

EFFECTS OF DRAMA PARTICIPATION  
ON STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE LEVELS

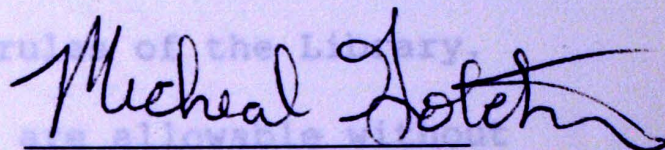
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SHERRY L. GOOLSBY



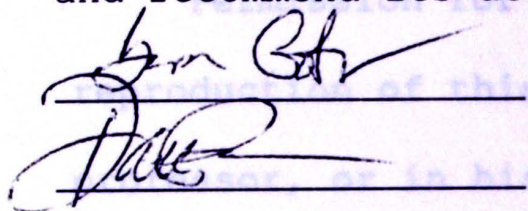
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis proposal written by Sherry Goolsby entitled "Effects of Drama Participation on Students' Argumentative Levels." I have examined the final copy of this thesis proposal for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Speech, Communication, and Theatre.

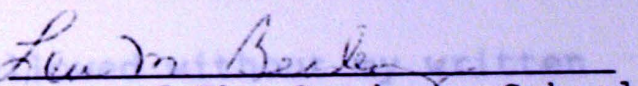


Dr. Micheal Gotcher,  
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We have read this thesis proposal  
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:

  
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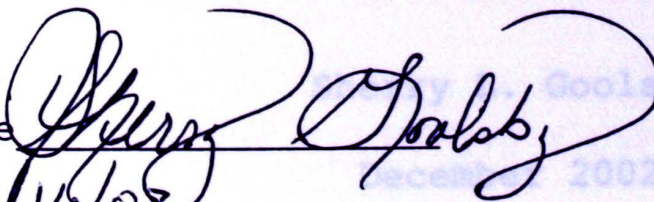


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ON STUDENTS' ARGUMENTATIVE LEVELS

DEDICATION

A Thesis

This Thesis is dedicated to

Master of Arts

Degree

of my high school graduating class,  
Austin Peay State University

(1975-1993).

Sherry L. Goolsby

December 2002



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Micheal Gotcher, for all of his help and patience. I would also like to thank the entire staff of the Department of Communication and Theatre at Austin Peay State University for their assistance and comments. Most of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my friends and family for their encouragement and support.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to  
the Salutatorian  
of my high school graduating class,  
Holly Lee Mercer  
(1975-1993).



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Many rural schools in Tennessee and other states currently lack a strong drama program. Lack of funds to hire a full-time drama teacher, buy drama texts, and purchase other necessary drama materials are common causes. This study supports the need for acting opportunities in all of today's public school systems. Every child attending public schools in the United States of America is entitled to the same educational opportunities.



## TABLE ABSTRACT

CHAPTER		PAGE
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Statement of the Problem	6
	Operational Definitions	6
2.	LITERATURE REVIEW	7
3.	PROCEDURE	26
	Location Description	26
	Measurement Techniques	27
	Assumptions and Limitations	39

The effect that participation in acting activities and lessons has on a student's argumentative level was explored in a rural Tennessee school. Seventeen and eighteen year olds' argumentative levels were assessed using a 20-item self-report scale (Infante and Rancer, 1982) before and after their exposure to acting. An Upper tailed Paired T-test was used to compare the pretest and posttest scores.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	6
Statement of the Hypothesis .....	6
Operational Definitions .....	6
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	7
3. PROCEDURE .....	26
Location Description .....	26
Sample .....	26
Measurement Techniques .....	27
Acting Sessions .....	27
Assumptions and Limitations .....	39
Analysis of Data .....	39
4. RESULTS .....	40
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	43
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	49
VITA .....	55

Johnson, 1979). The authors reviewed more than 100 studies that demonstrated that "constructive controversy stimulates curiosity, improves social perspective taking, enhances cognitive and moral reasoning, improves the quality of problem-solving, and increases creativity (p. 51). Thus, trait argumentativeness is considered desirable.

Despite the importance of argumentation, little systematic research had been conducted through the 1970's due to the lack of a conceptualization and measure of



argumentativeness. Infante and Rance recognized this need in a 1982 article. Argumentativeness was conceptualized as "a generally stable trait CHAPTER 1 disposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and INTRODUCTION verbally the positions which other people take on these issues" (Infante and

Rance) In America, possessing an argumentative trait in the high category has many benefits, particularly in relation to the democratic process, academic achievement, and personal growth. "Our legal and political systems depend on argumentation to determine both justice and policy" (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984, p. 67). David and Roger Johnson advocate creating controversy in the classroom as an important teaching strategy (Johnson & Johnson, 1979). The authors reviewed more than 100 studies that demonstrated that "constructive controversy stimulates curiosity, improves social perspective taking, enhances cognitive and moral reasoning, improves the quality of problem-solving, and increases creativity (p. 51). Thus, trait argumentativeness is considered desirable.

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Benefits of obtaining an argumentative trait in the high category were clear; how to increase those possessing an argumentative trait in the low and moderate categories was less clear. In the education realm, "research has indicated that our curricula and extracurricular communication activities may increase a student's argumentativeness" (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984, p. 69). This vague statement leaves much room for individual speculation regarding specific techniques and duration of exposure required for increases in argumentativeness to take place. The particular elements in one's curricula and extracurricular communication activities responsible for increasing a person's argumentative levels are unclear possibly due to the lack of in-depth studies on the subject.

