

Capturing Confidence: Engaging Improvisation Techniques to Teach Debate and Public Speaking Skills

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- Public speaking is the **biggest fear** in America (Hunter et al., 2014).
- Many college students and young adults **lack confidence** to speak in front of their peers (Bodie, 2010).
- Improvisational training can **establish confidence** and skill development in public speaking (Kristufek, 2008).
- Improv is an **innovative, organic**, and often **entertaining** performance.
- Students who **challenge themselves** to confidently deliver a message using improv techniques establish confidence and recognize that public speaking might **not be as hard** as they think it might be (Hombach, 2018).

Need for Innovation

- We leveraged Hombach's (2018) **conceptual model** for improvisational theatre to teach small group discussion and debate skills in an oral communication course ($n = 144$) at NMSU.
- Students first captured **ah-ha moments** from videos highlighting Farlow's (2015) 10 foundational rules of improv and Tina Fey's visual cues (Hoang, 2015).
- Groups then **drew a random topic** from an idea pool ranging from serious to silly.
- After each group drew their topic, we set a timer for two minutes and encouraged the group to **build a story** and **act out scenes** related to their topic using the rules of improv that they previously watched in the videos.

How it Works

- Leveraging improv skills when teaching adaptability in small group discussion or debate settings helped **establish confidence and camaraderie**.
- Permission to practice public speaking exercises in a lighthearted and less-serious manner helped **initiate a willingness and desire to speak** in front of their peers.
- Students later engaged with their classmates in the debate with **definitive stances and tones**, which was not observed as prominently in previous labs.
- The fun and relaxed environment encouraged students to **discover** that with time and practice, they can **deliver a prepared speech with the same confidence**.

Results to Date

Reinforcing the **purpose** of improv, the **journey** of confidence, and the **connectedness** of adaptability builds courage to communicate orally.

(Hombach, 2018)

- Students should **engage creativity and adaptability skills** when learning improv.
- We encourage instructors to expect **agile conversations**.
- Practice topics **do not need to be prescriptive or restricted**. A key point of improv is to allow students to creatively, yet professionally, interpret scenes and act out random scenarios.
- Students engaged with the **light-hearted topics** better than the serious topics. If using this activity as an interest approach, we encourage saving more difficult topics for a second trial to keep the energy high.
- If time allows, instructors can **increase the time limit and add more rounds**.

Advice to Others

