused on the timecard being raised, instead of their speech: the students would look at the time-keeper hoping he/she would raise the timecard. These students were concerned they did not have enough content. Other students thought the timecards created more pressure; when the student realized how little of time was left, the students were concerned they would not be able to deliver all the information they had left in the short amount of time.

For most public speaking classes, a time limit on speeches is required. Teachers could give students larger time-frames: instead of two minutes with a 15 second grace period, the time-frame could be three minutes with a 30 second grace period. Teachers may consider allowing students to choose if they want the time-cards to be raised.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand students' public speaking experiences, especially their public speaking anxiety. Being a phenomenological study, students described how they experienced and interpreted their public speaking anxiety retrospectively. All students from this study implied their teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediacy did decrease their public speaking anxiety, along with other factors. This section will conclude this study by discussing the following items: Theoretical Implications, Future Research and Limitations, and Final Reflections.

Theoretical Implications

One of the principal objectives for this study was to extend ERT by studying whether students' perceptions of their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy influenced their public speaking anxiety. The results of the study provided support for ERT. ERT proved to be a useful

lens to research what influences students' public speaking anxiety because it presumes that students' emotional responses will dictate if they approach or avoid their teachers. ERT was represented in this study by the teacher creating verbal and nonverbal immediacy using various verbal and nonverbal communication, which reduced students' public speaking anxiety.

Previous research using ERT as their theoretical framework found a teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy does affect students' emotional responses (Motter et al., 2006; Titsworth et al, 2013). In addition, students developed emotional responses to feedback and supportive environment, which, in turn, affected their approachable or avoidance behaviors in the classroom. When a student responded positively to the feedback and supportive environment, they were more likely to approach the teacher and students in the classroom, thus reducing their public speaking anxiety and providing additional evidence supporting ERT.

Even though some students did experience an increase in their public speaking anxiety at times, those students still stated that overall their public speaking anxiety did decrease throughout the semester because of their teacher's verbal and nonverbal immediacy, which also supports ERT.

Limitations and Future Research

It is important to address the limitations that may have affected this study and how the limitations can address future research. One limitation is that the students were from a predominantly White Midwest University. It cannot be assumed that diverse students from other parts of the country would have similar responses. Therefore, future research could seek more diverse students and identities attending institutions outside the Midwest region of the U.S.

In addition, all of the teachers' in this study were GTAs and many students stated they related to their teachers because of similar age and current student status; thus, future studies

may consider examining students' public speaking experiences when taught by full professors. Furthermore, all the students expressed liking their teacher and classroom environment. A focal point for future research may be interviewing students that do not express a liking for their teacher or classroom environment. Additionally, due to the students' responses, it is assumed this university had a strong GTA training program. Therefore, future research could seek universities that do not provide a GTA training program.

Also, the students' public speaking classes were divided between mass-lecture and a lab, with the students' speeches presented in the lab. Future research could focus on self-contained classes that do not have this structure. Additionally, since the students were interviewed individually, there may have been other factors that contributed to the reduction of students' public speaking anxiety, but they may have not felt comfortable sharing or were unable to recall information at the time of the interview. Future research might consider conducting a focus group that may provide a greater understanding of the whole classroom because students could complement each other's comments.

Gender was another limitation and possible future topic that arose while conducting this research. There was some evidence of student gender differences, but I intentionally did not represent gender in this study to maintain students and GTAs anonymity. However, future research could focus on the following questions: does a student's gender influence their public speaking anxiety, and does a teacher's gender influence the student's public speaking anxiety? Do stereotypes about females expressing more emotions than males influence students' ability to express their public speaking anxiety? Similarly, do these stereotypes influence a public speaking teacher's ability to create immediacy in the classroom?

Final Reflections

Even though there were limitations to this study, it provided rich data that can benefit teachers' ability to reduce students' public speaking anxiety in the classroom. However, public speaking is not the only assignment that creates anxiety in students. Writing a 10-page paper, conducting research, taking an exam, preparing a lesson plan, or drawing blood from a patient and more may create anxiety for a student. Thus, it is important address teachers in all fields. In this last section, I will provide my final thoughts and suggestions for GTAs and teachers in various disciplines.

For the most part, teachers are considered experts in their field and conduct extensive research in their field; however, knowing and researching the content well does not mean a teacher can effectively teach the content. It is important for teachers to look beyond the content to reach their students. When students experience learning, there is an emotional attachment, which can often be overlooked by teachers. When Palmer (1998) asked students to describe their good teachers, he found:

Good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a 'capacity for connectedness.' They are able weave a complex web of connections between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves (p.22).

I find it concerning that most professors in a 4-year college, especially grant research institutions, are required to have a Ph.D. in the field they are teaching but are not always required to take an education course. Additionally, according to Edmonds (2015), a majority of American professors are adjunct faculty, which can be a problem for many students due to andragogical

inconsistency. Most adjunct faculty members are not required to attend department meetings and gatherings, leaving the many adjunct faculty “out of the loop” regarding department information. Also, most colleges lack adequate office space for adjunct faculty, so it may be hard for adjunct faculty to meet students outside the classroom. According to Edmonds (2015):

Research has shown that students who take more classes from contingent [adjunct] faculty have lower graduation rates and are less likely to transfer from two-year to four-year institutions. The faculty are less student-centered in their teaching, have less contact with students outside of class, and spend less time preparing for classes (para. 3).

With these situations, the reduced opportunity for contact, may make it difficult for a teacher to foster a teacher-student relationship. Therefore, education training is crucial for professors and adjunct faculty.