Intrigued by past evidence and speculation regarding the benefits associated with the display of high argumentative levels, examining the role that argumentativeness plays in acting participation became my focus. Seventeen and eighteen year olds' argumentative levels were assessed before and after their participation in drama lessons and drama related activities. Their scores were examined on an argumentative scale between the



time they began an introduction to acting course and when they finished their last session looking for any changes in argumentative levels. Improving one's diction is as important to success. Argumentativeness deals with a person's ability to successfully debate an issue or to make a successful plea regarding a given stance on an issue. Similarly, success in an acting course derives from one's ability to immediately respond to a situation as his/her character would do so. An entry level acting course will often begin with improvisation activities that deal with the portrayal of a character or scene without rehearsal or preparation as discussed in Chapter One of Harry H. Schanker and Katherine Anne Ommanney's The Stage and the School (p. 7-23). Students may begin with individual improvisations involving a prop such as a cane or an emotion such as sadness, but they will eventually be expected to improvise a scene using a partner and then a group of possibly five persons or more. Improvisation is often surrounded by a conflict. When an improvised scene is based on a conflict, each character is expected to take a clear stance on the issue and successfully argue his/her case to the other character(s).



As a student progresses in an acting course, he/she begins to work on voice and diction. Developing an effective voice and improving one's diction is as important to successful argumentation as it is to drama. In drama, it is the actor's responsibility to "avoid spoiling lines by blurring pronunciation, muffling enunciation, or speaking with a nervous rhythm" (Ommanney and Schanker, p. 92). These same responsibilities would be considered beneficial in leading a successful argument.

An acting course utilizing the textbook, The Stage and the School, is meant to familiarize students with general concepts of drama and help them become less apprehensive about interacting and responding in a variety of situations (Ommanney and Schanker). It was hypothesized that as students become more confident in their acting abilities, they would become more confident in their ability to debate issues. The pretest and posttest scores on an argumentative scale would determine if there was a direct correlation between acting training and argumentative levels.



## Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect that participation in acting activities and lessons has on a student's argumentative level.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Statement of the Hypotheses

Seventeen and eighteen year olds will experience an increase in their argumentative level after exposure to acting sessions.

Acting training can be instrumental in the task of increasing one's argumentative level.

### Operational Definitions

In this paper, the term argumentativeness refers to "a generally stable trait which predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues" (Infante and Rancer, 1982, p. 72).

Argumentativeness is composed of the tendency to approach arguments and the tendency to avoid arguments" (p. 72). The tendency to avoid arguments (ARGav) is seen as a debilitating factor, weakening the tendency to approach arguments (ARGap) thus



an individual's general trait to be argumentative (ARGgt)

can be expressed:

$$ARGgt = ARGap - ARGav$$

## CHAPTER 2

The above equation served as a basis for the eventual

development of their LITERATURE REVIEW scale to measure

ARGgt, 10 for measuring ARGap and 10 for measuring ARGav.

Many researchers have explored the topic of allows

argumentativeness. Some of the most noted and closely

related research to my hypotheses are summarized in this

chapter. Much of the research that has been completed

concerning trait argumentativeness has raised many more

questions than it has answered. individual who almost never

dispu Seeing the need for an instrument to measure one's

argumentative level, Dominic A. Infante and Andrew S.

Rancer developed a 20-item, self-report scale. The process

is described in a 1982 article published in the Journal of

Personality and Assessment entitled "A Conceptualization

and Measure of Argumentativeness." Infante and Rancer

conceptualized argumentativeness as "a trait which is this

composed of the tendency to approach arguments and the

tendency to avoid arguments" (p. 72). The tendency to

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weakening the tendency to approach arguments (ARGap) thus



an individual's general trait to be argumentative (ARGgt), can be expressed:

$$\text{ARGgt} = \text{ARGap} - \text{ARGav}$$

The above equation served as a basis for the eventual development of their 20-item self-report scale to measure ARGgt, 10 for measuring ARGap and 10 for measuring ARGav.

Infante and Rancer's argumentativeness scale allows the assessment of one's argumentative level, but what should we do with the information? "Extremely high ARGgt scores may identify the incessant arguer whose behavior impairs interpersonal relations" (p. 80) while "very low ARGgt scores may identify the individual who almost never disputes an issue, is extremely compliant, and is easily manipulated in a manner that violates his or her best interests" (p. 80). The danger of dysfunctional communication associated with extremely high and very low argumentative levels increases the importance of finding techniques to avoid this occurrence. The goal of increasing one's argumentative level was included in this thesis study.

Initially, trait argumentativeness was sometimes confused with verbal aggressiveness. Verbal aggression is "a destructive form of communication, which may produce



damaged self-concepts, embarrassment, frustration, anxiety, anger, and damaged relationships, and may lead to physical aggression" (p. 69). Argumentativeness, on the other hand, was conceptualized by Infante and Rancer as " a generally stable trait which predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on the issues" (1982, p. 72). Two years after the development of the Argumentativeness Scale, Dominic A. Infante teamed with J. David Trebing, Patricia E. Shepherd, and Dale E. Seeds publishing a study in the Southern Speech Communication Journal entitled "The Relationship of Argumentativeness to Verbal Aggression." Their study involved two research questions.

The first research question was: Are high, moderate, and low argumentatives' intentions to use verbal aggression affected by the obstinacy or adaptability of the component? With the adaptable opponent, persons who were high, moderate, or low in argumentativeness were about equal in their preference for verbal aggression. Regarding high argumentatives, preference for verbal aggression was not significantly different. The statistical power was .58 (Cohen, 1977). For moderate and low argumentatives the



likelihood of verbal aggression messages was higher with a resistant than with an adaptable opponent, suggesting that high argumentatives were not as easily provoked to prefer the use of verbal aggression.

