able, has induced controversy among educators of argumentation. This debate about debate has been a focus of intense discussion within the United States debate community. For most of the early and middle twentieth century, the college and university academic debate community was relatively unified in offering models developed by the American Forensic Association, even though the issue concerning where to draw the balance between style and substance was discussed from time to time. During the sixties, the size of the policy debate divisions (or just "Debate" as it was known in those days), was enormous. A report on the Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament from 1969 indicated a policy debate division of over 80 teams. By the early 1970s, however, objections became pronounced that intercollegiate debate promoted argumentation that had both abandoned delivery skills and argumentation acceptable to the public arena (Howe, 1981). The efforts to reform intercollegiate debate education grounded in this controversy have, in part, led to the formation of many organizations other than the American Forensic Association that sponsor debate competitions: among others, these currently include the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA), the National Education Debate Association (NEDA), the National Forensic Association's Lincoln-Douglas (NFA-LD) debate competitions, the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), and the International Parliamentary Debate Association (IPDA). Additionally, this controversy fueled the development of the American Debate Association (ADA) within the AFA/NDT organization, and has also influenced the recent push toward change led by the Louisville School of Performative Debate within the NDT community (Louisville, 2005). This article will limit itself to the history of three movements to reform academic debate: 1) CEDA; 2) NEDA; and 3) NPDA. In order to assess the success and evolution of each movement, the article first explains Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) (Bormann, 1972, 1981) as an approach to these movements; second, it will explain the development of the rhetorical communities that not only developed each movement but which developed *within* each movement as they evolved; and, third, it will explain the implications of these conclusions upon the future direction of debate.

Method: Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) as an Approach to this Study

Developed by E. G. Bormann (1972, 1981) and his associates, Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) constitutes a general communication theory based upon the notion that meaning, emotion, and motivation for action are encapsulated in the language we use in our everyday lives to describe reality. As terms such as "debating from ones social location" (Louisville, 2005) gain prominence in the debate activity, understanding how shared meaning affects our argumentative educational activity makes SCT an ideal method for analyzing reform movements in higher educational debate. SCT's most basic unit for analysis is a *fantasy theme*, or statements taken by the speak-

er as reality containing such things as heroes (*dramatis personae*), plot-lines, scenes, and sanctioning agents (sources). Fantasy themes work as building blocks for *rhetorical visions,* or "composite dramas in which large numbers of people participate" (Shields & Preston, 1985, p. 106). The groups of people talking about their world with similar termi-nologies constitute a *rhetorical community.* Usually, rhetorical commu-nities are defined by different ways of discussing the same phenomena. The communities may often compete for adherents based on whether the rhetorical visions they accept are *righteous* (based on the language of principle), *social* (based on language under-girded by the greatest good for the greatest number), or *pragmatic* (based on appeals concerning what works) in nature (Cragan & Shields, 1995). Once a person has talked about a phenomenon and others begin to get caught up in the same language for discussing the phenomenon, the rhetorical vision is said to have *chained-out* to a larger audience, and its rhetorical community has expanded.

With regards to academic debate, a broad overview of SCT would likely sound something like this: *Meaning, emotion, and motivation for action are located in the language argumentation scholars use to discuss and debate what constitutes good argumentation.* Fantasy themes con-cerning argumentation might range from one sentence to several paragraphs in length. For example, *there is a lack of real-world persua-sion in today's CEDA debate* would exemplify a fantasy theme stem-ming from those who wish to reform the educational activity. The following might constitute a long-hand version of this very same fan-tasy theme:

> I am very disillusioned with the level of persuasion in CEDA debate. Nobody I know in the real world talks to other people like that. Although I feel like I can flow arguments at a pretty good clip, I doubt I'm teaching the students much with regards to how this argument might fly in front of an audience of rea-sonably educated people, and I certainly would not want my Dean to see this. Also, I understand eco-feminism since I've read the book, but I don't know if it can be elaborated fully to the average person who may be unfamiliar with this concept within only eight minutes. Yet it seems like the fastest reading students who have the most technical and detailed arguments seem to continue to win rounds, and are even allowed, in many instances, to choose mutually preferred judges who agree that this is good debate.

