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ABSTRACT

The rate of speech in intercollegiate debate has been increasing and might have contributed to the proliferation of divisions in debate. The American Debate Association (ADA), National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA), Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA), National Education Debate Association (NEDA), and the National Debate Tournament (NDT) all have different ideas about how to achieve their specific goals. However, a brief look into their general aims discloses that there are very few differences in their goals overall. Part of the advantage of an audience focused style over a speed style is that it prepares students who choose that track to be prepared to debate in the real world. The level of argument in speed debate is much deeper than that of stylized debate. Disadvantages to speed debate may include that not everyone can judge it, that jargon will be used, that some debaters will lose their judges in debates and that there will be disparity when confusing debates take place. The advantages of speed debate outweigh the disadvantages. A compromise on the issue of pulling debate communities back together again is to merge the debate programs and have one big debate community all striving for educational goals. Debaters can learn judicial preferences and cater to that. No matter what decision is made by individual schools as they choose their own communities, the goals they all share in the community should not be compromised. (Contains 10 references.) (RS)

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AT THE SPEED OF SOUND:

Rate of Delivery as a Dividing Factor in Debate

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Central States Panel Discussion

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"Many of the disputes over debate theory in recent years have concerned the choice among competing paradigms as models of debate... In each instance, theorists have assumed that the proper paradigm for evaluating debates can be borrowed from some other activity... In that [previous] work, I built a case for the view that the purpose of debate is not to make policy, test hypotheses, or serve any other real world function, but to teach students how to argue."

Dr. Robert C. Rowland, Baylor University, 1984

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Over the last few decades the rate at which we receive and process information has sped up to a point where a few words here and there in a sound bite substitute for news, weather reports, commercial sales, and informative messages. Information processing has sped up on television, telephone wires, computer databases, modems and the Information Superhighway. At our fingertips we have available so many options for sending and receiving information. With the push of a button and the click of the modem we can send and receive airline tickets, stock quotes, or any type of information we need or want. This has produced a society where there is very little need for books or libraries. These have been changed into moving pictures on computer screens and information databases. We have traded paper for disks, daily planners for handheld computers, and the telephone for beepers, pagers, modems and electronic mail. Perhaps the most significant change has occurred in the rate at which we receive messages. As students of the communication process we understand that receiving messages more rapidly also means processing them more rapidly or decoding them more rapidly. This has a unique implication for students of argument. As members of the information age, we are rapidly processing messages that are intended to persuade. We receive "arguments" in their most basic forms through the click on a computer mouse or a television satellite remote control.

While this may seem initially irrelevant to a group of people embedded in the traditional competition of debate, it is actually potentially an answer to a question that is long discussed but certainly not answered in the debate world. As one of my students said to me after reviewing a tape from the 1997 NDT, "Why ARE they talking so fast?" Surprisingly to some, there is an answer to that. However, this small question is overwhelmed by an even more pressing question. How has the increase

in speed talking in debate contributed to the proliferation of divisions in debate? Is this division among members who are attempting to achieve the same goal reconcilable?

The intent of this paper for this panel discussion is to introduce the topic of rate of speech in intercollegiate debate. Inevitably this discussion will lead to the examination of each debate “type” and while opinions abound about distinctions between the divisions, and stereotypes about who is right and wrong will not be settled here, certainly the conclusion is not nearly as unreconcilable as perhaps it is thought to be.

DEBATE DIVISIONS

There are several divisions in the debate community who have different mission statements and differ in rules of the game. DSR-TKA, American Debate Association (ADA), National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA), Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA), National Education Debate Association (NEDA), and the National Debate Tournament (NDT) all have different ideas about how to achieve their specific goals. However, a brief look into their general aims discloses that there are very few differences in their goals overall. In Argumentation and Advocacy from the fall of 1996, representatives from these different organizations explained their goals and aims and outlined some of the changes that these organizations have made to the community community as a whole and to their own organizations and to through the past few years. An examination of these goals highlights that the differences that lie between these communities are small and on a specific level rather than a general one. For example, aside from a couple which do not list specific goals, most organizations claim to want to increase participation for educational goals achieved through debate. The following list

explains these goals for each community.

The NDT as well as the rest claim to be dedicated to education and opportunity.

“The NDT seeks to be a tournament grounded in sound educational objectives. ...One of the most significant changes...is to debate the topic used by the Cross Examination Debate Association...in hopes of providing more...opportunities during the season and to encourage more crossover between the NDT and CEDA organizations” (Madsen, 1996).

CEDA indicates the same level of dedication to educational goals as well as diversity.

“We see CEDA as a diverse organization that represents our increasingly multicultural population and strives to prepare students for participation in the public sphere. CEDA will continue to provide students opportunities to discover, analyze, and manage information; to develop, communicate, and evaluate ideas; and to experience personal growth...” (Simerly, 1996).

Additionally, the ADA that operates within the NDT community focuses on a balance of educational and other goals.