The second research question was: Do males and females differ in their intentions to use verbal aggression with obstinate and adaptable opponents? When the opponent was adaptable, males were more likely than females to prefer the use of verbal aggression. When the opponent was obstinate, males and females were about equal in their preference for verbally aggressive messages. The statistical power for this comparison was .74 (Cohen, 1977). Previous research has found males to be more verbally aggressive than females. However, this research suggested that situational factors, such as the obstinacy of one's opponent, might influence the verbal aggressiveness of women.

The results of this study indicated that persons who score high on a measure of argumentativeness were least provoked to prefer verbal aggression. This supports the view that verbal aggression is mainly a result of a lack of argumentative skill. If this is true, it supports the need for further research regarding specific curricula and



extracurricular activities responsible for increasing one's argumentativeness thereby reducing one's verbal aggression, which often leads to physical aggression.

Curious as to the relationship of social desirability with trait argumentativeness and communication apprehension, Guo-Ming Chen published an article in *The Journal of Psychology* entitled "Social Desirability as a Predictor of Argumentativeness and Communication Apprehension" in July of 1994. In this article, Chen describes his study of undergraduates at the University of Rhode Island; he hypothesized that high social-desirability individuals would be more apprehensive and less argumentative in the process of communication. As a personality variable, social desirability is considered "an individual's tendency to perform socially and culturally acceptable and approved behaviors" (Chen, 1994). A 10-item instrument adapted from Infante and Rancer's Argumentative Scale (1982) and McCroskey's Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (1982) were used to test the hypotheses. The results of the study confirmed both of Chen's hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 predicted that high social-desirability individuals would score lower on the



argumentativeness scale than would low social-desirability individuals. High social-desirability individuals ( $M = 3.16$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) scored significantly lower than did low social-desirability individuals ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ),  $t(162) = 2.29$ ,  $p > .05$ . Hypothesis 2 predicted that high social-desirability individuals would score higher on the PRCA-24 than would low social-desirability individuals. High social-desirability individuals ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) scored significantly higher than did low social-desirability individuals ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ),  $t(162) = 2.29$ ,  $p > .05$ .

This study attempted to examine the impact of social desirability on argumentativeness and communication apprehension. Individuals scoring high on a social desirability scale showed more apprehension and were less argumentative in communication. Crandall, Crandall, and Katkovsky found that individuals with a higher degree of social desirability were less proficient in using language, showed a low degree of task productivity, tended to be more dependent on others for completing assignments, and were less aggressive verbally and physically in interacting with others (1965). Could it be possible that students with a negative beliefs about arguing, and few low argumentatives



higher degree of social desirability have a different belief structure about arguing?

Andrew S. Rancer and Dominic A. Infante, original creators of the Argumentativeness Scale, teamed with Robert A. Baukus to investigate the particular beliefs that differentiate types of argumentative individuals.

Published in the January 1985 edition of *Communication Education*, "Relations between Argumentativeness and Belief Structures about Arguing," focused on determining the belief structures which differentiate high, moderate, and low argumentatives.

Rancer and his colleagues conducted analyses to determine the particular beliefs which differentiate the three types of argumentatives. Of the nine types of beliefs, seven could be classified into positive and negative and were significant ( $p < .001$ ). A greater proportion of high argumentatives had positive beliefs about Activity/Process, Control/Dominance, Conflict/Dissonance, Self-Image, Learning, and Skill. The proportion of low argumentatives was highest in terms of negative beliefs about Hostility, Control/Dominance, and Conflict/Dissonance. Few high argumentatives listed negative beliefs about arguing, and few low argumentatives



indicated positive beliefs. For the positive beliefs, moderate argumentatives' responses were intermediate in comparison with high and low argumentatives. However, with negative beliefs, greater proportions of moderates had negative beliefs about Self-Image and Skill.

Rancer and his associates believed that "identifying the underlying belief structure associated with arguing may aid us in attempts to alter an individual's communication predisposition and consequently their communication behavior" (1985). This information could be useful to teachers of public speaking, interpersonal communication, argumentation and advocacy, mediation, negotiation, and courses dealing with communication conflict in general. The primary textbook used in this research, The Stage and the School, includes the act of resolving a conflict in the first chapter entitled *Improvisation* (Ommanney and Rancer). Specifically in the education realm, low argumentative students who deem arguing as a disruptive, hostile, or anti-social communication activity may be inhibited in their communication performance.

Communication performance is explored by Dominic A. Infante in a Communication Education article entitled "The Argumentative Student in the Speech Communication



Classroom: An Investigation and Implications," in which he discusses a study regarding the characteristics of the argumentative student in the speech communication classroom. Several variables, derived from communication and personality-related literature, were selected to determine whether they discriminated between high and low argumentatives. The variables, along with their expected relations, were:

- (1) birth order (first borns should be more argumentative since research suggests they are more motivated to prove, be competitive, and have leadership); (2) family size (the more children in a family the more potential for social conflict, thus the more opportunity to develop an argumentativeness trait); (3) liberal-conservative extremeness (taking extreme positions invites argument and thus necessitates being argumentative); (4) amount of training in argumentation (training may result in greater argumentativeness, or students who like to argue may elect courses which encourage such expression); (5) college grade point average