The above statement contains, or at least implies, *dramatis personae* (the students, the Deans, the judges, etc), *plotlines* (such as the refer-ence to mutually preferred judging, the notion that the specialized, intricate analysis will win debates in this format, that "real world" audiences would need deeper explanation to understand eco-femi-nism), *scenes* (a CEDA debate round, an audience in a public arena, a discussion with the Dean about funding for the activity), and *sanc-tioning agents* (such as education that prepares people for the real

world, or justifies funding for the activity). Those who understand and get caught up in the language generated by the rhetorical vision reflected in either the short- or long-hand version of this fantasy theme would be said to belong to a rhetorical community. To the extent that visions similar to those that were reflected in the earlier fantasy theme have under-girded reform in academic debate, these visions have chained out, to varying degrees, to rhetorical communities whose members have taken action with regards to both the way debate classes are taught at their universities, and what type of competitive debate, if any, is offered in the programs they direct. By looking at the websites for these three organizations, as well as discussion concerning the types of reforms their respective constituents seek, we can discover the development, growth, and possibly decline of the rhetorical visions that led to the establishment of each.

Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA)

Motivated by a desire to make debate more inclusive by broadening the activity and removing entry barriers for students, the original reform vision of what was originally established as the Southwest Cross Examination Debate Association (Howe, 1981) sought not to supplant the existing NDT, but rather to provide an alternative form of debate. Within this vision, NDT policy debating had evolved into a form with "excessive speed" and "incomprehensible" argumentation. To address these issues, the new debate association made, among other things, three changes from NDT debate aimed at *slaying these demons:* 1) to design a national sweepstakes system to encourage non-elitism and larger squads to make debate accessible to a larger number of students; 2) to emphasize debate, as would be appropriate, in the public arena by changing topics each semester in order to prevent excessive stockpiling of evidence; and 3) to introduce cross examination into the format so as, once again, to become more similar to argumentation as presented to lay audiences such as juries. Within this vision, early CEDA tournaments adopted formats such as attorney-judged events, and in its early years, sometimes experimented with critics who had less experience with the mainstream terminology of policy debate.

As CEDA's social rhetorical vision and its fantasy themes began to chain-out, the organization grew beyond a regional organization into a national organization. The fact that the NDT organization adopted, and still practices, cross examination as a part of its format attests to the notion that some of the CEDA fantasies influenced the thinking of the NDT organization even during CEDA's early years. Today, CEDA's web site claims that it is the largest sponsor of intercollegiate debate in the United States. Nevertheless, the current makeup of CEDA is unrecognizable from what it was in 1985.

During the middle 1980s, CEDA achieved enormous growth as the sanctioning agent of *Inclusiveness* chained out; however, the social nature of CEDA's rhetorical vision, involving its inclusive sweepstakes

system and newcomer awards may have planted the seeds for the destruction of CEDA's fantasy themes regarding making debate more palatable in the public arena. Part of CEDA's growth was not only among those who promulgated its original vision of debate for the public arena, but also those who could no longer find local NDT tournaments to attend. This was evidence that Howe's original fantasy themes regarding the need to return persuasion to debate had not completely chained out. Not surprisingly, CEDA began to supplant, rather than provide an alternative to NDT debate in some areas of the nation; however, as former NDT programs began to join CEDA, they brought with them a rhetorical vision that highly specialized debate and the heavy usage of intricate arguments (some arguably counter-intuitive to contemporary mainstream thinking) heavily backed by evidence was the primary educational objective. By the late 1990's, the rhetorical vision of CEDA was unrecognizable from its founding objectives of 1971. By then, the topics of each organization were the same, most debate tournaments had one division with a mixture of teams from the CEDA and NDT communities, and CEDA had abandoned such practices as changing topics at mid-year to discourage stockpiling of evidence. By 2001, questions over *eDebate* sounded like: "Beside the obvious national tournament different ranking methods and some other 'technicalities', what does my debate program get from being a member of CEDA that I don't receive as a member of AFA and vice versa?" (Bauer, 2001). Responses to queries such as this reflected a clear shift of emphasis in the notion CEDA's reform efforts:

> CEDA is an organization interested in working on itself and improving the activity of debate. To that end, CEDA has an infrastructure in place that addresses issues of diversity, retention, professional development, sexual harassment, and research. To my knowledge, NDT has no such infrastructure. The NDT Board simply makes decision about the National Debate Tournament. I've continued to affiliate with CEDA because it is interested in more [than] the national tournament. CEDA is interested in the whole of argumentation and debate: who participates, how we participate, and how we can promote debate and outreach (Schriver, 2001).

