Teaching Graduate and Undergraduate Students to Model Stuttering Behaviors

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Abstract

Graduate and undergraduate speech-language pathology students are commonly taught to model stuttering behaviors both in the classroom and in public. This helps students to better understand what it is like to be a person who stutters, to learn to model stuttering in a neutral and unemotional manner and to become familiar with voluntary stuttering, a commonly used speech therapy technique. This paper will describe one approach to teaching speech-language pathology graduate and undergraduate students how to model stuttering behaviors.

Introduction

Professors of courses focusing on stuttering and other fluency disorders commonly assign graduate and undergraduate students the task of modeling stuttering behaviors first in the classroom and then in public. This is done for many reasons including helping students gain an understanding of what it is like to be a person who stutters and to become comfortable modeling stuttering behaviors in a calm and unemotional manner during therapy. Students are also taught to model stuttering behaviors to familiarize these future clinicians with voluntary or pseudo stuttering, a commonly used speech therapy technique.

Shields (1999) explained her rationale for teaching students to model stuttering when she wrote, “As [future] speech pathologists, they [students] will be asking fluency clients to make significant and sometimes quite difficult changes in their speech. I want them to experience something of the discomfort and physical difficulties that accompany making such changes…” (par. 11). By “stepping into someone else’s shoes” and pretending to be a person who stutters, students gain some understanding of the difficulties and challenges that people who stutter face. Manning (2001) wrote, “Becoming desensitized to stuttering is an important first step in understanding the behavior and the person we are treating” (p. 15).

During therapy, speech-language pathologists need to model stuttering behaviors on a regular basis to help clients identify and modify stuttering, and to create a speech therapy environment that is “stutter friendly.” Breitenfeldt & Lorenz (2000) note that clinicians need to be willing to model any assignment for the client to demonstrate that the assignment is reasonable. To illustrate this point, why should a person who stutters be motivated or willing to modify his own stuttering if the clinician is unable or unwilling to demonstrate modification by using pseudo stuttering? Why should a person who stutters be willing to practice speaking strategies in public, such as stuttering while maintaining eye contact, if her clinician is not willing to demonstrate this target behavior through the use of pseudo stuttering? If the clinician demonstrates stuttering-related shame, then the client will follow. If the clinician is able to voluntarily stutter without shame, then the client will follow.

By practicing pseudo stuttering, students are preparing to model controlled stuttering behaviors during therapy in a neutral and unemotional manner. This demonstrates to future clients that stuttering is not shameful or bad and that working on stuttering is not shameful or bad. As many speakers have noted, "I will control the stutter; the stutter will not control me."

This paper will focus on a two-hour class in which students are taught to model stuttering behaviors, are assigned a pseudo stuttering fieldwork project and are assigned a reaction paper focusing on their experiences using purposeful stuttering in public.

Summary of Instruction

Teaching students to model stuttering behaviors will require five major steps during one class:

1. Show a video or several videos of people who stutter so students have a strong model of what stuttering looks like and sounds like.
2. Discuss the Ambrose & Yairi (1999) study, which details the salient disfluency differences between young children who stutter and young children who do not stutter. Discuss and model primary and secondary stuttering behaviors to help students consider different ways that they may model or emulate stuttering behaviors.
3. Discuss the Fucci, Leach, Mckenzie, & Gonzales (1998) study which found that listeners are unable to distinguish between real and volitional stuttering. This helps to assure students that listeners will not be able to tell the difference between real stuttering and pseudo or modeled stuttering.
4. Hold a behaviors lab in which every student must model primary and secondary stuttering behaviors.
5. At the end of class, assign fieldwork (stuttering in public) and a reaction paper.

1. Show a Film of People Stuttering

There are several short films that focus on stuttering which offer students strong examples of what stuttering looks and sounds like. "Transcending Stuttering: The Inside Story" is a wonderful 28-minute documentary film by Schneider (2004) that profiles the lives of six people who stutter. Another fine film is, "Stuttering: For Kids, By Kids" published by the Stuttering Foundation (2004). This 12-minute film features young children and teens talking openly about stuttering. Both of these films are available for purchase or to watch for free online. To watch online, use an Internet video search engine, such as www.video.google.com or www.youtube.com, and search using the title of the film.

Start class by explaining to students that the professor will be showing a film or films that offer solid examples of what stuttering looks and sounds like. Instruct students to pay close attention to "how" people are stuttering so that they can attempt to model or emulate the stuttering from the films later in class. After showing a film, discuss it with students.