(the trait to be argumentative may be an indication of achievement motivation); (6) preferred size of college classes (high argumentatives should prefer smaller classes since smaller classes typically provide a greater opportunity for arguing); (7) amount of communication required in intended profession (more argumentative students should seek professions with high interaction demands); (8) satisfaction with interpersonal relations (no expected relation with argumentativeness); (9) ability to relate to peers (no expected relation with argumentativeness). (Infante, 1983, p. 142-143)

There were 701 students enrolled in the introductory course in communication at a large midwestern state university that completed two instruments during the first week of classes in the quarter. They completed the Argumentativeness Scale proceeded by a second questionnaire which contained measures of the potentially discriminating variables (Infante & Rancer, 1982). A five-point scale was used for the variables. High argumentatives were defined



as subjects with ARGgt scores greater than one standard deviation above the mean ( $n = 11$ ). Low argumentatives were defined as subjects with ARGgt less than one standard deviation below the mean ( $n = 117$ ).

Two analyses suggested that five variables discriminated between high and low argumentatives. They suggested that high argumentatives, when compared with low argumentatives, received more high school training in argumentation, report higher college grade point averages, were born earlier in the family birth order, prefer smaller classes, and are more liberal.

The variable which best discriminated between high and low argumentatives was the amount of high school training. Duncan's test along with the discriminant analysis suggests the most argumentative individuals had the most high school training in argumentation. Because of the *ex post facto* nature of the research, this relationship might also be explained by students who are initially high in argumentativeness electing the most high school training in argumentation. Infante recognizes the need for research at the high school level to determine what the speech communication curriculum and extracurricular activities do to the student's level of argumentativeness.



In 1990, Kent R. Colbert and Todd Dorff conducted a study on two hundred eighty-one high school forensic students focusing on the effects of forensic participation on two specific traits—argumentativeness and verbal aggression. The results were presented in 1991 at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association in Atlanta, Georgia entitled "The Effects of Forensics Training on Verbal Aggression and Argumentativeness." Using D.A. Infante's Argumentative and Verbal Aggression Scale, Colbert and Dorff found a positive correlation between argumentativeness and high school debating experience; the results also showed that verbal aggression decreases as argumentativeness increases. This study supported the idea that social learning and argumentative skill deficiency are two of the major causes of verbal aggression, and that developing argument skills through debate training strengthens the argumentativeness trait and thereby reduces the verbal aggression trait.

As in debate, the acting process requires one to take on a role separate from themselves and convince an audience of their sincerity. Both the debater and the actor must convince observers of their genuine concern regarding an issue or conflict. The debater and the actor must present



a convincing argument for their stance on an issue in order for the audience to buy into it.

Both acting and debate are centered around conflict. A debater analyzes an issue and takes a stance. An actor analyzes the issue or issues surrounding a script and decides how their particular character would respond. Constantin Stanislavski describes the score of a role in his book, Creating a Role, using the following example:

I shall put myself in the place of the actor playing Chatski in *Woe from Wit*, and attempt to find out what physical and simple psychological objectives naturally form themselves in me when I begin, in imagination, to exist in the center of circumstances, to "be" in the vortex of life in the Famusov house in Moscow in the 1820's. (Stanislavski, 1961, p. 56)

A person's character should not be judged based on the role they take on in a play or debate. In both scenarios, the responses given by the participants in no way reflect upon who they are as people. Those with argumentative skill seem to grasp the concept of separating the role someone takes on from the actual person much better than



those lacking argumentative skill. Those with argumentative skill are less likely to resort to verbal and physical aggression because they understand the distinction between the actual person and the role they are playing (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, and Seeds, 1982).

The likeness between debate and acting led me to believe that training in acting could provide someone with argumentative skill just as forensic training had done in Colbert and Dorff's study in 1990. My focus became acting participation with high school students. I chose a rural high school in which forensics training was not available to escape any confusion regarding the cause of any personality changes that might occur during the course of the study.

The similarities between debate and acting could result in a parallel outcome in relation to increased argumentativeness. Colbert and Dorff's study with high school forensic students and this study with high school acting students might produce similar results. The speculation became that both studies would suggest that developing argument skills whether it is through debating or acting strengthens the argumentativeness trait and thereby reduces the verbal aggression trait.



Through training and practice, the actor and the debater gain confidence in their ability to analyze an issue and take a stance. Part of their strength as a debater or an actor is grounded in their ability to successfully convince the audience as well as other actors and debaters of their genuine concern regarding an issue or conflict. When the receivers of the information regarding an actor or debater's stance on an issue are persons less skilled or unskilled in the art of acting or debating, the performer's individual character might mistakenly be judged. Those with argument skills seem to grasp the concept of separating the role someone takes on from the actual person much better than those lacking argument skills. Therefore, the opportunity for some form of training associated with increasing one's argumentative level should be available and possibly mandatory before a student graduates from high school.

Four year colleges have addressed the issue of speech training by requiring an entry level speech course commonly referred to as "Fundamentals of Public Speaking" or "Introduction to Public Speaking." When I took this course in 1995 from a southern university, I was astonished at the state of most of my classmates. The majority of my



classmates were poorly prepared for such a class. Sweaty palms and shaky knees were common on performance days. My first thought was that my classmates should have had help in this area before beginning college, but the reality is that many of the smaller communities from which they came did not provide many if any opportunities to gain speech training.

My personal observations both in this entry level speech course and in other courses taken at the same state university clearly exposed the need for training in argumentation before one's college years. At the very least, the opportunity for formal training should be provided before graduating high school, if not before entering high school. Violence in public schools is on the rise. Students need to be taught how to debate issues without resorting to verbal aggression and physical violence. The art of argumentation is a skill, not a trait you are born with. Just like any other skill, the art of argumentation must be taught.

