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How can oratory improve politics lectures?

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Introduction

This paper introduces how oratory can be used to enhance the delivery of politics lectures. Its introduction aims to demonstrate the importance of an awareness of verbal communication, however it is by no means definitive in its scope. Indeed, the body of work on oratory is so vast and timeless that to try and sum it all up in a short paper would be foolhardy at best, impossible at worse. However, that does not preclude an introduction from having validity, and so this paper will hopefully lay the foundations for an interest in the subject of oratory and its significance for us as lecturers.

The art of oratory can be summed up as the means by which a speaker can convince an audience of their argument. Such is the importance of oratory to politicians that they use it to seek and obtain power, either within their party or

as a member of the executive. Cicero argued emphasised its significance saying the political states are maintained through the eloquence of oratory. Indeed, effective orators such as Lloyd George, Enoch Powell, and Neil Kinnock have used the art of linguistic construction towards guiding the philosophical development of their respective ideologies. Its power cannot be understated - it is the essence of politics, it has the power to change civilisations. As lecturers, we can and must use those same skills to enthuse and enlighten students, to encourage them to engage with the material, or even to energise them sufficiently to seek a longer term career in politics or even academia. Although this is a simplistic summary, there is nothing simple about the art of oratory, and it is a skill which we – as lecturers – must be aware of if we are able to prove effective facilitators of the learning process. To understand how this is possible, it is first necessary to evaluate oratory and rhetoric, whilst relating them to the learning process.

Oratory and rhetoric are two sides of the same coin. Both are relevant in the communicative process because without both effective communication becomes impossible. Whilst rhetoric is the content of a speech or lecture, oratory is the delivery of that speech. They are not the same thing, and must be seen as two separate art forms with different rules and devices. However, given their fusion, it is necessary to understand how we as orators must deliver chosen rhetoric (lectures) in a convincing manner to the audience (students). So I shall now

introduce four key aspects of effective communication, the first of which is the credibility of the orator.

Analysis – Credibility (Ethos)

An orator needs to have field-specific credibility that shines through their delivery in order for an audience to listen. For lecturers, we must possess academic credibility given that is the expected type of character. Given the audience are those which the orator is seeking to engage with, they must believe that the orator is worth listening to. Otherwise, the audience would not see the validity in listening to their arguments, and this would prevent the learning process from advancing. This is especially important for consideration in the period of higher fees. The product – tuition – must reflect the perceived value of the investment. Put simply, the lecture has to be value for money; it not only has to be delivered, it has to be delivered well. Therefore, the orators credibility is key. Resulting from this expectation will be an assumption of greater investment in the credibility of the academic orator, both in linguistic training and academic record. Importantly, however that credibility is rooted not just in the number of high profile journal articles – although this is very important –, but also in the number of books produced by an orator, as well as their broader impact with online activities. Although academics may not rate books or book chapters very highly, students view them in much more favourable terms, validating their use as credibility builders. Through journal articles, academic

reputations are built. Through books, students believe the orator has a public profile. And by engaging with online activities, the orators contemporary relevance is developed further. Online blogs, such as the LSE, reflect the political world as it currently stands, as such an engagement with this means of output will provide the orator with a real-world means of disseminating research. These help ensure the students regard the orator as being worthy of the financial investment they have made, and keeps their attention on the communicator. Without that credibility, the orator will not prove as convincing when deploying their rhetoric. Although the development of an academics credibility takes place outside of the lecture theatre, it is a vital aspect of enhancing the oratorical skills inside. This is because with enhanced credibility comes greater audience engagement, with greater engagement comes better results, with better results we will produce satisfied ‘customers’. The engagement of the audience is not only important, but rather it is vital if a politics lecturer is to be oratorically convincing.

Analysis – Emotion (Pathos)

Along with credibility is emotion. The emotional engagement of the audience can be a broad aspect of effective oratory, however in the context of politics lecturers, the most effective means is to inspire the imagination of the audience. It is possible for an academic orator to use the broader range of emotions, however they can and should only be deployed when the rhetoric reflects their

necessity. For example, when considering dryer aspects of the political process such as the logistical mechanisms of the European Parliament, engage the students through humour. When considering the ideological heritage of the political movements, strive to instil a sense of that emotional motivation felt by activists through role play. That way, the audience will engage more with the material, enhancing the student learning experience. It will give the students a flavour for the material that simple didactic instruction cannot provide.