2. Discuss Stuttering Behaviors and Normal Disfluencies.

Assign the Ambrose & Yairi (1999) article to be read before this class. One of the main reasons Ambrose & Yairi (1999) conducted this longitudinal study was to determine the differences between early childhood stuttering and the speech of children who do not stutter. Discuss this study and explain to students that it is easier to model stuttering behaviors once it is understood exactly what stuttering behaviors are and are not. One of Ambrose & Yairi's key findings was that children who stutter demonstrate significantly more part-word repetitions (i.e., mu-mu-mu-maybe), single-syllable word repetitions (i.e., My-my-my-my) and disrhythmic phonations (blocks and prolongations). Ambrose & Yairi referred to these disfluencies as "stuttering-like disfluencies." It is also important that the

professor model these behaviors for students before students are expected to model stuttering. Professors may even invite people who stutter to class to help model these behaviors.

Amborse & Yairi also found that children who stutter will often repeat a unit of speech 3-4 times while children who do not stutter generally produce 1-2 unit repetitions. 3-4 unit repetitions were “virtually nonexistent” (Yairi & Ambrose, 2005, p. 121) in the group of children who do not stutter. Also of interest was that children who stutter were found to repeat part-words and whole words at a faster rate than children who do not stutter.

Ambrose & Yairi found that children who do not stutter demonstrate significantly more of what they termed “other disfluencies” which include interjections, revisions and multisyllable word or phrase repetitions. The professor may wish to explain that some children and adults who persist in stuttering (people who do not recover from stuttering) may begin to use interjections and revisions to avoid stuttering, but that originally, these behaviors are not part of the stuttering problem and are considered “other” or “normal” disfluencies.

Among their key findings, Ambrose & Yairi report that part-word repetitions are a hallmark of early stuttering as are single syllable word repetitions. They also found that blocks and prolongations (which they called disrhythmic phonations) are a red flag for stuttering behavior and occur extremely infrequently in the speech of children who do not stutter. While these findings may seem obvious to speech-language pathologists working with people who stutter, students are often unclear about the distinctions and differences between the speech of people who do and do not stutter. Presentation and discussion of this research provides students a strong understanding of how stuttered speech should sound.

After discussing this study, hand out a list of primary and secondary stuttering behaviors (see Table 1). Model theses stuttering behaviors for students. Begin by modeling primary and secondary behaviors in isolation, then move to modeling primary and secondary behaviors in combination such as demonstrating a part-word repetition while tilting your head and closing your eyes. While many students will be familiar with the list of primary and secondary stuttering behaviors listed in Table 1, some will ask for clarifications and may want you to repeat various models of stuttering. Some graduate students have been exposed to lists of primary and secondary stuttering behaviors as undergraduate students without ever having heard these behaviors modeled.

Primary Stuttering	**Secondary Stuttering**
■Repetitions	■Eye Blinking, Eye Closing
■Prolongations	■Head Tilting, Arm Waiving
■Blocks Silent Blocks o Audible Blocks	■Hand and Arm Waving, Fist Clenching

Table 1

Traditionally, speech-language pathologists have discussed stuttering behaviors in terms of primary and secondary behaviors. It is often assumed that primary stuttering occurs first and that secondary behaviors occur later. It is worth noting to students that recent research has found that secondary behaviors often appear near the onset of stuttering (Schwartz, Zebrowski, & Conture, 1990; Yairi, Ambrose, Paden, & Throneburg, 1996; Yairi & Ambrose, 2005).

Perhaps the best way to teach students how to model stuttering behaviors is by suggesting that they use a primary behavior along with a secondary behavior such as producing a part word repetition while blinking the eyes or blocking on a sound while waving a hand. Also, remind students that stuttering typically occurs on the first sounds or phonemes of words (Andrews et. al., 1983) and at the beginning of utterances (Peters & Hulstijn, 1987; Van Riper, 1973).

3. Assure Students that Modeled Stuttering Will Sound Real

Most students will be apprehensive and afraid of modeling stuttering and will say things such as, “I feel that modeling stuttering is like teasing” and “I don’t think my stuttering will sound real.” Briefly discuss with students a study on modeled stuttering using 40 graduate and undergraduate speech and hearing science students. This study found that listeners were not able to distinguish between real or authentic stuttering and simulated stuttering (Fucci, Leach, Mckenzie, & Gonzales, 1998). Assure students that their stuttering will sound real and that their future clients will appreciate their efforts to better understand what it is like to be a person who stutter.

4. Facilitate a Stuttering Behaviors Lab in Class.

In your syllabus, it is suggested that professors assign points or a grade towards this stuttering behaviors lab so that students understand that participation is required. In the author’s classes, participation in this behaviors lab is worth five percent of every student’s final grade.

