

example the welfare reform topic. We can't speak for all Blacks, but my students (and it has been my experience with most African Americans) hate the welfare system and would love to see it reformed in ways that would probably shock Rush Limbaugh and Congress. But what can we argue? We had absolutely no ethos when it came to reform, because often critics had already made up their minds with regard to what fits their definitional stereotype; and thus, what my students could legitimately argue. Conversely, when my students argued against reforming the system, they not only feed all of the stereotypes that they absolutely hated, but they got some very interesting racial comments on their ballots from "impartial, professional educator-critics." One critic even wrote, "Of course you don't want AFDC to be reformed. How would you eat?" This is the same "educator" who helped one of our teams by suggesting that they "shouldn't advocate cutting funding to welfare mothers, because you never know when you might need it." Granted it was only one instance, but it does not take very many of these "educational experiences" to totally demoralize a student competitor and forever stigmatize the forensic community.

We will not even begin to discuss how an historically black university argues that "America's colleges and universities have inappropriately altered their practices to address issues of race and gender." How about the violent crime topic? What do you argue when the opposition points out that "it's your people who are the main reason for the crime problem anyway." Other teams ran white oppression and poverty as alternative causation arguments. Southern attempted the same argument strategy and was awarded a loss which was explained on the ballot with "It hurts your credibility when you argue this racist stuff. Why do you always have to blame whites for your problems. Why not just admit that Blacks cause many of their own problems and punt out of the position?"

Ultimately, the topic has evolved into a litmus test for participation for many African American students. If forced to make the choice between losing to an ethos perception problem or arguing a personally repugnant position that "sells out" to the white dominant culture, they will chose not to participate. Until we can develop more culturally sensitive critics, we must focus our attention on the development of topics that are more sensitive to multicultural issues.

Secondly, we must develop cultural sensitivity within our individual events critics. I apologize if the next few sentences seem to demean other minorities or subdominant culture groups, but I am genuinely at a loss to understand why gays can do gay pieces, women can do feminist pieces, but Blacks who perform "Black literature" are often subjected to racist comments that delegitimize their culture, heritage and experience. Preston (1989) makes the point, "... ballots at collegiate tournaments can at times prove a challenge to the program which is truly open to a variety of students. For example, ballots instructing students to avoid reading 'repressive literature' by African American authors reflect a cultural bias that may discourage students...from participating" (117). If one of our competitors interpreted a selection from a well-known black author that contained dialect, references to slavery, or expressed outrage toward the "white dominant culture" we could count on dead last in the round and a ballot that would have made references to 'this material being unacceptable;' or 'not of literary merit;' or 'you should challenge

yourself with more difficult material.' Ask yourself how you would feel and *then* write that ballot.

Third, we need to closely examine the rules which seem to exclude non-traditional students. Over the past few years, there has been some controversy over why part-time students could not compete at Pi Kappa Delta. Many of the Southern students fell into this category. Most of them did not have a choice. They must work to survive. When PKD accepts their dues for membership and then excludes their contributions to our culture and access to the process of enriching our experience, we should be ashamed. In fairness to PKD, the rule, or interpretation of the rule, has varied from year to year. But even the thought of exclusion reinforces the negative stereotype that forensics is, as one of my more vocal team members put, "for those rich, white kids with all the time and the money."

#### 4) Being competitive is costly:

**Recommendation:** Develop policies that limit the impact that money has on forensic outcomes.

**Discussion:** The strong positive correlation between funding and success has been reported (Rogers, 1991). A valid example of this resource disparity was expressed by Tuman (1993) who posited "serious doubts" that "enough schools can afford the subscription rates for this service (LEXIS/NEXIS), meaning those programs and students with money may possess an unfair advantage over their opponents" (189).

Three suggestions might close the gap: 1) structure debate tournaments so that there is little or no time between rounds to go "hook up" and "down load;" 2) require tournaments to provide LEXIS/NEXIS access; and 3) share LEXIS/NEXIS information and access with other local schools. Of course, option 3 seems most realistic, but that would require forensics *educators* to work together to provide the best possible educational experience for all students involved regardless of team affiliation; an admittedly radical concept for many forensics *coaches*.

There are other examples of the impacts of resource disparities on participation and success, but they all support a single, inescapable ethic: *share*. Oddly enough, this reflects the current state of affairs within American society in general. If we truly want to make a difference in the lives of those who have less than we do, we must learn to share what we have.

#### Conclusion:

We have recognized the lack of representation of subdominant culture groups within the forensics arena for some time. Studies, forums, panels, discussions and debates — both regional and national in scope — have had little impact. In many regards, we are our own worst enemy. When will we learn that inclusion of other points of view does not necessarily mean the aberration and/or subjugation of our own? We teach diversity and tolerance in the classroom, but seem unwilling or unable to practice it in the round. It is not about being less competitive — it *is* about expanding our definition of what *is* competitive.

