

Rhetorical Citizenship

A Written Submission to the *Speaking for Change* Inquiry

Authors:

Dr. Henriette van der Blom, Senior Lecturer in Ancient History,
School of Classics, Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Birmingham

Prof. Alan Finlayson, Professor of Political & Social Theory, School of Politics, Philosophy
Language and Communication Studies, University of East Anglia

Experience:

Dr. van der Blom is an ancient historian specialising in the study of Roman oratory, all aspects of Cicero, and political oratory across historical periods. She is the founding director of the *Network for Oratory and Politics*.

Prof. Finlayson is a political theorist and scientist specialising in the study of political rhetoric, a founder of the Rhetoric, Discourse and Politics Group of the Political Studies Association and on the board of the Rhetoric Society of Europe. He is also the lead for an MA in Rhetoric and Speechwriting scheduled to start at UEA in 2021.

Background Research and Teaching:

Together we have conducted wide-ranging research into the historical and contemporary, theoretical and practical aspects of rhetoric and oratory. Our research project *Crisis of Rhetoric*, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, brought together academics, speechwriters, journalists and politicians to investigate the state of rhetoric and rhetorical culture today. The report of our findings was launched at The House of Lords in October of 2019.

We have given talks on Rhetoric and speechmaking to public audiences (for example at The Hay Festival) and on radio (including BBC Radio 4 and The World Service). Particularly relevant to the present context is the fact that we also have experience of teaching public speaking and rhetoric to university students and to public audiences (ranging in age from thirteen to eighty-five). For example, at the Latitude Festival, we used the ‘Dare to Speak’ model (see below) developed by Prof. Finlayson and UEA colleague Suzanne Derks van Damme to give a crash course in oratory from idea to speech delivery in just ninety minutes. We were also behind the first Political Studies Association national undergraduate political speech competition.

Crisis of Rhetoric (hard copies available on request):

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-artslaw/caha/cor/crisis-of-rhetoric-report.pdf>

Dare to Speak (hard copies available on request):

<https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/DARE%20TO%20SPEAK%20UP%20BOOKLET.pdf>

Undergraduate Political Speech Competition: <https://www.psa.ac.uk/political-speech-competition>

Executive Summary

A central, guiding, concept for the teaching of oracy is *Rhetorical Citizenship*. Under this

heading oracy skills, in addition to promoting confidence and verbal skills, are of great value for:

- Cultivating citizenship
- Inspiring democratic character
- Supporting pupils in becoming skilled speakers *and* critical listeners
- Delivering wider aspects of the curriculum including history, literacy, philosophy, politics, media.

In developing teaching in this area teachers need:

- Models: examples of which can be found in the classical and contemporary rhetorical tradition as well as taken from the contemporary period. Academic researchers can help by assisting in the development of materials to aid in using such exemplars.
- Supporting material: including teaching strategies combining speechwriting and speechmaking such as that found in *Dare to Speak*.

Education for Rhetorical Citizenship

1. Oracy and Rhetoric

We fully support the APPG's goal of promoting skills in public speaking and agree that doing so promotes learning and development of a wide range of ancillary skills.

We also think that alongside general oracy skills there is value in promoting a specific

and distinct form of oracy: Rhetoric.

Teaching and learning in rhetoric focuses attention on oracy skills that are:

- Centred on the preparation and delivery of a single speech as well as debate
- Concerned with the art of *persuasion*
- Able to attune pupils to the multiple registers of public language, the combination of logic and imagery, and to how reason and emotion may work together.

Furthermore, the essence of persuasion in the rhetorical tradition is that one has to adapt arguments to the audience being addressed. Accordingly, learning rhetoric is also learning:

- That other people see the world differently and come to an issue with knowledge of different aspects
- That successful communication involves building bridges between groups of people and individuals
- That public speech and argument isn't only about the forceful repetition of one's claims but also about the development of an argument for others
 - The ethical understanding that public discussion isn't primarily about telling others what we think but, rather, about sharing ideas and giving reasons to each other.

The process of developing an idea into a clear proposition, adapting its presentation in light of reflection on audiences, writing it down and then explaining it orally, promotes a range of cognitive, literary and social skills. Importantly, unlike debate situations which advantage those already confident in speaking and quick to respond, rhetorical training gives less confident students a chance to prepare and feel more able to participate.

2. Rhetorical Citizenship

The teaching and learning of rhetoric are intimately linked to the ideals of democracy:

- the belief that anyone can learn to present publicly their political ideas and their reasons for holding them;
- the value that policies and proposals must be presented and explained to citizens;
- the commitment to listening and assessing both critically and fairly what others have to say.

These principles are captured by the concept of Rhetorical Citizenship.