Break students up into groups of two or three and ask them to practice modeling stuttering behaviors. It is best for the professor to choose the groups so that students are working with random partners and not their friends. Sometimes the author will put every student’s name into a box and pick out partners for this project randomly in front of the class. This often adds an element of light-heartedness to the lab and helps to dispel some of the pressure and fear that students may have. Some students may say, “I don’t know what to talk about.” Consider making an announcement such as, “If you can not think of a topic of conversation, talk about how your parents met or about your favorite relative.” It is also wise to remind students, “Do not cheat the stutter by stuttering so softly or easily that the listener is unaware that you are stuttering. Make sure that you are stuttering hard and noticeably.” Also consider asking students to model stuttering in clusters, meaning, several stutters in a row (i.e, “I-I-I-I-I aaam vvvery hu-hu-hu-hungry.).” Explain that people who stutter often stutter in clusters and that it would be good practice for students to do so as well.

As students practice, walk around the class and listen to their modeled stuttering. Make suggestions and challenge students to use different forms and variations of pseudo stuttering. If an adult who stutters is attending the lab to help model behaviors, the guest may also move around the class offering suggestions and feedback.

5. Fieldwork and Reaction Paper

In the author’s classes, the pseudo stuttering fieldwork and the reaction paper are worth ten percent of each student’s final grade. Pass out the following fieldwork assignment:

> **Fieldwork Assignment**:
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> Each student will stutter in public in five different situations. **Only one pseudo stuttering situation may be on the telephone or using a drive-through window – the other four situations must be in person.** Vary the types of stuttering you use. For example, if you start by using part word repetitions (Where is the bu-bu-bu-bu-bus?”), also use some prolongations (Wwwwwwhat time is it?) and blocks. Do not “cheat” the assignment by stuttering so easily that no one hears it as stuttering. Be sure and stutter noticeably. Include several secondary characteristics as well such as closing your eyes, waving a hand, or speaking with a high pitch voice while stuttering. It is important that you do not “apologize” for stuttering by explaining to the listener something such as, “I am really not a person who stutters. I am just a student completing an assignment.”

Sometimes when students complete the fieldwork assignment in groups or with partners they tend to get embarrassed when using modeled stuttering and will laugh. To prevent this, encourage students to work alone. If students choose to use modeled stuttering in front of friends or family members, encourage students to explain the assignment to these individuals so that they understand what is going on. In the fieldwork assignment, students are limited to only one phone call or one drive-through window because some students would conduct all five pseudo stuttering situations in ways that do not require face-to-face contact. It is important that students gain some understanding of how they and different listeners react to stuttering during face-to-face situations. Encourage students to use pseudo stuttering in situations such as ordering food at a restaurant, asking questions at a store and asking strangers questions such as, "What time is it?"

Pass out the reaction paper assignment:

Reaction Paper: Write a 2-3 page reaction paper. In your paper, include the following:

- Describe the different situations in which you used voluntary stuttering.
- How did you pseudo stutter? Did you use blocks, part-word repetitions, secondaries, etc?
- How did you and your listeners react to your voluntary stuttering?
- What did this teach you that may help when working with people who stutter?
- How did you feel before, during and after the assignment?
- Was using modeled or pseudo stuttering always hard or was it easier at times. Did using pseudo stuttering become harder or easier Why?
- How well were you able to model stuttering and communicate with listeners at the same time?

Discussing the Completed Assignment

Be sure and discuss the assignment and completed reaction papers with the class. Different students will have vastly different experiences during this assignment. Many students will prepare to use voluntary stuttering only to realize that they back out of it many times before finally finding the courage to try it. Some students report that it becomes easier to model stuttering behaviors as the assignment progresses, while other students report becoming more ashamed and more embarrassed of speaking with a modeled stutter. It is common for students to report only wanting to stutter in front of a single listener without other people present. For example, students often report walking around department stores until they find an employee to speak to who is standing completely alone.

On occasion, a student will even refuse to complete the assignment due to fear or embarrassment. Shields (1999) discussed this possibility and explained, "Students can, and often do, chicken out …Even when they do this, they report the stomach-churning anticipation of stuttering, and most find it an eye-opening experience" (par. 11). It has been the author's experience that after completing this assignment students tend to hold greater respect for their future clients and a greater respect for their role as future therapist.

Other Ideas

Parents and siblings may also benefit from participating in voluntary stuttering assignments and activities. For example, at self-help conferences and workshops, parents, siblings and family friends have participated in voluntary stuttering activities. Participation provides some understanding of what it is like to be a person who stutters.

It is strongly advised that family members and friends learn to model and role-play stuttering behaviors before using modeled stuttering in public. For example, a speech-language pathologist may decide to include a parent in a voluntary stuttering activity. The parent is taught to model primary and

secondary stuttering behaviors in the therapy room. It is often helpful to have the child or teenager who stutters teach his or her parent how to stutter. The parent then practices stuttering behaviors during role-playing situations in the therapy room. Then, the speech pathologist, parent and child take turns using voluntary stuttering in public. Of course, the speech pathologist should always model stuttering first. After the parent has had the opportunity to model stuttering in a variety of public situations, return to the therapy room and discuss the experience.

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