If we allow forensics to continue to reserve participation and success only for those who subscribe to the dominant cultural group, then it will inevitably reach the point of pointlessness. Competition is good, but winning is *not* the

end that justifies the process. McBath (1975) warns, "reactions of students (and I would take the liberty to extend this to say - - and particularly coaches) to the competitive environment sometimes may be perverse . . . an excessive or unwise competitive stress can be destructive of healthy personalities and can produce distortion of ideas" (18). I would add that it may also lead to the exclusion of cultures and ideas that may prove competitive when the final ballots are cast.

The only valid conclusion to reach is that there is still much to do. The ideal is there: "The ethic of diversity is essential if the forensics laboratory is to be worthwhile and legitimate" (Jensen, 1994, 109). As educators, we must put our students first. We owe it to them to be educators first, and coaches, second. We must send them out into the "real world" equipped to communicate effectively within the incredibly diverse cultural climate that is America. Competent communicators must be able to adapt to the situation and context around them.

If we are to survive and prosper as a forensics community, then the ethic of diversity demands inclusion of all minorities to legitimize the applicability of our activity to "real world" communication events. This critical need for inclusion was addressed through a closer examination of four issues: 1) *Recruiting* - activities specifically designed to attract and retain African American students; 2) *Positive Role Models* - increasing the number of positive role models through encouraging Blacks to pursue forensics as a profession and including blacks in our judging pools; 3) *Cultural Sensitivity* - learning to perceive the forensic activities of debate and performance through the eyes of African Americans, so that we do not delegitimize their culture, heritage and experience; and finally, 4) *Cost* - learning to share our resources, so that the overall forensics community can grow. While the four issues offered in this text do not reflect an exhaustive list, the intent is to stimulate discussion and to provide program directors with a common point to begin laying the foundation for increased membership and participation of African Americans.

Ultimately, it should be remembered, that we are in charge of the asylum. A concentrated effort by a number of directors of forensics to conduct some insightful analysis into how their programs "measure up" in the four areas discussed above would go a long way toward increasing the openness, and thus, attractiveness of this activity to African Americans.

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### **The Focus upon the Individual Competitor**

Speech students can easily follow societal patterns and neglect the importance of the group in forensic development. In fact, an introduction to forensic activities easily begins by accenting the personal perspective. Enthusiastic directors of competitive speech programs may employ the practice of recruiting new team members by focusing upon what forensics can do for the individual. In introducing newcomers to forensics, experienced squad members often "sell" such personal benefits as gaining individual research skills, the improvement of one's public communication, and the accumulation of an achievement record that can enhance a personal employment resume or application for advanced study.

An essential premise in a working definition of forensics also stresses the specific challenge-responsibility to the individual when one person competes with or against others. While group teamwork may be included as a benefit of forensics, explanations frequently begin with a focus upon the challenge to and performance of individual participants. For example, James McBath's often cited essay of 1984 notes that "forensics is a communication-centered experience in scholarship in which one's ideas and arguments are subjected to the judgment of others" (p. 6). While this educator's additional advice can certainly apply to speakers working as a group or team, the responsibility resting upon individual participants is evident when he concludes that "few, if any, academic enterprises place such intense demands upon participants for preparation, practice, confrontation, and critical judgment" (p. 6).

To encourage competitors to become successful, experienced forensic directors often develop inspiring squad speeches promoting the importance of determination and goal setting by each individual. Students are eagerly reminded that the assumption of personal responsibility becomes the foundation for an achieving program. However, with the appropriate motivation to succeed as single competitors, forensic educators also discover how the devotion to achieve as an individual event performer, a debate speaker or a debate unit can become the dominant preoccupation of squad members. More specifically, forensic educators observe how goals such as acquiring qualifying legs or debate victories in particular tournaments can contribute to the fragmentation of speech squads.

### **Toward a Definition of Team**

With a clear recognition of the value of preserving individual responsibility within a team framework, the task of actually building a team emphasis becomes a challenging and rewarding goal. But how can a gathering of talented speakers make the transition from singular performer-competitors to a rewarding team entity?

While a variety of variables influence the coalescence of a collection of competitors into a forensic team, an essential factor is the squad's conceptualization of its own existence and activity. Basic developmental steps must include how a collection of competitors defines itself and how members see themselves as they work together and relate to one another. Specifically, by exploring the team concept, members and coaching leadership can better understand team features and dimensions that merit development and support.

Initial definitions of the team concept usually denote a collection of two or more persons who are associated for a joint, purposeful action. Further, a close

examination of teams at work reveals that they usually function as small groups with definable task allegiance. Thus, characteristics of small groups can certainly apply to the team-group as well. Tubbs (1995), relying upon the research of Shaw (1976), notes that small group characteristics that are often identifiable include the impressions members make on others, the rewarding motivation of the group, working for or with a clear purpose, fulfilling roles, relying upon each other, and interaction (p. 5). Tubbs concludes that as a small group, "the word 'team' also has come to connote closer cooperation and cohesiveness than the term 'group.' So when we use the word 'team,' it implies closeness as well as cooperation" (p. 5).