“The ADA...is an organization committed to a balance between educational and competitive goals in an atmosphere of expanded opportunities for participation. ...ADA attempts to maintain a balance between competition, education, and equitable opportunity through a set of rules that governs the conduct of debaters, tournament administration, and debater eligibility. The ability to offer debate to individuals who have never participate in the activity, prior to the collegiate level, has significantly increased the pedagogical focus of debate within the ADA” (O'Donnell, 1996).

NEDA also promotes those values and even states in it's mission that tournaments will be held to promote the public forum of debate.

“The 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... To facilitate this mission, the Association will host a variety of tournament events open to students and directors willing to abide by and enforce Association standards” (Mission Statement NEDA).

The American Parliamentary Debate Association especially describes its commitment to knowledge.

“Rather than concentrating on extensive preparation of evidence, APDA encourages a breadth, as well as a depth, of knowledge. Since students can be forced to debate almost any topic at short notice, they must have a working knowledge of many political, economic, social and philosophical issues” (Stris, 1996).

All of these communities want to increase the educational function of debate and encourage more participation in the activity. However, as hinted in the selections above, each group has a different way of going about achieving those goals. The biggest distinction (with the possible exception of Parliamentary debate organizations who focus on types of argument as well) is the style and form of debate. Perhaps this distinction is best explained in terms of the audience/judge/critic.

NEDA, APDA, and NPDA all promote “public forum” styles of debate. This indicates that critics and judges would be “lay” judges from the public who could evaluate the debate without knowledge of traditional debate jargon or style. “NEDA

tournaments parallel what most students are accustomed to from their high school or collegiate debate involvement, but its 'public audience' focus has occasioned alterations in rhetorical invention and style. Liberal use of non-debate judges has tended to discourage use of jargon while rewarding analysis and explanation" (Underberg, 1996). This attitude towards debate initially seems consistent with what debate was "supposed" to be (if there is such a thing). The idea of public debate is not a bad one. In fact, it seems consistent with the educational goals and the idea of expanding the debate community to those who have not been previously involved. More lay judges could be involved, and the public as a whole may become more involved. This idea of a public forum does, however, sacrifice some part of current trends in debate. It also divides the community.

NDT style debate, and CEDA and ADA included, all use a style not focused on delivery, but focused on critical thinking and refutation. This is not to say that audience focused debate or public forum debate could not also focus on these things, but the style is not nearly as practiced and focused on delivery in NDT, ADA, and CEDA debate. "Style" as it is referred to in these debates is still subject to speed and to jargon. In fact, the debaters have to appeal to all sorts of judges who can and cannot deal with different levels of clarity, or speed. Debaters are also required to "sort things out" by the end of the debate and that can be difficult sometimes even for them, but that is part of the strategy.

While these divide the community, there are advantages and disadvantages to both an audience focused style and the speed style. It is after fleshing out these advantages to each that some compromise, or at least a recognition of the advantages of debate itself can be realized.

DISADVANTAGES AND ADVANTAGES TO STYLE AND SPEED

Part of the advantage to style is that it prepares students who choose that track to be prepared to debate in the real world. "Delivery tends to share a comparable status with content. Judges at NEDA events are rarely passive critics, thus audience analysis- weighing the impact of public opinion- constrains the form and content of argument...Our debates tend to focus on issues that would strike a general listener as central to the debate proposition" (Underberg, 1996). Furthermore, in the same article, Underberg states, quoting the Association's mission, "The Association's view that debate tournaments are 'an extension of the speech classroom' has far reaching implications for NEDA. Tournaments, while competitive, are also viewed as instructional and learning opportunities. The role of the critic is taken to be one of educator; as a result judges at Association events tend to be more interventionist than is the norm." But these advantages also hold their disadvantages. For example, in the previous quotation, NEDA readily admits that its focus on style "constrains the form and *content* of argument "(emphasis added). It also leads critics and judges to be interventionist. The question this raises is whether this precludes the original goal of increasing the education of our debaters.

If the idea of debate, as created for students of argument and advocacy, is to further the breadth and the depth of their learning environment, it seems important to preserve, as much as possible, the ability for the students themselves to debate out issues. This is not to say that the critic should not intervene to make a decision when necessary, but it seems counter-intuitive to purposely *limit* the ability of the debaters to sort things out for themselves by not only allowing, but facilitating judicial intervention. Judicial intervention implies that the critic can do as she/he wants post the debate. For example, a debate can occur and the judge can fundamentally disagree that a position is true and vote against it no matter what happened in the debate. If this occurs, then

the argument over evidence and reasoning is pointless for the debater. Furthermore, it limits the arguments that will be researched and presented because of certain judicial constraints. If this occurs, then not only is less research done, but fewer debaters learn about certain arguments. If the education of debate is to further breadth as well as depth, then it is defeated by facilitating intervention due to "judicial preference."