Most notably, any notion of "incomprehensible arguments" and the "public arena" is missing in this vision. Nevertheless, this remains a very flexible and social vision, and could plant the seeds for a reinvention of the goal of debating in the public arena. With the advent of the Louisville School of Performative Debate and its recently established success within CEDA and NDT, these seeds may already be flourishing. Inasmuch as these seeds of reform are germinating *within* what has become the largest policy debating organization rather than *splintering*, this reform shows some potential for having a more lasting impact on US American policy debating. Even as this paper is being written, this flexible, social vision continues to evolve and chain out, and to the extent that CEDA and NDT have not only merged topic but the elimination brackets at each national tournament, increasingly

showing striking similarities in terms of the schools involved, these fantasies show the potential to chain out, in earnest, into traditional NDT programs. In fact, some of the former hard core NDT programs have become the initial fantasizers of these reform visions, making the notion of the public sphere something more than an afterthought buried at the end of the current CEDA constitution. The initial sanctioning agent of Inclusiveness remains. Which direction will it head?

National Educational Debate Association (NEDA).

As CEDA debate evolved and eventually reinvented the wheel of traditional NDT policy debate during the late 1980s and early 1990s, predictably, some of its members became uneasy as they felt that not only the fantasies, but the original *rhetorical vision* of CEDA was dying. Chief among those who wished to do debate where research was allowed, but felt that CEDA debate had become too rapid in delivery and geared toward the specialized audience, were the original founders of NEDA. For example, the following fantasy theme in NEDA's (2005) mission document is reminiscent of CEDA's fantasy themes during its early years:

> This Association believes that debate should be a practical educational experience and that performance by participants should reflect the stylistic and analytical skills that would be rewarded in typical public forums (i.e., courts, congress, the classroom, civic gatherings, etc.). . . . Ideally, a debate is an exchange that, when witnessed by a member of the general public, would be viewed as comprehensible and enlightening. A more specific description of the climate expected to prevail at Association events may be found in Jack Howe's "CEDA's Original Objectives—Lest We Forget" (*CEDA Yearbook*, 1981) and Robert Weiss' "The Audience Standard (*CEDA Yearbook*, 1985).

Also, rather than seeking to provide an alternative format to debating within a program, NEDA actively seeks programs that only offer NEDA debate. The need to distinguish itself from perceived bad practices within NDT/CEDA debate fueled the righteous and less flexible nature of NEDA's rhetorical vision. Motivated to act within this vision, NEDA sanctioned, and continues to sanction, a very limited number of tournaments where it is understood that its rules and standards should be enforced. These standards heavily encourage on-topic arguments and arguments that tournament directors deem comprehensible to a lay audience. Much attention within this vision is placed on having less experienced judges for students, although trained to judge in a specific way. There is no pretense at being inclusive; considerable time is spent on the website debunking practices such as excessive speed, poor evidence citation, and usage of structural and technical debate jargon such as "cross-apply my last statement" and "flip my turns." These are used within the NEDA vision to vilify NDT/CEDA debate. Aside from limiting membership to those who promise to adhere to this strict vision, NEDA also uses the unique

technique of allowing judges to assign a loss to both teams in a debate round if it is perceived that neither team is debating in a fashion conducive to the rhetorical vision of NEDA.

