

1. I am Stephen Coleman, Professor of Political Communication at the University of Leeds. I have conducted research on young people's capacity to speak confidently; collaborated as research lead with the Speakers' Corner Trust in establishing the Youth Amplified website and associated learning and assessment resources; worked with the WEA to provide speaking workshops for a broad range of their students; designed and led a pioneering university module working with undergraduates to enhance their speaking confidence; and published several works on speaking, including a forthcoming book entitled *How People Talk about Politics*. As will be clear from the above, my main interest is in the relationship between speaking confidence and democratic engagement. To be specific, I regard speaking as a fundamental resource for political agency.

GENERAL REMARKS

2. I think that it is important for any consideration of this subject to begin by registering some concern about efforts to turn the act of speaking into a technical competence, inculcated via compulsory school and workplace instruction. In her critique of contemporary efforts to fashion talk as a sellable commodity, Deborah Cameron (2000:180) argues that

... communication training does not empower people on the grounds that people are never empowered by being denied the opportunity to exercise choice and judgement. That is in effect what many regimes of communication training do, even as they claim to be developing 'communication skills' – a paradox that arises because the prevailing notion of 'skill' is mechanical and decontextualized.
3. In criticising the idea of communication as a set of skills to be imparted through disciplinary training, Cameron is challenging the fundamentally undemocratic assumption that most people are not the best judges of how they should speak.
4. In the context of democratic civic expression, advice couched in simple terms of finding the strength to speak up reduces discursive inequality to matters of individual psychological fitness and technical competence. People are left out of political conversations for many more reasons than having low self-esteem or failing to sound like a strong leader. Like communication training, confidence-enhancing pedagogies address personal challenges that are often very real, but they tend to do so in ways that ignore the structural roots of individual powerlessness. If confidence is defined as the reasonable expectation that things will go well, there has to be an objective basis for such optimism. Encouraging people to believe that they are capable of achieving things that they are not able to accomplish on their own is not confidence-building, but cynicism.
5. Despite these strong reservations, I want to suggest that building confidence must be at the core of any attempt to engender inclusive, strong democracy. When the radical educationalist, Paulo Freire (1970/2017:76), declared that 'Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression' he was making a direct connection between confident self-expression and political agency.
6. So, while acknowledging the fuzzy superficiality and suspect didactic ambition of much of the rhetoric from the confidence-boosting industry, confidence remains a vital democratic resource that is unequally distributed. The most fundamental claim of democracies is that everyone has a voice and every voice counts. For that claim to become more than

platitudinous, democratic confidence needs to be conceptualised as a pervasive political quality rather than a psychic form of body-building, focused entirely on the personality traits of discrete individuals.

7. The challenge, I believe, is to think of democratic confidence as an intersubjective phenomenon. The extent to which a society encourages the next generation of citizens to make the most of their voices signals its commitment to democracy. In recent years there have been energetic efforts to teach school students to speak and listen in ways that might enhance their capacity to enter into public acts of intersubjective discourse, clear meaning-making and personal efficacy. Much of this work has been inspired by Andrew Wilkinson's (1970) pioneering work on oracy developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Mercer et al's Cambridge Oracy Skills Framework, which focuses on the physical, linguistic, cognitive and social and emotional aspects of confident self-expression has been particularly useful. Vitally important though teaching children to become the next generation of articulate citizens is, its success depends upon not simply reinforcing generic scripts of appropriate civic performance. A key question for the next generation is how they can acquire the courage to unlearn debilitating rituals of citizenship with a view to performing their democratic selves in ways that suit who they are and want to be. Capabilities' theory, which emerged in the 1980s as a progressive alternative to welfare economics, is relevant here. The idea of capabilities, developed by philosophers Amartya Sen (2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2003, 2011), refers to the opportunities people have available to them to be able to 'do' or 'be' things they have reason to value. Insofar as certain media-related capabilities may be viewed as fundamentally important, advocates of the capability approach argue that they should be made available to all, regardless of subjective preferences. Capabilities are not differentiated in this respect. But, importantly, where the capability approach is sensitive to difference is in emphasizing how differently situated groups may require different resources to realize the same capabilities. The concept therefore makes clear that access to resources does not necessarily mean equal benefits for all. The approach also stresses that people should have the freedom to decide whether to take up the opportunities made available to them. Giles Moss and I, from the University of Leeds, have been working on the use of a new technological tool, designed in collaboration with the Open University, to explore how people respond to spoken messages in different ways (Coleman and Moss, 2016; Coleman et al, 2018). We believe that this tool could contribute valuably to speaking pedagogy.

YOUTH AMPLIFIED

8. Working with the Speakers' Corner Trust, and supported by funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, the Youth Amplified project was established to provide educational resources to be used in and beyond schools to help 11-18 year-olds develop confidence and competence in speaking in public. The Youth Amplified website and educational resources were launched in May 2012 and the lesson plans were distributed to over 100 schools, mainly in West Yorkshire, in October 2012. (Unfortunately, after funding ran out the site was hacked and is no longer accessible online – although we still have all the resources).
9. As I have shown in my study of Citizenship curriculum guidelines and textbooks (Coleman, 2012), communicative competence is required in order to carry out many the practical objectives set out in the Citizenship National Curriculum, but skills for speaking in public are not taught in any formal way as part of the curriculum. In schools where the YA resources were used, teachers reported that
 - they provide a structured approach to developing speaking and listening skills;

- they have boosted the confidence of students who have used them, enabling them to speak in public in ways that they were not able to do previously;
 - they provide support for group learning in the classroom, combining formal instruction with participatory verbal/physical activities;
 - they provide an innovative method of assessment that not only allows teachers to monitor students' progress, but also allows peers to assess one another and students to assess their own progress.
10. I worked with student teachers at Bradford College, which is the largest trainer of Citizenship teachers of all PGCE institutions in the UK, to train 30 student teachers in using the YA resources. Stephen Fairbrass, Principal PGCE Lecturer at Bradford College, has stated that 'There has never been anything quite like this. This is a really innovative and important educational resource which is helping educators to support young people in the development of the skills they need to engage in their communities, schools and workplaces'. The YA resources were adopted by Leeds Youth Services in support of their aim to develop the communicative confidence and capacities of some of the most excluded young people in the city. Vince Foster of Leeds Youth Services has stated that 'Many of the young people working with us have great difficulty expressing themselves calmly and confidently in relation to issues that affect their lives. Having used the Youth Amplified programme in our work with several groups of young people, we have been able to see marked improvements in their ability to project their voices, form arguments and enter into reasonable discussion and negotiation'.
11. Youth Amplified project was a casualty of short-term funding. The absence of an integrated approach to funding and dissemination of speaking resources is a key problem. Creating such a hub would be a useful recommendation for your committee to make.

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