In the specific case of humour, the orator can choose to present their rhetoric in a manner likely to energise the audience. By doing so, the orator will – as Quintillian argued – ‘make learning an entertainment’. Quintillian rightly suggests that by making the learning process entertaining, students will automatically engage with the material, and be compelled by their own interest to engage in inquiry-based learning. To be entertaining does not necessarily mean following Matthew Flinders’ example of performing on a piano, however it can mean using humorous techniques which ensures the orator develops a connection with the audience. Inversely, a boring, emotionally dry lecturer will quickly lose the audience, and close down the communicative process. In such circumstances, the audience will erect blocks to learning, or may even close down entirely. Energy keeps the audience engaged! An effective orator will inspire the audience, will enable student learning, and by doing so will prove to be a much stronger communicator.

To engage emotionally, the orator must seek out the passions and interests of the audience. To do that, an awareness of their audience and its expectations will be vital. As politics students, they have demonstrated an interest in that subject, however to break it down into the component parts relies upon an awareness of why they are interested in politics. If their interest in a particular part of politics is lukewarm, inflame their interest by appealing to their imaginations. To do this, make the rhetoric relevant – construct it as a narrative that students can relate to. If it is dry philosophy, connect it to real world examples. As Quintillian argued, boring lectures make students hate their studies, to which they may never return. So we must make our orations interesting by appealing to their emotional interest, even if that interest needs to be grown.

Analysis – Logic (Logos)

The duality of humour and credibility must, however be threaded together by logic. As politics lecturers, we must present arguments based upon logic and reason. In rhetorical terms, this requires us to present interesting narratives around political theories linked to real world examples. By doing so, the logic of a certain position garners contemporary relevance, as well as the attention of the audience. It will become logical, even if at first the theory appears abstract and otherworldly. Clearly the most obvious means of constructing such

arguments is by remaining plugged in to debates surrounding politics through current cutting edge theories. To do this the orator must be aware of such ideas and concepts, as such we must contribute to those debates directly in an accessible manner. Students expect lectures to be based on logical foundations, as such they must be presented in an interesting and engaging manner. Such engagement helps build credibility, but it also ensures the logic of an orators arguments are clear and contemporary.

As an example, the rationale of a political position may be found within the tradition of the specific topic of a chosen lecture. As an illustration, the neoliberalism of the Thatcherite period may be found to be logical if it is connected to the tradition of individualism and counter-collectivism. Equally, the hard left socialism of the Bennite tradition may be logical if connected to the growing discontentment amongst the rank and file with the Labour establishment. Each can appear logical within their own contexts. As such, the logic of an argument should be located both with the philosophical or historical traditions of a chosen subject. For an orator, that logic can be communicated to an audience by convincing them of the rationale for those realities. By doing so, the audience may be compelled to accept the logic of an argument, even if they ideologically disagree with the conclusion. This utilisation of logic within the rhetorical method enables the orator to prove convincing of the logic of an

argument, and will compel the students to engage in their own inquiry based learning.

These three facets are vital in the communication process. The combination of an orators credibility, emotional engagement, and logical argument will help make politics lectures both interesting and enjoyable. For a politics lecturer, this will enable us to inspire an audience. However, rhetoric alone will not energise an audience sufficiently. Rather, a certain style of delivery is vital in order for the students to be truly encapsulated by a lecture. Very briefly, there are three forms of oratorical delivery. The judicial, deliberative, and performative forms. The judicial form looks backwards to quantifiable data. This is the most common form found in law. The deliberative form assumes a debate, in which data and facts can be challenged by those of equal intellectual capital. The performative form is where the orator produces a drama for the audience and is found mostly on the stage. The first form is the least appropriate for politics lecturers given it requires the audience to have comparable knowledge to the lecturer. The second form is more of a debate, and may have increased validity in politics seminars, however is less valid in the lecture theatre. The most appropriate form for lectures is the performative method, which I will now briefly discuss.

