



2017 annual report

the practice space



our mission

Our mission is to build confidence and community voice through communication skill development. We provide accessible educational content and supportive practice experiences to improve the culture of communication in schools and communities. Our programs help people of all ages communicate effectively, address social anxieties, be authentic, and feel connected to others. Our aim is to provide instruction that improves communication skills and develops leaders that can foster more equitable environments for learning from one another and elevating underrepresented voices.

“If no one else is going to represent other opinions, I better do it and I better do it well, because otherwise, it’s never going to get said.”

—High school student

“I had horrible stage fright, so I decided to challenge that.”

—High school student

“Finding your opinions and realizing that your voice has so much benefit when you’re talking to other people is super important.”

—High school student

“Part of finding a voice is owning up to what you really believe and acknowledging it is something important.”

—High school student

letter from the executive director



Dear Friends,

When we launched The Practice Space this past year, I hoped it would help people feel more connected to each other through opportunities to practice effective communication. In an age where it is entirely possible to interact with people without ever getting to know anyone, it is easy to feel isolated, silenced, and alone. What I didn't realize is how the work of launching a non-profit in my hometown would make me feel more connected to others in ways I never had before. I have been amazed by the kindness and support that you have shown me this year—The Practice Space absolutely would not have been possible without you. I am constantly in awe of your many talents and feel so fortunate to work alongside you and listen to your stories.

This year, I have witnessed incredible courage and vulnerability from people determined to find their voice and communicate on their own terms. From the professional who always felt “stuck” in her job to the high school student who was asked to leave the classroom for offering a controversial viewpoint, what people at The Practice Space have in common is the initiative to take control of their own lives and speak up for others. I have had the pleasure of interacting with some amazingly kind, thoughtful, and humble people and have heard stories that deeply inspire me. And what we at The Practice Space are lucky enough to do is encourage these wonderful people and help them be their best selves.

I have learned a great deal from our students this year. Beyond feedback on what programs would be most useful and how to improve our existing offerings, I also have been able to listen to the bigger picture of the challenges people face as they try to communicate every day. These challenges are a reminder of why communication is so much more than polishing our speaking delivery. While it is valuable to learn and practice communication techniques, these skills are not enough when we are still faced with situations out in the real world that render us voiceless. We live in a culture that expects us to speak up without changing the inequitable (and often hostile) conditions that make us feel afraid to articulate who we are.

In the coming year, we will continue to offer educational programming that provides people with instruction and coaching to communicate in a clear, compelling way. In parallel to this work, we are excited to partner with schools and organizations to develop leaders who can help improve the culture of communication and cultivate safe environments for learning from one another, even outside The Practice Space. This will be hard and complex work, but instead of feeling overwhelmed, I feel energized by the thought of working with all of you.

Thank you for making this dream come true. I have no words to fully express my gratitude for your volunteer hours, class attendance, generous donations, and encouraging words that make this work possible. We look forward to more adventures in the coming year.

Thank you for everything,
AnnMarie

The Practice Space Board of Directors

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how we helped our students

“One of my favorite places! I am so shy at talking but I am learning lots with your private lessons and storytelling classes.” — Adult Student



Summer Learning.

Middle and high school students at The Practice Space Summer Camp focused on argumentation, story-telling, podcasts, spontaneous speaking, and dramatic performance during a two-week experience that culminated in a community showcase. In addition to learning effective communication skills, they also got to know students from other schools and build community through team “houses” and group leadership games.



Competitive Success.

High school students from El Cerrito High and Berkeley High practiced debate skills during weekend scrimmages at The Practice Space, where they practiced debating philosophical and political issues. Students also received feedback and coaching on prepared speeches and monologues. During the year, these students participated in competitions in speech and debate as well as Lion’s Club speaking contests, winning local and state awards.



Engaging Performances.

The majority of youth private lesson students focused on oral delivery skills, including healthy vocal technique,

engaging gestures and facial expressions, and portraying emotions. Others used private lessons to practice spontaneous speeches, including how to outline quickly, how to elaborate on key points, and how to connect ideas in a clear and compelling manner. In 2017, 75 percent of youth private students returned for follow-up lessons.



Designing Podcasts.

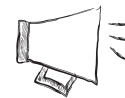
High school students from El Cerrito High and Berkeley High designed and produced The Practice Space Podcast from scratch, selecting the content and format as well as learning editing and production from a professional voiceover artist. The podcast is available on iTunes and focuses on communication issues and experiences, including research, stories, and guest interviews.



Speaking on the Job.

The majority of adult private lesson students focused on professional goals, including techniques for being more persuasive, presenting clearly, giving successful interviews, facilitating meetings, and navigating power dynamics at work. The remaining adult private lesson students worked on speech writing, stage fright and anxiety-coping strategies, interpersonal

communication techniques, and approaches for everyday conversation. In 2017, 77 percent of adult private lesson students returned for follow-up lessons.



Parent Advocacy.

Parents from a Family Leadership program with GO Public Schools West

Contra Costa practiced storytelling and advocacy techniques in a month-long workshop series. The predominantly Spanish-speaking group showed tremendous growth in being able to tell their story confidently and speak up for their children and were later able to present for the school board and at community events for the first time.



Culture of Communication.

Members of the local community gathered weekly on Sundays for the “TPS @ 2” discussion group to discuss and analyze issues with communication. By sharing stories and research, participants unpacked key challenges and barriers to effective listening, productive political dialogue, speaking to people in power, and being judged by others. Discussions included people of all ages and also reflected on how to create a culture that supports inspiration, fearlessness, and learning from one another.

Strong communication creates a culture in local communities where we can learn from one another, constructively challenge different viewpoints, empathize with one another, and find connections we never knew existed.

our participants speak

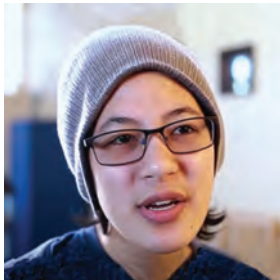
We begin by helping people find their authentic voice, and then proceed with concrete strategies for making their voices compelling, clear, credible, and polished.



“I think a lot of us are much more comfortable with public speaking generally, not only in a competitive setting, just in everyday life.”



“People don’t come to The Practice Space to stay here, people come to The Practice Space to go out into broader spaces, whether that be their home, their classrooms, their community centers, their churches, their local civic groups, their workplace, giving that presentation for the first time. That is one of the values that is upheld here at The Practice Space.”



“A lot of kids are always saying that they need to find a way to find their voice and have been talking about how they’ve been finding that through speech, through The Practice Space. It’s really nice to have a place where you can make mistakes and it’s okay for that.”



“Going to The Practice Space, in my case, allowed me to relax and to trust enough to have the courage to try new things and believe that I could achieve my goals going forward.”

Our students learn to communicate the best version of themselves and feel connected to others. Our approach helps people have the courage to speak up, lead, pursue goals, and participate in a variety of spaces in their everyday life.

what we achieved



who made it all possible

The Practice Space was made possible by over 30 volunteers who helped support our programs with their talent and hard work. We are grateful to the hours they spent networking and spreading the word, leading debate scrimmages and classes, helping set up the office space, putting together the podcast, providing feedback on programs, creating curriculum, offering thought partnership and encouragement, helping out at festival booths and raffles, performing at events, and recruiting students. Thank you for your tireless dedication.

We also extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation to the creative artists and consultants who assisted us with setting up this organization and lending specialized expertise to our efforts. From photographing and filming events, performing and composing music, designing our website and animation, and teaching us production techniques, we benefited greatly from your wonderful skills. Thank you to our individual donors who made it possible to do our best work and engage with more people in this community.



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