Specifically, the concept of team as it applies to forensics is understood through application of additional insight from a study of small groups. In a 1991 convention paper, Raymond Zeuschner explored the "connection" between small group theory and forensic teams. He observed:

The qualities of small group interaction are clear: the numbers are right, the motivation to remain part of group is present, goals are usually overt, there exists an organization of roles, there is interdependence, and the participants certainly perceive themselves to be part of a group (p. 3).

In a 1982 paper, RoLayne DeStephen observed that identification of students with a particular "collectivity" reinforces the concept of the team as a group. She noted that "because students perceive the existence of the team as a group to which they belong, and an entity which would continue without a given individual's personal membership, a forensics squad is a small group" (p. 3). Importantly she added, "The fact that an entity functions as a group is, of course, no guarantee that it will be successful in its task accomplishment, or that the group will be one which people feel affiliation with and commitment towards" (p. 4-5).

In essence, by visualizing the forensic team in terms of a small group with its essential group characteristics, members can create a framework for potential growth. Important group-functioning questions and practical choices can then be explored with the goal of strengthening the group while maintaining team and individual achievement.

### **Team Building through Cooperative Group Methods**

If educators and competitors view a forensic team as a small group or a series of small groups in those settings where team units are developed within large comprehensive programs, important questions about coaching and team development deserve consideration. As the following discussion will note, choices in approaching teamwork, learning, and personal growth can unite very competitive members into a group that produces rewarding team and individual benefits.

Views that tend to isolate individual achievers can be countered by emphasizing a cooperative method of learning and performance that is easily adapted to forensic education. In her support of this approach in a convention paper, Caroline Capstick (1994) set forth the argument that cooperative learning is a pedagogical practice that provides "the necessary skills for success in our changing work environment" (p. 2). The author also contends that the concept is "a vital precondition for building community in any forensics program" (p. 2).

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5. Special forensic performances that require more planning and effort than routine rehearsals are especially effective in building individual responsibility and team loyalty. Speakers can be assured that their polished presentations at group meetings convey far more than a fulfillment of personal responsibilities. Indeed, performances can demonstrate a willingness to provide examples for beginning speakers and peer evaluations that can encourage growth of the entire team. Additional question periods and workshop sessions also allow speakers to establish helpful dialogue and relationships with members who are attempting new event assignments.
6. An important premise of some programs is that members should be allowed and encouraged to take academic and performance risks for the overall achievement of their team. Frequently, team members enjoy attempting new individual events or novel debate formats with the realization that their efforts benefit their team. With the impetus of group achievement, individual progress in written and oral communication can also occur as new competencies are developed.
7. Forensic squads can also build team unity that reaches beyond individual competition by fostering service to local and university communities. The usual but important providing of judges for high school and college competition, the hosting of tournaments sponsored by the local chapter, and appearances and performances at numerous service clubs, churches, and organizations are all opportunities for a group to function as a team in service to others.
8. Team task and support functions also include service to the team that is more directly related to competition. My experience emphasizes that team unity and cohesiveness are enhanced by stressing that the group has not prepared for a tournament until each member has assisted another competitor. Opportunities include hearing events, filing extemporaneous speaking material, assisting with speech revisions, and even packing the van for travel.

Service to the team can also assume a more formal arrangement with specific assignments for peer coaching. As explained in a presentation by Carolyn Keefe (1991), such a program "aids the educational development of both the coaches and the coaches" (p. 7). Regardless of the degree of structure selected, peer assistance and coaching can illustrate the theory that group success depends upon members assisting others.

Service can be highlighted by the coaching staff to convey its importance to the team. In the Southwest Baptist program, for example, the only traditional award given at the annual spring banquet attended by parents, administrators, alumni and team members is the D. J. Nabors Forensic Service Award. Named in honor of the former Pi Kappa Delta Executive Secretary, the award recognizes the team member selected by peers as the best example of the year's goal of service to others.

9. No listing of factors contributing to group-team development is complete without mention of the important interpersonal and social dimensions

that promote team development. While the director of forensics is not responsible for the social life of his or her team, opportunities to influence team cohesiveness through social interactions certainly exist. Beyond hosting organizational meetings and special occasions, numerous operational practices affect interpersonal relationships and impact the entire team. For example, many directors establish the norm that all team members adjust schedules so that evening meals are eaten together while in competition. Some coaches stress that members must demonstrate support of colleagues through dependable participation at workshops or team meetings, and still others establish standards for supporting team speakers and opponents at award presentations. Indeed, through a variety of social experiences, coaches and speakers have opportunities to enhance supportive norms and contribute to group maintenance.

### Conclusion

This paper has focused upon the speech team as a developing and rewarding small group. While recognizing the importance of individual responsibility and achievement, the essay has explored potential benefits to be attained when competitive speakers are committed to effective teams. In particular, emphasis has been given to small group identity and cooperative learning as avenues for meeting the needs and goals of forensic teams. Potential strategies for assisting the forensic team as a cooperative and productive small group have also been suggested.

Finally, the claim of this educator is that the functioning of the forensic team as a creative small group can bring rewards that are not accomplished with emphasis upon individual achievement alone. However, as this discussion also contends, society and cultural conditioning tend to accent a focus upon the individual, but the concept of team requires nurturing and support.

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