Infante established the amount of high school training in argumentation as the variable that best discriminated between high and low argumentatives (1983). In his study with 701 students enrolled in the introductory course in



communication, the most argumentative individuals had the most high school training in argumentation. The results of Infante's study establishes training as the best way to increase a person's argumentative trait, thereby decreasing the tendency to resort to verbal aggression. The next question is which type of classes or activities in high school would be most instrumental in providing training in argumentation. Colbert and Dorff's study supports the use of forensic training as an avenue for the strengthening of argument skills. Not all students will have the desire to be a part of a forensics team and may choose to look at other avenues that could provide the same desired outcome. Because of the similarities between acting and debating, the participation in acting sessions was explored as a possible alternative for the purpose of affecting one's argumentative level. In this study of seventeen and eighteen year olds' argumentative levels, a significant increase in scores after their participation in acting sessions was anticipated. This study was expected to support the use of acting sessions as a tool for increasing one's argumentative level.

Although the benefits of argumentative training have been established by Infante and his colleagues for a number



of years, it has yet to become a formal requirement for high school graduation. One fine arts credit is required for college bound public high school students in the United States. However, this does not have to be fulfilled by an acting class. In many cases, an acting class is not even given as a choice in rural areas. The other proven method of argumentative training, forensics, is sometimes offered only as an optional after-school activity rather than a formal class if it is offered at all. Broad graduation requirements and inconsistencies between public school systems have contributed to the significant number of students graduating high school without formal training in argumentation.

Four year colleges have taken the "it is better late than never" approach by providing a public speaking class to its undergraduates, but what about the high school graduates that do not attend a four year college? More often than not, these graduates enter society without the much needed skills of argumentation making them more likely to resort to verbal aggression and possibly physical violence in the workplace, home, and elsewhere.

Public school systems in the United States have a responsibility to prepare its young people with the skills



necessary to become a successful productive member of society. One of the necessary skills is training in argumentation. Argumentative training should be as common in public schools as reading, writing, and arithmetic.

#### PROCEDURE

##### Location Description

The high school in this study is located in a rural area of Tennessee and includes seventeen and eighteen year old students. The student body of this school is made up of more than 96 percent white, less than 3 percent black, and less than 1 percent Hispanic. At the time of the study, the student population was made up of 48.5 percent male and 51.1 percent female. Students in this study attend a small school of less than 300 students. Prior to the Spring 2000 semester, no acting classes or acting-related clubs were available to the students.

##### Sample

Out of a total of 116 junior and senior high school students, 12 males and females participated in the study. A sample consisting of 10 percent of the total population



## CHAPTER 3

### Chapter 3 Measurement Techniques

#### A pretest/posttest PROCEDURE

participants. Before participating in an introduction to acting class that is a Location Description one-month period,

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Gamanney and Schanker's Sample The Stage and the School

(1999) Out of a total of 116 junior and senior high school students, 12 males and females participated in the study. A sample consisting of 10 percent of the total population



of 17 and 18 year olds attending the school was included on a voluntary basis.

## Chapter One Measurement Techniques

A pretest/posttest format was used on the participants. Before participating in an introduction to acting class that met every weekday for a one-month period, Infante and Rancer's 20-item Argumentative Scale was given to each participant (Infante and Rancer, 1982). Table 3-1 contains the scale used. Shortly after thirty hours of acting sessions were completed under the instruction of a kindergarten through twelfth grade licensed theatre teacher, the same 20-item scale was given to the participants again.

## Acting Sessions

Every weekday for four weeks, the participants were exposed to acting exercises and activities contained in Ommanney and Schanker's textbook, The Stage and the School (1999). Any talk of chapters, exercises, and activities within this section will be of ones contained within Ommanney and Schanker's text. Prior to each session,



homework such as chapter reading, video watching, portfolio preparation, and line memorization was assigned.

Day 1

Chapter One entitled *Improvisation* had been read by the participants prior to this meeting. The session began with two improvisation games called "The Mirror" and "The Machine." These activities helped everyone become comfortable with the idea of working with partners and in groups. The participants then moved on to solo improvisations using actions like hemming a skirt and applying makeup. After mastering individual improvisations, two to five person conflict improvisations were assigned. Students with low to moderate argumentative levels were not as quick to respond in the conflict improvisations initially when compared with those displaying high levels of argumentativeness.

Day 2

Exercises from Chapter Two entitled *Pantomime and Mime* became today's focus. After having read this chapter the night before, participants were ready to practice pantomime and mime techniques. Today's session began with relaxation exercises that helped everyone focus and prepare for the posture, walking, crossing, falling, and turning exercises



that followed. After mastering these activities, participants moved on to exercises involving gestures and pantomime expressions. Participants generally performed on the same level during today's activities.

### Day 3

Chapter Two, *Pantomime and Mime* was continued on day three. Participants were asked to come to the session prepared to pantomime a characterization piece and an object piece. The characterization pantomime would involve a situation such as hearing a noise in their house while watching a horror film. The object pantomime involved placing one round object out of sight behind a small screen or in a box. Participants were then each asked to portray imaginary people such as a butler or traffic officer. This was followed by pantomiming a real activity they do often such as brushing their teeth. The last exercise of the day involved group pantomimes, concentrating on cooperating with others to create the best effect. Students with low to moderate argumentative levels seemed less apprehensive than the first day when working in groups.