Additionally, and perhaps more compelling is the argument of the latter part of the quotation above. It states that arguments can be constrained by this focus on style. It constrains the content of the argument. Again, the question becomes, does this support the educational values that debate sets out? The answer, unfortunately, is most likely no, that is, if argument is another aspect, another thought, another perspective that leads to an increase in knowledge and educated thought. If argument is constrained, as it is in ALL forms of debate, that can be acceptable. After all, there are time constraints. However, the focus on style *uniquely* constrains the argument even from just the normal time constraints. In essence, by comparison to other types of debate and other debate styles, audience-centered debate actually hinders argument further with its focus on slow, stylistic debate. John Miller summarizes this point in the Southern Journal of Forensics in 1996, "While audience-centered debate may appear to instruct students in critical thinking, decision making, and oral communication skills, many of its constraints are detrimental to these same goals. Modeling the public argument styles compel the debaters to rely on anecdotal reasoning, thereby supplanting critical thinking skills." He adds in the conclusion of his essay, "As the emphasis of oral communication maintains a predominate role, the debater is urged to sound persuasive rather than to argue soundly. Public debate will undoubtedly continue to grow as dissatisfaction with the dominate debate organizations continues to flourish. While forensics educators search for new alternatives, one must be ever vigilant to be certain that the goals of educational debate are not harmed by the

practices of the alternatives no matter how honorable the alternatives may appear.” (Miller, 1996).

This is not to say that there is no place for style or form, or that style is necessarily a bad thing to focus on. More so, the question is again, what it does to the education of debate. Some may argue that part of the education of debate is style, thereby making the argument that debate is a communication activity. It is my contention that debate is still a communication activity which focuses on critical thinking and argument and advocacy rather than on style, flowery language, appearance, and judicial intervention. In fact, there are outlets for focusing on style. However, it must be admitted by the community (and probably readily would be) that the level of argument in speed debate is much deeper than that of stylized debate. Therefore, education on issues and argument are deeper and broader, furthering those goals originally addressed in this essay.

Disadvantages to speed debate may include that not everyone can judge it, that there will be jargon used, that some debaters will lose their judges in debates and that there will be disparity when confusing debates take place. It also means, however, that more arguments are researched, that more debates take place, that more advocacy is furthered and that more critical thinking is required by those students whose minds the community is attempting to broaden. It is a fact that some judges/critics cannot always keep up with the speed at which some arguments are delivered. The response to this should not be that the critic is then rendered incompetent or that the critic should no longer judge. In fact, it should mean that the debaters who can make themselves aware of this facts rather easily, should learn how to debate for that judge. Some critics can handle 25 blip answers that somehow make sense to them. Others would like more explanation. Either way, a debater's responsibility lies in *persuading the critic* even if it is done at 350 words per minute. If

the judge can handle that, then why should the debater be limited to speaking at a style generally accepted in social circles when in fact, he or she is further his or her advocacy and education? Perhaps the answer to that lies in a more serious question. Aside from the judges, what if debaters do not want to participate in fast paced debate? Most students know or learn about speed debate. However, it still seems that fast talking does not necessarily preclude anyone from debating. Training may be needed, but it does not uniquely eliminate anyone from the debate forum.

The advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages however. First, more argument appears in a debate that allows speed. Secondly, the rate at which the arguments are delivered and heard, along with the inherent time constraints in debate, provide for an environment conducive to quick, fast-paced, critical thinking. This is particularly important because the increase at the rate at which we receive information currently demands the ability to think critically about that information. Third, though the speed argument looks superficial at first, it is important to also know that as the jargon in debate is used at a high speed, so is "jargon" used in commercial advertising, memos, e-mail, and paging systems. The argument that debate uses a jargon not understood by the rest of the world is absolutely true. Small, made-up and fragmented words stand for arguments. However, this is the way things in the status quo are presented to us. Think about commercials, fax machines, and especially e-mail with its short-hand style letters and "emoticons." The superhighway of information processing speeds up exponentially as technology improves. And as the information we receive comes faster and faster and this society begins to process information faster and faster it will become more important for our future students and leaders to not only learn to receive that information, but to also learn how to deal with it. It is becoming more important for educators, particularly those in debate, to help their students deal with this rapid exchange of information critically.

COMPROMISES

Does this mean that no one will ever be able to come to a compromise on the issue of pulling debate communities back together again? Perhaps. But it is also possible that there is a solution to this great problem that people do not consider anymore. What is communication (especially for an audience) for anymore? Is it not still true that ideas such as “audience analysis” and “audience adaptation” still do exist? While it seems like it may not in the NDT, ADA, or CEDA, it really *does* occur. It can occur in any division of debate with different judicial paradigms, preferences and style considerations. It seems possible then, to merge the debate programs and have one big debate community all striving for educational goals. Debaters can learn judicial preferences and cater to that. Maybe then everyone could get the best benefit-speed debaters will learn more about style and style debaters will learn more about critical thinking at a faster pace. This is a simplistic solution, however, and most likely a utopian one. It most likely will never happen and the transition would be brutal. However, as cited previously, John Miller’s analysis is still the most compelling: no matter what decision is made by individual schools as they choose their own communities, the goals that we all share in the community should not be compromised.

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