

RESPONSE

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From its inception, intercollegiate debate has been designed with the primary goal of equipping students with the knowledge, skills, values, and dispositional traits needed for a meaningful and successful life. Those who have committed themselves to the enterprise have worked hard toward fulfillment of this mission. Judged from the perspective of dominant 20th century Euro-Centric United States society, I believe that the traditional forensics model served its purposes well. Its participants cultivated critical thinking skills, a spirit of individualism, a competitive drive, and other skills, values, and dispositions that were associated with success within the dominant culture.

But as we enter a new millennium, there is much evidence that it is time to reconsider the goals and mission of this enterprise. Enriched by the contributions of African-American, Womanist, Feminist, Latino and Latina, Asian-American, American Indian, and other voices that have challenged the dominant paradigm, the field has the potential to respond effectively to global change. Worldwide transformations compel responsible educators to reassess our basic assumptions regarding truth, morality, relationships, decision-making, economics, and politics, and challenge us to rethink our pedagogical assumptions and practices. As Melissa Wade notes: "the coming century will require radical pedagogical reform in order to promote a healthy society" (40).

Today's debate students will enter a world marked by dramatic demographic shifts, by a break-down of historically secure cultural boundaries, by exploding population growth, by technological proliferation in every field – science, medicine, law, education, journalism, and media – as well as by increased global inter-dependence, and perhaps most fundamentally, by extraordinary moral complexity.

Meaningful and successful participation in this New Age will require distinctive sets of skills, values, knowledge, and dispositional traits. Perhaps foremost among these will be a willingness and skilled capacity to cross cultural boundaries with respect, sensitivity, and care; multi-cultural sensibility and relational abilities; self-reflexivity; participatory decision-making skills; conflict resolution abilities; community-building abilities; and

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sophisticated and deep critical thinking skills. Students entering the New Age are entering a world in which the well being of all who live on the planet will depend upon widespread replacement of the ethic of control and domination with an ethic of inter-dependence, love and care. Increasingly social, economic and political justice will be understood as key measures of morality. In this New Age, debate students will need a different set of knowledge, skills, and abilities than their predecessors.

In my view, the thoughtful re-conceptualization of debate proposed by participants in this project goes a long way toward meeting these challenges and tapping related opportunities. The group's focus on the learning process, on debate as an exercise designed to enhance understanding and to build loving connections, on debate as a tool for reasoned deliberation, on helping students view one another as resources, instead of as enemies, opponents, rivals or adversaries, will help to equip student participants for the opportunities and challenges they are likely to confront in the years ahead.

After careful review of this project, I believe that a few relatively minor modifications will help align the debate exercise even more fully with twenty-first century pedagogical goals. The roles and responsibilities of the judge/critic are particularly important. Rather than asking the judge or critic to indicate his or her view on the subject – an approach that risks focusing on ends at the expense of means – I would suggest developing and implementing criteria for performance assessment that align with the activity's purposes. To what extent have participants contributed to the quality of their own as well as audience members' deliberations on the subject? How effectively have participants helped to illumine core issues, and helped audience members grapple with the moral complexities of these issues? How effectively have participants demonstrated a deep understanding of and responsiveness to multiple perspectives on key issues? To what extent do participants' arguments reflect well-informed, thoughtful, sensitive, and reasoned insight? To what extent did the participants contribute to an experience of safety and immanent value, and so on? Developing and applying criteria of this type will help to align judging activities with the purposes of the forum.

I also share Cindy Griffin's view that it is important to avoid binary resolutions. To the extent that debaters use binary ground for debate, they risk simplifying complex issues. Instead, I would encourage issue construction that enhances participants' capacities to grapple with and understand the deep complexities of the moral issues that they are

confronting. I would also encourage debate participants to share all of their information and evidence with one another throughout the process of preparing for the debate exercise.

In my view it is also important to discourage participants from advocating on behalf of perspectives they do not embrace. To the extent possible, I would encourage participants to provide authentic representation of views, and to encourage passionate participation in the exercise. In my view, passionate presentation of views in no way conflicts with invitation and offering. However, passionate expression must be grounded with a corresponding openness and receptivity. This element is key, in my view, to successful 21st century pedagogy.

Finally, I would consider tapping community resources. Linking debate with service learning offers one potentially fruitful outlet. Inviting members of the community at large to serve as critics and judges could prove especially productive. Working with community partners in the development and implementation of criteria for performance assessment, for example, will help to foster reciprocal partnerships that will serve debate participants, as well as the broader community.

In his illuminating comments during our NCA presentation of this panel, Jeffrey Bile raised the question: "Is argument inherently problematic, or can argument be conceptualized in a way that is invitational?" ("Invitational Debate" 6). He went on to remind us of insights by Robert Trapp and Joseph Wenzel regarding differences between traditional rhetorical, logical and dialectical perspectives. As he reminded us, traditionally, rhetorical perspectives focused primarily on suasive effectiveness, logical perspectives called for conformity to external standards of good argument, and dialectical perspectives seek to tap argument as a resource for effective decision making. The latter, according to Bile, is especially "friendly with invitation."

I share Bile's view regarding dialectical perspectives, and have long supported this approach to argumentation practice, as well as pedagogy. I believe as well, however, that it is possible (and perhaps advantageous) to adopt an integrative approach to argumentation and debate, one that taps the resources and insights of traditional perspectives, while radically revisioning core epistemological, sociological, ethical, and spiritual assumptions. I'm hopeful that my comments above help to illustrate how, with a few modifications, this project can achieve such integration, and help to address 21st century pedagogical challenges and opportunities.

MacArthur Fellow Anna DeVeres Smith noted recently in her contribution to the Millennium Project that freedom is wanting to do what you need to do because it will make the world a better place. I commend this project's effort to help students and faculty experience this sense of freedom, and hope that my small offering will contribute to this outcome.

Works Cited

- "Invitational Debate." Unpublished Transcript. Debate presented at the Annual Convention of the National Communication Association, Chicago, 1999.
- Wade, Melissa Maxcy. "A Reflection on the Future of the NDT." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 33 (1996): 40-43.