### Day 4

This session was devoted to Chapter Three, *Voice and Diction*. The session began by working on breath control.



exercises followed by voice quality activities. During the pitch and volume exercises, students who began with high argumentative levels did seem a little more outgoing. Vowel and consonant sounds were also covered.

Day 5

Chapter Four, *Acting*, was assigned the night before. Participants brought a character sketch and a partially scored script to class. After discussing and going over these assignments, two exercises to help with entrances and exits from the stage were covered. This chapter also included more voice and diction exercises such as inflection and dialect. Students who began with low argumentative levels were making noticeable improvements in regards to self-confidence. Everyone seemed to enjoy tremendously the dialect exercise.

Day 6

Students were to come to class prepared to perform a two-person scene. With only a single weekend to prepare, participants were encouraged to memorize their lines but were not required to do so. Students more familiar with their lines displayed more appropriate body language during their scenes than those that had to continuously refer to their script; however, no one seemed frightened to perform.



Day 7

Today, each participant was asked to come to class prepared to perform a monologue of one to two minutes in length. There seemed to be a small amount of apprehension before their monologue performance; but, after the second monologue performance, everyone else seemed more receptive to the activity.

Day 8

Chapter Five entitled *The Structure of Drama* was assigned the night before. Participants read about Aristotle's Key Elements of a Play and the stages in the plot structure of a play. Participants were asked to identify elements in the first two scenes of a Shakespeare play that reveal the where, when, why, and who of the play. This activity was followed by the Motivation and Personality activity which required each participant to assume the part of a character from a play while the rest of the class asked them questions. Those beginning the sessions with low argumentativeness pulled through the activity without hesitation. Those beginning the sessions with high argumentativeness did seem more comfortable with the activity and were quicker to respond when asked an

Day 11



extremely thought provoking question like, "What were you thinking while standing over a dead body?"

Day 9 After having read Chapter Six entitled *Varieties of Drama* and watching a tragedy and comedy of choice the night before, students came to class prepared to answer questions regarding comedy techniques and tragic elements as it pertained to their selections. All students performed primarily on the same level during today's activities. There were some differences of opinion when discussing which comic technique is most effective in a play or film; I was impressed with how smoothly the debate over this issue went. No one seemed to take comments personally or lose their temper during the debate.

Day 10 Participants were asked to read Chapter Seven, *History of Drama*, the night before and prepare a presentation over one of the historical periods covered. After each participant presented their time period including how the culture influenced drama, an activity over asides was covered briefly. Everyone seemed confident and well-prepared for their presentations.

Day 11



Chapter Eight, *Producing the Play*, was to be read before this session along with a short play. Participants were divided into groups and required to decide on a single play to analyze. Each group considered production needs such as settings, costumes, actors required, and royalty costs. After each group presented its findings to the class, the class decided on the best play choice for its school. Participants were then asked to design a rehearsal schedule for the play chosen. Some liked the idea of longer rehearsals on very few days of the week while others preferred a balanced Monday through Friday schedule. I found no correlation between rehearsal schedule preference and argumentative traits.

Day 12

After analyzing a straight play, the participants were ready for Chapter Nine entitled *Producing the Musical Play*. Each participant was asked to present the nonproduction costs of a musical play such as script and royalty charges. After comparing nonproduction costs of various musicals, students were asked to compare the musical they had chosen with one of the straight plays they had previously studied. They were asked to pay attention to how the use of music and dance affected the treatment of theme, character,



setting, and action. When asked which type of play they preferred, the majority chose straight plays to musicals.

Day 13

Chapter Ten entitled *Stage Settings* provided the participants with activities regarding scenery and flat handling. Participants were asked to select a scene from a familiar play and describe the amount and type of scenery they preferred and the most appropriate color scheme. Realistic scenery with tangible props was preferred over abstract scenery and mimed props used in a play like *Our Town*. After presenting their scenery and color scheme findings to the class, large pieces of cardboard was used to practice methods of handling a flat. Participants were

Day 14 the option of simply describing the costumes if they

Chapter Eleven entitled *Lighting and Sound* included a purchase list activity in which participants were required to create three lists: one for a school that could purchase only the minimum equipment, a second for a school with more resources, and the third for a school with unlimited resources. Resources, in this case, referred to money, a theater facility, people, and time. Participants' findings were presented to the class in groups. Everyone seemed to pattern their makeup creation after and filled out a



comfortable with the activity, and no one was apprehensive during his/her presentation.

Day 15

Chapter Twelve entitled *Costuming* provided two activities covered in class. The first activity involved the choice of a costume for two young people, real or imaginary, that came from totally different backgrounds. Participants were asked to choose costumes that would help an audience identify with each character's personality traits. Their decisions regarding each character's costume was presented to the class including an explanation for their choices. Those with better drawing skills seemed to be more comfortable with this activity. Participants were given the option of simply describing the costumes if they were not confident in their drawing abilities.

Day 16

Participants began Chapter Thirteen today simply titled *Makeup*. Everyone was asked to bring a portfolio to class showing close-ups of interesting faces they might want to use as models. Pictures could be obtained from magazines, photographs, cartoons, newspapers, and the internet. Participants chose a character they would like to pattern their makeup creation after and filled out a



makeup worksheet. The worksheet provided them with exactly what materials they would need such as eyeliner, powder, eye shadow, and rouge.

Day 17

Participants brought all necessary materials required for their makeup project to class. Participants practiced applying makeup with a partner. The females were generally more skilled in applying makeup. The males did seem to become more interested when applying special makeup such as elderly, facial scars, and blemishes.

