

CEDA VS. NDT: A DYSFUNCTIONAL MYTH
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Forensics is an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people. An argumentative perspective on communication involves the study of reason giving by people as justification for acts, beliefs, attitudes and values. From this perspective, forensics activities, including debate and individual events, are laboratories for helping students to understand and communicate various forms of argument more effectively in a variety of contexts with a variety of audiences.¹

If forensics is indeed an educational activity, then the "coach" should be guided by the desire to provide the best education possible to forensic competitors. The experimentation and innovation, which have characterized competitive debate since its inception in this country serve as testimony that most coaches have taken seriously their educational responsibilities.² Forensic educators have primarily pursued two complementary concerns: The study of argument and the development of delivery skills. There has always been disagreement on the relative importance of these two goals. Even in the early 1900's criteria for judgment in academic debate reflected this tension. "Sometime a basis of fifty percent was suggested for argument and the same for delivery, sometimes it was sixty for argument and forty for delivery, or even seventy-five and twenty-five."³

Even today, the question of emphasis is still with us, as indicated by the way educators view their roles. Although the categories are overly simplified, coaches have divided themselves into two broad camps. These categories reflect different pedagogical assumptions of what the purpose of a forensic education should be, and imply the standards a critic should use in evaluating a debate. First, many educators view themselves primarily as "teachers of argumentation." These educators follow a tradition, exemplified by Whately and Perelman, which focuses on logos or reason giving. Consequently the debate round is interpreted as a contest of arguments and the judge serves as a critic of argumentation.

The second category emanates from a tradition more closely aligned with concerns of Blair and Winans. This tradition views the goal of forensic education within a public speaking model. These "teachers of public address," emphasize the ethical and pathetic forms of proof which induce audience adherence. Consequently, the debate judge evaluates the style and delivery skills as an integral part of any decision.

Of course, all debate coaches recognize the importance of both the argument and performance factors, but the underlying assumptions of each tradition suggest the prominence each factor plays in pedagogical application. Consider the practices which each model emphasizes. The first class of scholars requires a primary role for research in their educational systems. This emphasis stems from the understanding that the research abilities required of highly competitive intercollegiate forensics provide the student with skills critical to the creation, discovery and understanding of arguments. Likewise,

the second class of scholars emphasizes the search for "all the available means of persuasion" in reference to a particular audience. Thus, analysis, humor, style, etc., are of primary concern to such educators.

Nevertheless, we see today an increasingly polarized world in the forensic community. "Teachers of argument" too often are known only as NDT coaches. Those educators who emphasize delivery and style are increasingly lumped in the category of "CEDA only." The feud which separates "CEDA people" from "NDT people" is as useless and artificial as the separation of argument and delivery. An advocate should be trained in both the study of argument and the skills necessary for persuasive delivery. It is not the purpose of the authors to deny the differences in focus of CEDA and NDT debate, it is rather to celebrate it. We are concerned that forensic coaches often fail to appreciate the role performed by each of the debate formats and the value of each. This lack of understanding is harmful for the activity in general and for the student in particular.

This past spring, Jack Howe issued the "Report of the Executive Secretary of CEDA - 1982."⁴ In his report, a genuine concern is expressed as to the future direction of CEDA debate. He reminded CEDA coaches of the roots of the activity, stressing the goals of "communicative delivery, a balance among evidence, argument, and analysis, audience appeals and appropriate demands on students' time and energy." Because we agree that CEDA focuses on unique educational goals, we find the concern expressed in the report encouraging. However, Howe's report is also somewhat disconcerting. The point of view of the report can be interpreted in no other way than displaying an extreme "ethnocentrism." One symptom of this ethnocentric attitude is the espousal of the position that CEDA, by maintaining the "true" values of debate, will save the activity from itself. In other words, CEDA represents what is good in debate and NDT represents what is leading to debate's demise. Howe states:

To those students who now debate CEDA with no regard for a communicative delivery and who believe that the key to success in CEDA is the amassing of hoards of evidence to the disparagement of argumentation and analysis and who persist in distorting our debate topics so as to make a mockery of them, I suggest that there is an alternative form of debate available: It is called NDT. Since you have not left it in spirit, then why don't you rejoin it in actuality?⁵

By implication, then, if you want to speak poorly, engage in bad argument and analysis and distort the activity, you are an NDT debater. If you insist on bad practices, join the misdirected. Needless to say, we take offense at this comment and believe that such causes serious injury to the activity.