Performative

The performative form of oratory entices the audience by engaging directly with Quintillian's prerequisite of effective teaching – that of making the studies entertaining. To entertain does not mean to simply amuse, but rather to enable learning through techniques that compels the students to engage intellectually. For example, the body language, humour, tone of voice of an orator all contribute towards drawing the audience in. The pose of an orator on the stage commands the attention of the audience. Passion, enthusiasm, and a genuine affection for the subject material will all lay the foundations for an effective performance. These are personal traits, which are present in an orator even before a word has been uttered. These enable the audience to invest in the performer. The audience becomes compelled to listen. To achieve this result, an awareness of effective methods can be found through carefully crafted oratorical techniques. Great political orators structure sentences that induce the audience to listen. I shall now briefly introduce two such techniques which will provide an initial foundation for how oratory can improve politics lectures.

Sentences can be rhythmic, they can also be beautiful. To achieve this result, consider how the sentences are formed. A classical technique, known as Anaphora, is using the same phrases at the beginning of short sentences to highlight specific points. **This compels** an audience to listen, **this compels** them to learn, **this compels** them to understand. It is a technique which politics lecturers can use when presenting to students. Praeteritio is another useful

performative technique. It can be of particular use when reminding students of something without making it appear as though you are reminding them of it. For example, if I were to say I'm not going to talk about the importance of an orators credibility, use of humour, or logic when evaluating this aspect of oratory, I have in fact reminded you of it without making it as obvious as a recap. These two basic techniques can begin a transformation of communication that will entice students to engage. They create a narrative of learning to which the students can connect. Although there are other techniques which are as equally valid, time does not fully permit a full discussion of them here. However, it is recommended that an awareness of such techniques will help improve a lecturers communication.

Powerpoint

It would also be judicious to briefly consider one of the most popular barriers to effective oratory, that of Powerpoint. Firstly, it is important to state that Powerpoint has a valid use in lectures as a means of displaying factual information or pictorial representations, aiding the lecturer in their argument. I do not want to give the impression that Powerpoint and effective oratory are entirely incompatible. However, where it fails is when it detracts from the oratory by becoming a distraction. It is tempting for communicators to use Powerpoint as a guide to the topics being discussed. This is entirely understandable. However, its overuse turns it into a duplication of the content,

and a prison for the orator. The effective orator does not use it for notes, nor do they flood it with text. Rather the effective orator relies upon their body, voice and knowledge of the subject to inform and audience, and leaves Powerpoint as a supportive tool. The phrase ‘death by Powerpoint’ may have validity!

Moreover, and most damaging to the communicative process is the orator may end up talking to the slides rather than to the audience. This is fatal when communicating to an audience, given it breaks the connection between the two. Added to this is reading from the slides rather than speaking to the audience. This reduces the speakers role into simply a translator of the written materials at the expense of the audiences attention. Should those presentations be over 60 slides long with five bullet points on each, the audience will disengage swiftly from the topic and, potentially, from a desire to engage in inquiry based learning. Importantly, the student may also no longer view the lecture as value for money, which in the current climate may have longer term damaging affects upon reputational excellence. Effective oratory requires the communicator to speak to the audience, to engage with them, to care about the message. To overuse Powerpoint acts as a barrier to oratory rather than as a window to learning.

Conclusion: The Way Forward?

The issues raised by this paper must compel us, as politics lecturers, to be more aware of how we communicate within the lecture theatre. No more can we assume old conventions are sufficient for the students, given the changing culture of expectations. Today's politics lecturer needs not only to be academically credible, not only politically informed, not only humorous. Today's politics lecturer must also be a performer. To be an effective performer one must have clarity of expression, confident body language, and a presentation style comparable to that of most effective communicators. We deliver monologues, we orate frequently, we have audiences counted in the dozens, if not hundreds. Given most academics rightly have focused upon journal outputs and personal research interests rather than perfecting our communication techniques, it would be judicious for more consideration to be paid to how politics lecturers engage with this part of the vocation.

As such, more attention must be paid to the training of effective communication techniques. These techniques and devices, touched on by this paper, can and are taught through acting and coaching by professional wordsmiths such as Max Atkinson. Moreover, a perfecting of communication will have other academic applications such as conference papers and video podcasts, impacting upon learning beyond the lecture theatre. Students expect their lecturers to strong communicators, with a passion for their subject, and a profile to match. Oratory

can help deliver that expectation. It has the devices, it has the methods, it has the key to audience engagement. As such, we as politics lecturers have the potential to meet the growing expectations with an armoury of successful communicative techniques, used by politicians and performers alike.

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