Day 18

Chapter Fourteen entitled *Theatre and Other Media* was to be read before this session. In addition, each participant brought a history report about a television program or a star to class. After sharing their findings, participants worked with partners to create a storyboard. Better drawers were teamed with a less than good drawer to help the storyboard activity run smoothly. Working with partners in this fashion worked well; no one seemed overwhelmed with the activity.

Day 19

Chapter Fifteen entitled *Theatre and Other Art Forms* provided activities that were very different from any



previously covered material. Participants began by presenting a song concentrating on the theme and the writer's purpose in composing the work. If the song had lyrics, they were asked how they affected the communication of theme, mood, character, and setting. After the song presentations were completed, everyone was asked to choose a brief scene with a partner and interpret it through dance movements. The females were more receptive to the dance activity than the males. The males seemed embarrassed at first but slowly overcame their stage fright as the activity progressed.

Day 20

Participants were asked to present a plan for adapting a children's story to the musical theater. *Hansel and Gretel* was given as an example of a permissible children's story. All students did well with this activity concerning choices of songs and stories. However, those that did not feel like they were strong singers tended to choose songs with simple melodies like "Old MacDonald Had a Farm."



Table 3-1  
Instructions

The Argumentativeness Scale (Infante and Rancer, 1982)

This questionnaire contains statements about arguing controversial issues. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by placing the appropriate number in the blank to the left of each statement. If the statement is *never true* for you, place a "1" in the blank. If the statement is *rarely true* for you, place a "2" in the blank. If the statement is *almost occasionally true* for you, place a "3" in the blank. If the statement is *almost always true* for you, place a "5" in the blank.

- \_\_\_ 1. While in an argument, I worry that the person I am arguing with will form a negative impression of me.
- \_\_\_ 2. Arguing over controversial issues improves my intelligence.
- \_\_\_ 3. I enjoy avoiding arguments.
- \_\_\_ 4. I am energetic and enthusiastic when I argue.
- \_\_\_ 5. Once I finish an argument I promise myself that I will not get into another.
- \_\_\_ 6. Arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves.
- \_\_\_ 7. I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a point in an argument.
- \_\_\_ 8. When I finish arguing with someone I feel nervous and upset.
- \_\_\_ 9. I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue.
- \_\_\_ 10. I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I am about to get into an argument.
- \_\_\_ 11. I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue.
- \_\_\_ 12. I am happy when I keep an argument from happening.
- \_\_\_ 13. I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue.
- \_\_\_ 14. I prefer being with people who rarely disagree with me.
- \_\_\_ 15. I consider an argument an exciting intellectual challenge.
- \_\_\_ 16. I find myself unable to think of effective points during an argument.
- \_\_\_ 17. I feel refreshed and satisfied after an argument on a controversial issue.
- \_\_\_ 18. I have the ability to do well in an argument.
- \_\_\_ 19. I try to avoid getting into arguments.
- \_\_\_ 20. I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument.

Scoring Instructions

Tendency to approach argumentative situations: add scores on items 2, 4, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20.

Tendency to avoid argumentative situations: add scores on items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 19.

Argumentativeness trait: subtract the total of the 10 tendency to avoid items from the total of the 10 tendency to approach items.

Source: Infante, D.A., & Rancer, A.S. (1982). A conceptualization and measure of argumentativeness. Journal of Personality Assessment, 46, 77.



## Assumptions and Limitations

### Assumptions

1. The research assumes that students in this study answered the items in the self-report scale honestly.

2. The research assumes that the subjects understood the questions.

### Limitations

1. Ideally, the researcher should use a larger sample of students for best results.

2. Ideally, the researcher should use a control group. However, for best results in this type of study.

3. Because the school studied is made up of predominantly white students, results cannot be

inferred on a population unlike this one. A self-report scale to test their argumentative level before engaging in acting activities and lessons. The activities and lessons were congruent.

### Analysis of Data

An Upper tailed Paired T-test was administered to see if the posttest scores on the 20-item Argumentative Scale (Infante and Rancer, 1982) were significantly higher than the pretest scores.

The same 20-item scale was completed a second time shortly after the drama classes



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

Male and female students from a rural high school in Tennessee participated in this study to investigate the effect that participation in acting sessions had on their argumentative level. The literature review spoke of studies that deal with the theory of argumentativeness. However, nothing has been published that deals specifically with the effects that drama has on one's argumentative level, making this a ground breaking study.

Each student in the study completed a 20-item self-report scale to test their argumentative level before engaging in acting activities and lessons. The activities and lessons were congruent with ones often found in an introduction to acting course such as improvisation, pantomime, and various theatre games. The primary text was The Stage and the School written by Harry H. Schanker with Katherine Anne Ommanney. The same 20-item scale was completed a second time shortly after the drama classes



were completed. The pretest and posttest scores were compared using an Upper tailed Paired T-test. The results of the T-test ( $T = 4.019314$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) suggested that the posttest scores ( $M = 11.58$ ,  $SD = 13.00$ ) were significantly higher than the pretest scores ( $M = 4.42$ ,  $SD = 9.62$ ).

Refer to Table 4-1 for pretest and posttest scores. The acting classes appeared to have an impact on the students' argumentative levels.

In summary, the results of this study suggest that the inclusion of acting as a part of one's curricular or extracurricular activities may result in an increase in their argumentative level. This study supports the importance of acting inclusion in today's schools. Today's schools have a responsibility to their students not only in helping them achieve academically but also in achieving personal growth and in becoming good citizens. Possessing a high argumentative level is associated with all of these things.