The idea of citizenship suggests both one's legal status in a country and also a range of rights and duties that come with it. The idea of Rhetorical Citizenship is that some of those rights and

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duties are about language: the right to speak and be heard by others; the obligation to listen; the commitment to find out and try to understand what competing claims other citizens are making.¹

There is much – legitimate – concern at the moment about the rise of 'post-truth' or 'post-fact' political cultures and also about an often shrill and aggressive public sphere. Our research suggests that addressing these requires us not to reduce rhetoric but to improve it and to spread understanding of how to take part in rhetorical culture.

Rhetorical Citizenship can be developed through the study and imitation of 'great' speeches, the critical analysis of past and present examples of rhetoric. But the centrepiece of such

learning is the writing and delivering of a speech *and* listening to and productively appraising those of others.

3. Rhetorical Citizenship and Democratic Character Today

Teaching rhetorical citizenship is a means of:

- Cultivating citizenship in general
- Inspiring democratic character
- Supporting pupils in becoming skilled speakers *and* critical listeners

These aspects of character are of ever more importance as political and public debate passes from the restricted domains of broadcast and print media into the open spaces of the internet.

The Hansard Society found, in 2018, that in the previous year just 15% of over-55s had watched politically-related online videos. By contrast, many more of 18-43s (43%) had seen such videos.

Our own research suggests that YouTube is a very important stage for political rhetoric and for new kinds of rhetorician. Younger people are becoming used to finding and making political arguments online and through internet forums. It is vital that young people develop the skills to critically understand what they are hearing and how to respond to it, and that they learn how to speak well online.

4. Rhetorical Citizenship and the Wider Curriculum

Learning about and practicing rhetorical citizenship means that students also learn about a wide range of other aspects of their curriculum. For instance,

- In studying examples of great past speeches students learn about political and social history
- In learning about ways to present and develop an argument, students acquire reasoning and critical thinking skills and develop the groundings of a philosophical education
- In finding evidence for arguments about public and policy issues students develop a more nuanced understanding of Politics
- In reflecting on the contexts and situations in which rhetorical argument is communicated – face to face, on news programmes and increasingly online – students develop critical skills of media analysis.

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5. Rhetoric has always been taught

The very first – philosophical – objection to teaching rhetoric was the claim that it could not be taught, and that it was a gift possessed only by a few. This view remains prominent. Successful political orators are often described as gifted or endowed with innate charisma.

Rhetoric *can* be taught. In ancient Greece, public speaking was taught so that citizens were able to participate in political debate. The rhetorical handbooks they developed are still used in rhetoric teaching today. In ancient Rome, students:

- Learned to imitate famous speeches
- Practised thinking up arguments to deal with difficult questions and situations
- Gained experience in the arts of rhetorical delivery

In both Greece and Rome, rhetorical training was considered the final stage of education. It was understood to help good students embark on successful careers and, even more importantly, to become fully engaged good citizens.²

Rhetoric can continue to be taught in this way today.

6. The teaching of rhetoric today

In the US today, many universities offer degree programmes in Rhetoric and host Rhetoric Departments. Often a course in rhetoric is a requirement for students taking degrees in subjects such as Engineering and Business. This is the case at, for example, Michigan, Virginia, Berkeley and Iowa.³

In the UK, universities often require students to deliver presentations and to speak in public, especially but not only as part of learning in the Humanities. Increasingly assessment may include an element of public speaking. However, there is little systematic teaching of public speaking in universities and there are reports that students find presentations damagingly stressful.⁴ But rather than stop assessing speaking skills, universities should teach them and schools provide opportunities for pupils to gain both experience and confidence before going on to Higher Education.

In UK universities, there are no Departments of Rhetoric. However, interest in researching and teaching rhetoric is growing apace. There are now a number of scholars, across disciplines, teaching various aspects of political speech and rhetoric. These include:

- A module in Rhetoric in British Politics taught in Politics at The University of Liverpool⁵
- A module in Rhetoric and Political Speech taught in Politics at Goldsmiths.⁶
- A new MA programme in Rhetoric and Speechwriting beginning at The University of East Anglia in 2021
- Modules on Roman oratorical culture in Classics at The University of Birmingham⁷
- A module in Speeches and Speechwriting taught in the English Department at The University of St Andrews⁸
- An MRes in Rhetoric taught at The Centre for Oratory and Rhetoric, Classics, Royal Holloway⁹

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The University of Birmingham hosts the Network for Oratory and Politics (www.birmingham.ac.uk/nop), established in 2014 as an interdisciplinary and multi-institutional research network. It aims to facilitate research into and discussion of political oratory across historical periods and regions and to connect academics and political practitioners of public speech (politicians, speechwriters, political recorders and journalists). The Network co-hosted the *Crisis of Rhetoric* research project, which has informed our wider knowledge and ideas about rhetorical citizenship and the value of rhetorical education in schools.

