

REFLECTIONS ON CEDA DEBATE - 1980-81

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The academic year of 1980-81 has been a period of substantial growth in CEDA debate. This has also been a period that finds CEDA debate as a speech activity serving the needs of a large number of students and schools across the nation. The growth and acceptance of CEDA debate brings me great personal pleasure because I remember vividly the early years of the Southwest Cross-examination Debate Association which later became the Cross-Examination Debate Association. In those early years we vied for the forensic community's acceptance and understanding of what an alternative to NDT debate could and should be. Now roughly a decade later the forensic community understands the intent of CEDA debate. CEDA debate is not precisely today what it was back in the early 1970's, but it certainly is a strong activity with the support of a large number of programs across the country. CEDA debate fills a need for an alternative form of debate to NDT debate. That alternative has varied somewhat from year to year, depending upon whether CEDA was debating a policy proposition or a value proposition. Many of the coaches and directors involved in the coaching and administration of CEDA debate have expressed their views in the past on what forensic skills a CEDA debater should emphasize. Many are struggling to define the finer points of debating value propositions. Some have concerns regarding whether we utilize one or two debate topics each year. This sort of

constant reassessment of the activity is healthy and should continue. From all of the discussions and considerations of CEDA debate a clear premise emerges. There is basic agreement that CEDA debate is intended to be a very communicative style of debate that puts its emphasis upon persuasiveness. That philosophy of debate is operationalized by intercollegiate debaters and evaluated by critic judges in a variety of ways at various tournaments in different parts of the nation, but the basic philosophy stands with clarity.

CEDA has always resisted attempts to make too many rules, regulations or pronouncements regarding the proper approach for a CEDA debate. This is wise because there has been no compelling need for an elaborate set of pronouncements regarding the proper CEDA procedure. Some forensics events can be changed and redefined ad nauseam and those redefinitions only serve to suit the whim of certain persons in the forensics community at a particular point in time. With CEDA debate in its current state we see a situation in which style and form seems to change slightly from year to year to fit the topic under debate. As rhetorical strategies and debate techniques have changed in NDT debate they have also influenced the style of CEDA debate. But it is encouraging to observe that the debaters in CEDA still view themselves with a certain distinctive quality, i.e., they believe they must be communicative and persuasive in order to be an effective CEDA debater.

CEDA has an outstanding feature embodied in the procedure of counting only a school's best six tournaments to determine their national standing. It makes CEDA unique and

allows schools with a small to modest travel budget, the opportunity to still achieve a respectable national ranking. It is pleasing to listen to the statements of some forensics directors who indicate that a CEDA national ranking system has given them needed publicity and visibility on their campus that has resulted in the leverage to gain more support for their school's forensic activities program. Lets face it, for unique and special educational programs to survive in the 1980's those programs must have some positive public relations. The public relations benefit to an institution of being ranked relatively high in the national standings of CEDA can be significant and it has been significant with some schools in being able to either build or sustain their programs.

On the other side of the coin, I would be less than candid if I said that there has not been some criticism of the CEDA point determination format. That criticism usually focuses upon the belief that the point system distorts the priorities of some programs. Obviously, that is true in some cases. But it is also obvious that every forensic director and every program sets certain priorities that fit their particular circumstances. CEDA merely provides an additional alternative for the allocation of a program's energy and resources. CEDA does not officially mandate either a highly competitive or non-competitive philosophy for a program. Some colleges have joined CEDA or begun CEDA debate programs because they did not like the NDT emphasis on winning and qualifying for a national championship tournament. Other schools have joined CEDA because

they felt that CEDA national standings provided a very clear indication for the school of its competitive debate success. Some schools don't really care where they stand in the national rankings. This diversity of attitudes is healthy. There will always be those who disagree with the philosophies of other directors and other programs. But disagreement over program philosophy does not justify any drastic changes in our CEDA format or record keeping system.

The CEDA by-laws and procedures are quite clear and simple, and the organization's strength is in adhering to them. Most of the problems we have discussed at national meetings or that persons have brought to our concern have been more a feature of a lack of knowledge regarding the procedures than anyone's conscious attempt to subvert or distort CEDA procedures. Now this may not have always been the case prior to this year, but at this point in CEDA's history its rules and procedures governing the counting of points have been quite well refined. A simple reading of an up-dated copy of the CEDA constitution should provide a clear understanding of the procedure for authorizing CEDA tournaments and counting points.

In regard to the future I believe that the organization ought to take a conservative and cautious approach to change. I don't believe its wise for us to tamper with success. CEDA's growth has been almost phenomenal. The value of CEDA to the forensic community is rarely challenged. There is, however, one rather simple suggestion I would like to make for the future. I would suggest that tournament directors who include a CEDA division at their tournaments consider offering a junior and a senior division of CEDA debate. In some parts of the country student partici-

pation in NDT debate dropped drastically during 1980-81 so that tournaments that formerly held junior and senior divisions of NDT debate collapsed that division to an open NDT division. Also, in many of those cases there were enough CEDA teams to justify two strong divisions of CEDA debate. Some coaches have consistently expressed frustration at entering rather green, novice debaters in a CEDA division that includes many seasoned three and four year debate veterans. Some of the highly experienced debaters would prefer to enter competition where they are assured of competing against experienced debaters each round. I do think the time has come for tournaments with a large CEDA entry to consider offering two divisions in CEDA.

During the last several years, some directors have expressed an interest in having CEDA sponsor a national tournament to determine the best team in CEDA debate. I believe that at this point that would be an unwise route for us to take. CEDA began with the idea of providing a distinctive alternative to debate which is focused on year-end championship competition. With the present format, season long competition is significant in CEDA and an entire forensic squad's slate of CEDA teams can, and usually do, contribute to a team's standing. To begin a national championship CEDA tournament would seem to greatly dilute the rationale that underlies CEDA debate.