Table 4-1

## Argumentative Scale Scores Before and After Drama Participation

<u>Student</u>	<u>Pretest Score</u>	<u>Posttest Score</u>	<u>Difference</u>
1	- 5	- 1	4
2	11	17	6
3	19	23	4
4	- 3	15	18
5	21	33	12
6	25	38	13
7	- 2	6	8
8	10	11	1
9	7	14	7
10	-12	- 3	9
11	-11	-17	- 6
12	- 7	3	10

Upper tailed Paired T-test results:

<u>Difference</u>	<u>Delta0</u>	<u>Estimate</u>	<u>Std. Err.</u>	<u>DF</u>	<u>Tstat</u>	<u>Pval</u>
var2 - var1	0	7.1666665	1.7830572	11	4.019314	0.001

to have been caused by their participation in acting

sessions.

It is unknown whether the significant increase that occurred in these students' argumentative levels will be long-term or short-term. Without continued acting

participation, a student's argumentative level might decrease after a short time. Further research over a

longer time frame would be necessary to determine duration of the heightened argumentative level.

The subjects of this study took part on a voluntary basis. It should be noted that this could have had some effect on the outcome of this study. Since participants



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results of this study support the possibility that participating in acting sessions will increase one's argumentative level. In this study, seventeen and eighteen year olds' posttest scores were significantly higher than their pretest scores. The increase in their scores appears to have been caused by their participation in acting sessions.

It is unknown whether the significant increase that occurred in these students' argumentative levels will be long-term or short-term. Without continued acting participation, a student's argumentative level might decrease after a short time. Further research over a longer time frame would be necessary to determine duration of the heightened argumentative level.

The subjects of this study took part on a voluntary basis. It should be noted that this could have had some effect on the outcome of this study. Since participants



could not be randomly selected and were not financially compensated, persons who have a personal interest in acting might be more inclined to volunteer for this type of study. Randomly selected participants who might or might not have a personal interest in acting could have been affected differently.

Ideally, this type of study should include a control group that did not participate in acting sessions between the pretest and posttest. The number of volunteers was not large enough in this study to include a control group. Inclusion of a control group would increase the validity of the results.

The overwhelming majority of students that attend the high school studied are white. This limits our ability to infer the results on other populations. The results can only be inferred on other predominantly white populations.

Despite the design limitations of this research, the results indicate that acting participation has a positive impact on students' argumentative levels. Because of the lack of funds and resources, many rural schools have gone without full-time theatre teachers for many years. This study supports the need for acting classes in all of today's public school systems, not just the larger systems



that can afford it. Every child attending a public school system deserves to have the same opportunities.

The results of this study suggest that acting classes can be instrumental in decreasing a student's likelihood of becoming verbally aggressive. According to a study by Infante and his associates entitled, "The Relationship of Argumentativeness to Verbal Aggression," persons who scored high on a measure of argumentativeness were least provoked to prefer verbal aggression (1984, p. 76). If acting classes can increase a person's argumentative level then acting classes would also decrease a person's likelihood of preferring verbal aggression in communication situations.

The more opportunities that students have to increase their argumentative level in school, the better off they will be as adults living in a democratic society. Young adults would certainly benefit from avoiding the use of verbal aggression in the work place and in college with their peers. Infante and his associates suggest that verbal aggression is mainly the result of a lack of argumentative skill (1984, p. 76). A person skilled in argumentation before entering the work place or college would have an advantage for a variety of reasons. Workers in many job fields are required to give presentations,



cooperate with coworkers, and negotiate tasks. College instructors often require presentations, speeches, debates, and group work as part of the class curriculum. Containing an argumentative trait in the high level would help a person excel at the tasks listed as well as benefit by decreasing their likelihood of resorting to verbal aggression in communication situations.

Despite the benefits associated with argumentation training, it is not a requirement for public high school graduation in the United States. Studies have highlighted the kinds of courses proven to be instrumental in the alteration of a student's argumentative level. Colbert and Dorff's study focused on the use of forensic training to sharpen one's skills in argumentation. The current study targeted acting sessions as an argumentativeness increaser. According to these studies, both acting and forensic participation can be successful in increasing the argumentative level of students. However, neither of these are formal requirements for graduation.

If course selection is decided upon by students, the ones that may need argumentation training the most could end up being the students that do not select courses proven to be effective in the act of increasing argumentative



levels. Both acting and forensics are optional courses that may not even be available in some public high schools. A shy student that does not like to speak in front of others will most likely avoid courses in which this will be required. The shy backward student could very well need this type of course more than the outgoing talkative one. If a class proven to be instrumental in the teaching of argument skills was required for graduation, the shy student as well as the outgoing student would reap the benefits. A student that begins a forensics or acting course with an argumentative level in the low range may not end the course at the same level as a student who begins the course with an argumentative level in the moderate range, but any increase is better than no increase. Exposure to argumentative techniques should be encountered by all high school students regardless of their personality or argumentative level upon entering a course such as forensics or acting.

Additional studies are needed to help emphasize the importance of training in argumentation at the high school level. More studies in forensics and acting in relation to their ability to increase argumentative levels would certainly help to further validate past findings.



Argumentative level studies with other kinds of courses would also assist in determining classes besides forensics and acting that could result in the same desired outcome.

After courses thought to be instrumental in the teaching of argument skills have been identified as valid and reliable, public high schools in the United States should make such courses available to all students in all school districts. Forensics, acting, and other courses proven to be instrumental in the increase of student's argumentative levels should be available to both college bound students and technical path students. Training in argumentation should be considered a necessity instead of a frill in today's high schools.



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## VITA

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