This growth in teaching and research experience means that academic experts are able to inform each other about the pedagogy of public speaking and to share best practice. This is a propitious time to consolidate and promote the teaching of oratory and rhetoric.

7. Support for Teachers 1: Models

A classical way to learn about preparing and delivering a speech was through the imitation of

others.

At the University of Birmingham, Henriette van der Blom teaches undergraduate and graduate students the history of ancient rhetoric, including practical sessions on analysing ancient and modern political speeches (e.g. by Cicero, Pliny, British Prime Ministers, President Obama) and on preparing and delivering own speeches.

Reading and, in the case of modern speeches, listening and watching speeches provides students with hands-on examples of what works and why it works, which they may take on an use in preparing own speeches from scratch.

The ancient method of analysis, imitation and practice still works.

In developing teaching in this area, teachers need such *models*. We recommend the development, in a partnership between academics and teachers, of materials which present and analyse exemplary speeches and enable teachers to help students to imitate, revise and reassess them.

8. Support for Teachers 2: ‘Dare to Speak’

Teachers also require supporting material to help them develop teaching strategies combining speechwriting and speechmaking.

Dare to Speak is a booklet and training method developed at The University of East Anglia by Alan Finlayson and Suzanne Derks Van Damme. It has been used in teaching undergraduates from across disciplines and members of the public at free events. Prior to the Covid19 lockdown, interest in training using the model had been expressed by The John Lewis Partnership, and The National Education Union. The booklet is designed to be used in workshops and takes students through the following steps:

- Finding ideas
- Honing ideas

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- Shaping a proposition
- Organising the argument
- Writing to a structure and organising an argument: Introduction, Narration, Proof, Refutation, Conclusion
- Adding in flourish
- Body language and delivery

9. Recommendations

- Rhetoric should be taught as part of oracy. Including rhetoric teaching in the oracy curriculum, enabling students to develop their rhetorical citizenship, will be of benefit to individual pupils but also to the democratic culture as a whole.
- Academic researchers can assist by developing materials which afford access to models of great speech from which students can learn by imitating and criticising.
- Academic researchers can also help with supporting materials for training in speechwriting and speechmaking.

10. Conclusion

Rhetoric can and should be taught to school and university students today. Doing so can form a vital part of a wider humanistic and democratic education. It can help people to exercise the full capacities of their rhetorical citizenship.

Isocrates, the Ancient Greek thinker and teacher of rhetoric, worried about the limited possibilities for success when trying to teach people to be fully virtuous and honest. He nevertheless believed, as we do, that:

“people can become better and worthier if they conceive an ambition to speak well, if they become possessed of the desire to be able to persuade their hearers”

For further information contact:

Henriette van der Blom
Dept of Classics, Ancient History and
Archaeology
School of History and
Cultures University of
Birmingham
Edgbaston, Birmingham
B15 2TT
Email:

h.vanderblom@bham.ac.uk Tel:
+44 (0)121 415 8658
Alan Finlayson
School of Politics, Philosophy, Language
and Communication Studies
University of East Anglia
Norwich
NR4 7TJ
Email: a.finlayson@uea.ac.uk
Tel: +44 (0)1603 59 228

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¹ See Christian Kock & Lisa S. Villadsen, ‘Rhetorical citizenship: studying the discursive crafting and enactment of citizenship’, *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 5, 2017.

² See Arlene Holmes-Henderson, ‘Responsible citizenship and critical skills in Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence: the contribution of Classical rhetoric to democratic deliberation’, in Carr, P. Thomas, B. Porfilio and J. Gorlewski (eds.), *Democracy and decency: what does education have to do with it?*, 213-228, Charlotte, Information Age Publishers, 2016

³ See for example ‘Why is Rhetoric Required’, University of Iowa:
<https://clas.uiowa.edu/rhetoric/about/why-is-rhetoric-required>

⁴ Anna Fazackerley, ‘Public speaking: is the push to make students employable going too far?’, *The Guardian*, 14th May, 2019

⁵ More details available at this link:
https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/info/portal/pls/portal/tulwwwmerge.mergepage?p_template=m_pw&p_tu_lipproc=moddets&p_params=%3Fp_module_id%3D70715

⁶ More details available at this link: <https://rl.talis.com/3/gold/lists/9A2CEF0C-BAA8-AA35-605C6686E7BEC950.html?lang=en-GB>

⁷ See also Henriette van der Blom, ‘The State of Speech: Cicero and current research into Roman

republican oratory', available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVv5cs1yCX4>

⁸ More details available at this link: <https://rl.talis.com/3/sta/lists/B66E849C-9E5F-1ACD-4A16-BADF30F9F1D1.html?lang=en-GB>

⁹ For more information on the Centre and the MRes see here:

<https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/research-and-teaching/departments-and-schools/classics/research/our-research-areas/centre-for-oratory-and-rhetoric/>