NEDA's vision in some regards has served the original intentions of the organization well. Inasmuch as NEDA has provided guidelines for its members, the style of debating in its organization has not "devolved" or come closer to merging with the mainstream policy debating organizations in the United States, which has had two impacts. First, the organization has remained relatively small since students interested in learning specialized debating skills have tended to go the NDT/CEDA programs, and students interested in doing less research have gone to NPDA programs (as discussed below, though this is changing). Secondly, the organization has successfully provided a consistent set of standards for students interested in evidentiary debating to participate in a research-oriented debate format that stresses delivery skills appropriate to the public arena. This more rigid rhetorical vision is not conducive to chaining out widely in the larger debate community, especially since NEDA's members have relatively little contact with that community. Nevertheless, the vision does provide cohesiveness within the NEDA organization and gives member students a relatively clear-cut set of standards as to what it takes to succeed within league-sponsored events. In this sense, since NEDA's vision represents a clean break from other debate groups, this vision might be termed more of a revolutionary than a reform vision. Programs that join NEDA must divorce themselves from specialized debate, including speed, as well as from "counterintuitive" arguments; however, its ability to spread reform to the universal activity may be limited since NEDA does not communicate with that community very often – and without communication, chaining is impossible. Even with the clear standards and educational objectives NEDA's righteous vision offers for its participants, some of its members have splintered off from the activity. This has happened because former member schools have disagreed with top-down decisions regarding issues such as topicality as well as rules regarding double-losses. In other words, just because a vision is righteous, codified, and less flexible does not mean that it is immune to splintering. For the members who remain in NEDA, however, the behaviors needed to win an educational debate round should be crystal clear to most students. Just as students appreciate professors who offer clear-cut grading rubrics, so too do NEDA coaches and participants appreciate clear-cut standards for critics to follow when judging debates. A crucial issue centers on whether or not this will be enough to motivate enough schools to participate in NEDA for it to remain a viable national organization.

National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA).

Whereas the original CEDA rhetorical vision was both flexible and social and continues to evolve as the reader reads this article, and whereas the NEDA rhetorical vision is both inflexible and righteous

(but works well for its members), the debating reform movement for NPDA tends to be pragmatic for its members. The nature of the NPDA reform movement was twofold: 1) similarly to CEDA, to provide students an alternative to (rather than replacement of) prevailing forms of competitive debate, and to include more students to the debate activity; and 2) to provide a form of parliamentary debate for programs which were guided by faculty coaches (as a reform to the American Parliamentary Debate Association, a league of primarily student-run programs). NPDA also reflected a rhetorical vision that was practical to debating programs who 1) had increasing problems justifying why 15 passenger vans were needed to transport for only four students because of the evidence; 2) were comprehensive, sweepstakes-oriented forensics programs who could justify asking individual events competitors to debate just as they required debaters to do a few individual speaking events to contribute to team sweepstakes; 3) who wanted to eliminate the intensive research barrier that intimidated many students from joining debate, and 4) preferred the two day tournament format parliamentary debate made possible so students and faculty alike could enjoy part of the weekend for themselves.

The pragmatic rhetorical vision (outlined in Johnson, Johnson & Trapp, 1999) has certainly chained out, with the rapid rise in NPDA participation from the mid-1990s through the early years of the twenty-first century; however, the nature of reforming debate based on what works has its pitfalls. Although texts are beginning to be written about parliamentary debate, lack of coherence in pragmatic visions has resulted in phenomena such as students being rewarded for creative truism arguments (similar to "going low" in a game of "spades" when dealt a bad hand) in one round while being punished for it in the next. Similar to CEDA unwittingly "converting" NDT programs early in its evolution, NPDA is increasingly "converting" what have become CEDA/NDT programs to abandon CEDA/NDT for NPDA. Like CEDA, NPDA's pragmatic vision is inclusive; it faces the same (de)evolutionary challenges faced by the CEDA organization. The decision before NPDA is which way to go in choosing its future rhetorical visions; should they: 1) continue to go with "what works," which could lend itself to more chaos and splintering given the lack of guiding principles present even in social rhetorical visions; 2) adapt a more social approach similar to CEDA, with objectives being able to evolve but with the ability to adopt new principles to guide the evolution of what NPDA considers to be good debating; or 3) go more in the direction of NEDA and offer more principled guidelines for how arguments may be evaluated. Right now, NPDA seems to be working, and it is growing, but for both better and worse, already many of its rounds are unrecognizable from what they were 10 years ago. The community needs to consider if as scholarship schools with generic argument back-files begin to argue more intricately and gather wins, the initial pragmatic vision of NPDA may have sewn the seeds of its own destruction. Could a merger between NPDA and

CEDA/NDT be far off?