As discussed in this study, educational training must incorporate learning the importance of verbal and nonverbal immediacy. As discussed in literature review, most GTAs have little teaching experience and tend to be more concerned with learning the basic needs of teaching, than the interpersonal skills, so it is vital for GTAs’ training include interpersonal skills. The difference between knowing the content and teaching the content is effective communication. Therefore, creating an educational training that incorporates information on verbal and nonverbal immediacy should be a requirement for all teachers to complete before they start teaching college. Colleges should consider creating “teach-the-teacher” training.

Teachers learning simple, yet effective, verbal and communication skills could make a long-lasting positive impact on their students. I feel teachers have a responsibility to learn how their verbal and nonverbal behaviors are influencing their students’ learning and anxiety.

Training teachers on the different aspects of effective teaching could be a promising tool for increasing student-teacher interactions.

It is impossible for all teachers to use the same techniques. However, educational training should provide a variety of teaching techniques for teachers to incorporate into their classrooms. Each teacher can determine which teaching techniques work best for them, and then could incorporate these techniques into their classrooms. Learning effective ways to provide feedback to their students should be an essential tool for teachers in order to help their students be successful. As this study revealed, consistent feedback can become a powerful tool to reduce students' anxiety.

Although each teacher will use different teaching techniques, teachers could learn how to create a supportive environment through verbal and nonverbal immediacy. Through immediacy, a teacher can better show they care about their students as people. Again, this study showed immediacy does not need to be self-disclosing your life story or being comedian, which many teachers may feel uncomfortable performing; rather, it can be as simple as a teacher self-disclosing their own anxiety in college, discussing students' interests when describing the content, or using "we" in the classroom, instead of "I" and "you."

Additionally, learning different nonverbal communication techniques, such as making eye contact with all students, smiling at students when entering the classroom, adding vocal variety when lecturing, walking around the classroom, nodding when student is speaking is speaking up in class can better draw students to their teacher, reducing the students' anxiety towards the class.

In addition, incorporating different content appropriate activities into classroom can create a supportive environment. For most students, classroom activities build peer-to-peer

relationships, which can reduce students' anxiety. Students knowing they are not alone in their anxiety, can help reduce their anxiety. A supportive class environment is the product of student-to-teacher and peer-to-peer relationships.

Furthermore, examples of different activities for the students should be provided to the teachers through the education training, along with setting a time for teachers meet throughout the semester to discuss their experiences (what worked and what did not work) with their group activities. Students from this study noted peer-to-peer interaction helped create a supportive environment, which eased their public speaking anxiety; peer-to-peer interactions for teachers may provide similar support.

This study has been a worthwhile experience for me as an educator. I've gained valuable knowledge that will help me become a better public speaking teacher. Since conducting this research, I have already implemented some the student's ideas about effective teaching techniques into my public speaking with successful results. I have learned that not only should the students receive feedback from their teachers, but students should also provide feedback to their teachers during the semester. Students' feedback could provide the teacher suggestions and activities to help reduce the students' anxiety. Teachers want students to be successful; open communication between teacher and student is the key. As teachers, we have a responsibility to help students reduce their public speaking anxiety. Through effective communication, teachers can become verbally and nonverbally immediate, thus reducing students' public speaking anxiety. Outstanding teachers are not remembered because of a thought-provoking lesson, but by how they made the student feel (Dalonges & Fried, 2016).

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APPENDIX A. RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Recruitment Email: COMM 110 Research Pool

Dear COMM 110 students:

We are conducting a research study on your experiences in your public speaking break-out session. We are looking for individuals who are willing to participate in a one-on-one interview.

All NDSU college students over the age of 18 are eligible to participate in this study. You will receive 10 research credit points for your participation in this project.

This project involves minimal risks to those participants involved. No names or identification numbers will be recorded. All individual demographic information obtained during this study will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary. You may change your mind and quit at any time during the process. Only the principal investigator, Dr. Nate Wood, and the co-investigators, Andrea Ramstad, will have access to the records from this study.

If you wish to participate, please contact me at andrea.ramstad@ndus.edu or 623-210-4234.

Thank you,

Andrea Ramstad

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

Andrea Ramstad

Before the interview starts, the participants will be informed about the purpose of the study and their rights. They will also be informed that they will be recorded, and the researcher will be taking notes.

Being a semi-structured interview, the questions will evolve as the researcher proceeds through the questions.

Opening:

1. Explain study and obtain signed consent.
2. Discuss that the researcher will be taping the interview.

Establishing relationship culture / “warm up” questions:

1. How many credits have you completed in college?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your major? Minor?
4. Tell me about your public speaking experiences before entering COMM 110.
5. Tell me why you chose to take a public speaking class Fall 2017.

Public Speaking Questions

1. What were your perceptions of a public speaking class when the semester started?
 - a. Follow up – did you expect to have anxiety?
2. The semester is six to eight weeks in, what are your thoughts of your public speaking anxiety now?
3. Tell me about your teacher in the break-out session.
4. How comfortable do you feel approaching your teacher in the break-out session with questions, comments, and concerns?
5. Can you think of anything your teacher has done that has changed your public speaking anxiety?
 - a. Follow up – How has your teacher’s verbal behaviors decreased or increased your public speaking anxiety?
 - i. Follow up – Can you give me examples?
 - b. Follow up - How has your teacher’s non-verbal behaviors decreased or increased your public speaking anxiety?
 - i. Follow up – Can you give me examples?
6. In general, can you talk about how your break-out teacher has affected in your level of anxiety in your public speaking class?

Closing:

1. Ask the participant if he/she has any additional comments or questions.
2. Thank the participant for his/her time.