Unfortunately, we believe that dichotomous thinking is increasingly characteristic of debaters and coaches alike. Comments often heard at tournaments are typified by the following:

"CEDA is saving debate from the excesses of the narrow and self-serving NDT types," or

"CEDA is for those who cannot make it in 'real' debate."

This categorical thinking is also reflected in Howe's affectionate references in the report to the "CEDA clan's" commitment to solidarity and

openness. By implication then, there must be a closed exclusive "NDT clan" existant in the forensics community. The reference to clans are by their very nature perjorative. Classification of CEDA and NDT into clans makes it more difficult to think holistically in terms of a "debate community." It is such attitudes which are key to understanding the trends which so disturb Professor Howe.

There is a growing consensus that forensics has changed in the last decade. Traditional debate has suffered in terms of participation vis-a-vis other forms of forensics competition.⁶ This decline has been explained by many in the "CEDA clan" as a failure of NDT to reflect the "important" factors of a forensics education, namely delivery and audience appeal.⁷ Given the perspective of the historical debate between advocates of each pedagogical position, we find this excuse less than satisfactory.⁸ An alternative hypothesis would suggest that NDT has changed for more fundamental reasons. First, NDT became more and more insular, excluding other styles of debate. Success was defined in terms of national circuit competition and squads became increasingly specialized to meet the challenge. Secondly, the information explosion and the need to find ways of accommodating the data deluge changed the activity.⁹ One response to numerous cases and information availability has been shifts in theory and practices to maintain argumentative equilibrium. NDT debate now requires the knowledge of sophisticated gamesmanship in rounds. The use of various theoretical "paradigms" which enable many of the complicated maneuvers in rounds has not been without positive effect. Such developments have, for example, stimulated related work in argumentation theory and lead to careful review of the assumptions underlying the activity.¹⁰ The problem, of course, is that such development often works against other goals, such as providing a forensics education to a broad range of students. Thus debate becomes an activity for the select few. Increased sophistication necessarily means higher "entry barriers." Obtaining a level of proficiency which equates with success requires long internship periods. As a consequence, participation has declined. It is almost as though we have a sign on the door which reads, "Only the very brightest and already trained need apply." In many instances CEDA has provided debate opportunities without excessive "entry barriers." The separatism of CEDA, however, threatens this very strength.

The message here should be very clear for those working to develop CEDA debate. The "practices" of NDT, which are so strongly objected to, are the result of "causes" which increasingly typify CEDA debate.

The adoption of a solitary debate style within programs necessarily raises the caliber of what it takes "to-play-the-game" successfully. As "entry barriers" are raised the successful CEDA debater can be expected to have an extensive high school background. Specialization and increased sophistication is spurred by the "closed system" and the cycle (fed by pursuit of the mythical national title) enters into a spiral not unlike NDT. We are sure many in CEDA would defend trends of increased sophistication and theory development but they should be prepared to be far less critical of NDT's shift in emphasis and recognize the implications for what Howe refers to as the "underlying

strengths" of CEDA. Maintaining realistic "entry barriers", emphasizing a public speaking model and resisting the evidence explosion ask not for a rejection of NDT but rather urge persuasively for programs which do both.

At the risk of being accused of viewing CEDA and NDT hierarchically, we are suggesting that the "underlying strengths" of CEDA can best be maintained when there is strict adherence to those goals while other outlets are made available to the highly experienced and motivated students.

Debate has long been an activity with few "rules" for conduct. Perhaps it is time that CEDA consider restricting, through more formal structures, the practices allowed. This would clarify judging criteria and guarantee CEDA's adherence to certain goals. Concomitant would be a recognition of the different goals of traditional debate and allow it to reflect a more natural evolution. NDT and CEDA would be viewed as supplementary activities within a single program, each contributing different educational goals to the student.

It should be clear by now that both NDT and CEDA debate operate from different pedagogical models, each offering important contributions to a complete forensics education. The schism between debate communities imposes blinders on evaluating the contribution of each debate style for students. In addition, excessive ethnocentrism functions to threaten the very goals that CEDA has traditionally promoted. It is our contention that the best solution is one which offers diversity within programs, not just among programs.