Discussion and future directions

As SCT would predict for communication education, communication education and co-curricular activities such as debate, which encourages the clash between ideas as its vehicle, participants operate within different symbolic realities. When the visions under-girding these realities are social or pragmatic in nature, the fantasies constituting those visions tend to evolve; when the visions prove more inflexible and righteous, they tend to stay more constant, but their chaining capacities may be diminished. Each case indicates that although righteous and social visions (with regard to forensics communication education) have their limitations, they also have advantages for each group. The challenge facing the debate activity as it defines itself is to discover whether there is some sort of meta-vision that combines the best elements of each that can provide more opportunities without losing focus. This may be challenging, especially when it comes to reconciling these visions with other university educational objectives. That would be a whole other article, perhaps several.

These realities, consisting of rhetorical visions based on group fantasies that give meaning, emotion, and motive for action in terms of advocating not only debate but what constitutes *good* debate, are, to varying degrees, social, righteous, and/or pragmatic in nature. They also vary in degrees of flexibility. When a vision is flexible, such as the case of CEDA's emerging central vision of inclusiveness, change is inevitable. During the 1980s and 1990s, the inclusiveness was inviting for programs formerly within the NDT (or, simply put, "college debate" up until 1971) whose participants were not caught up in the righteous elements of Jack Howe's vision to bring artistic persuasiveness and comprehensible argumentation back into the activity. At the same time, such inclusiveness has also made possible the success, with some perseverance, the Louisville Performative Debate School. This performative debate vision juxtaposes the need for comprehensible argumentation that is useful for students doing debate for social activism with the language and artistic forms that flow from cultures understood to be marginalized in traditional debating by the participants in this vision.

NEDA, on the other hand, proscribes from above what its leaders consider to be comprehensible argumentation. Because its paradigms attempt to proffer a topicist approach to debate (Preston, 1987) that enforces a codified set or organization objectives, an evolution within its organization to arguments its members consider to be counterintuitive would appear less likely. At the same time, an evolution to performative debate, which sometimes involves confronting the critic, would appear to be less likely as well. The advantages the participants in this righteous persuasive debate vision see is that when a student or critic with the instructions on how to judge enters a round, there are

clear principles to follow. By following one set of principles, the students can gain a depth of expertise in this one format of debate that may be more difficult within the more eclectic CEDA community.

NPDA, like CEDA, was formed as an alternative to but not a replacement of policy debating, although its origins stemmed from the world debate community. It differs from CEDA inasmuch as its rhetorical vision tended to be more pragmatic than social in nature. Hence, within NEDA, there is less of an emphasis than within CEDA on issues of inclusiveness, although the effect of NPDA has been to involve a massive number of U.S. American debaters in debate formats more similar to what the world debate community had practiced before evidentiary debate was introduced in recent years. The flexibility of its vision plus the emphasis on what works, however, has led to rather rapid changes and evolution similar to those which occurred with CEDA. Hence, what started out as a debate format easily accessible to students formerly doing only individual events has evolved into a format where not only orators, but policy debaters, have rediscovered the *lost canon of Memory* (Knapp and Galizio, 1999). As these scholarship debaters enter the NPDA activity, and *memorize* loads of evidence and positions from massive generic article back-files (as made possible by NPDA advocates repeatedly denying that this is "debate without evidence"), the evolution toward barriers to participation, more time commitment with respect to students' other activities – and rounds that resemble fast-past NDT rounds—is perhaps inevitable. This may be indicative of future shifts within NDPA to more performative paradigms once it discovers that the barriers to participation posed by the entry of ex-CEDA scholarship debaters into NPDA *don't work*.

Today, the state of intercollegiate debate would appear to be both imperfect and healthy – and, as SCT would teach, imperfection is good for an activity such as debate education. Indeed, directors and teachers of debate within communication curricula possess a smorgasbord of choices in debate events in which to participate. At the same time, to the extent that an activity has so many competing voices, some of whom *yell* rather than argue with other voices, its unifying nature might be lost on administrators. Without a unified meta-vision for what brings all of this together, the referent for that which we advocate loses focus and meaning to funding agents. As was noted at the 1995 developmental conference at Shreveport, comprehensive forensic organizations such as Pi Kappa Delta have key leadership roles to play if a central *vision of visions* for debate is to take root and develop. Where will this lead? Stay tuned. . .

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