When programs make the choice to offer one or the other of the activities, it is often a carefully considered decision. Circumstances do dictate that some student opportunities cannot be provided within a given program but far too often the choice represents little more than a rationalization. We have heard many excuses and few compelling arguments for the limited program. Consider the following:

1. We only do "X" because the other is morally bankrupt or teaches the wrong skills. Throughout this essay, we have addressed contributions to be made by both forms of debate and can only wonder at the director who has found "truth."
2. Our program only has the resources to do "X". The limited resources each program has to expect is a serious concern of and often dictates hard choices. While resources may limit the number of teams that can effectively be served by a program, this does not seem to be an argument why all teams must be entered CEDA or NDT. Sometimes tournament patterns dictate what is the best use of dollars and time, but if programs were integrated and consequently selected tournaments which rewarded this diversity, this problem would soon disappear. Even now, there is a trend in tournaments, including many which have been exclusively national NDT tournaments, to offer both. Another absurdity could be solved by consolidating national competitions in a way that would not require traveling to different ends of the country in the same year.
3. As directors, we only have the time and expertise to do CEDA or NDT. In some instances this may be the case, but as Director of Forensics

and educators, coaches could and should have expertise in both argumentation and communication theory. Rather than being a reason to limit a program, this seems to argue for better qualified coaches. Broad based debate programs provide a number of advantages to the activity and to students which an either/or program inhibits.

First, integrated programs would strengthen the idea of a "debate community" as opposed to warring camps. In a time when the activity is threatened economically and academically, working cooperatively can only strengthen the community. The cues are abundant that such a reapproachment is possible and it is time to seize the moment. Arguably the NDT community, through elitist attitudes, has been uninterested in the concerns and values of CEDA debate during the last decade. Such attitudes on the part of NDT schools are changing with the realization that debate must be more broadly based to survive. Many programs which have traditionally offered only NDT are now also participating in CEDA, whereas there are few "CEDA schools" making an effort to offer a meaningful NDT experience. The exclusive attitude among NDT coaches surely was one of the catalysts for CEDA's growth but the response among CEDA people has been no less exclusive or elitist.

It is our position that the ethnocentrism is no more justified when practiced by CEDA programs than it was when practiced by NDT programs. Last February, in an open meeting the National Debate Tournament Committee held at Northwestern University, a frank discussion of primarily "NDT coaches" concluded with the unanimous adoption of the following resolution:

That it (NDT Committee) ask the AFA to establish a committee to find ways and means of promoting a dialogue among all components of the college forensics community concerning the state and future directions of the activity. This AFA committee should, at a minimum, bring together leaders to the CEDA and NDT debate communities in order to attempt to find common ground for future goals.¹¹

We do not know the specific outcome of this particular resolution but offer it as an indication that an atmosphere for reapproachment exists. Failure to recognize the opportunity and retreat into an exclusive "CEDA clan" is to invite the same conditions which reduced NDT's appeal.

Second, integrated programs offer increased opportunities for students. Without a doubt CEDA can provide skills within a communication model emphasizing public disclosure. CEDA also has been a place for students to learn fundamental debate skills without discouraging the novice competitor. These advantages do not demonstrate, however, that NDT should be abandoned. As detailed earlier, NDT provides outlets for many students and uniquely emphasized argumentation theory. Our concern is with those programs which subscribe to the false dichotomy and provide their students only one type of opportunity. It is as equally reprehensible to be unconcerned with communication skills as it is to keep the especially skilled student consistently debating against the less skilled or debating before critics far less sophisticated in argument. It may win the program trophies or sweepstakes points, but the educational rationale is compromised.

Third, integrated programs necessitate an environment where practices in

NDT and CEDA are mutually beneficial. Rather than students learning to distrust each other and finding security in their isolation, an integrated program forces interaction. Whenever people interact, there is a tendency for understanding to increase and for each party to learn from each other.

To the extent CEDA and NDT have merits and limitations, their interaction should serve to moderate and strengthen practices in both. Their symbiotic relationship in an integrated program has healthy implications for theory and practice.

The above arguments should not be interpreted as attacks on CEDA as an integral part of the "debate community." We have both been demonstrably committed to CEDA. What prompted this discussion is a sincere belief that CEDA can provide unique opportunities in debate, as can NDT. We value educationally useful alternatives and hope that CEDA and NDT thrive in a supportive atmosphere. We are convinced that the divisive tone found in the Executive Secretary's Report is harmful to students and CEDA itself. A stronger "debate community" will be formed when programs embrace the benefits of each debate style and celebrate their differences.

NOTES

¹Forensics as Communication: The Argumentative Perspective, ed., James H. McBath (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Company, 1975), p. 11.

²A short history of the change and innovation which occurred in the forensics community is found in L. Leroy Cowperthwaite and A. Craig Baird, "Intercollegiate Debating" in A History of Speech Education in America, ed., Karl A. Wallace (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1954), pp. 259-276.

³Egbert Ray Nichols, "A Historical Sketch of Intercollegiate Debating: I", Quarterly Journal of Speech 22 (April, 1936), as quoted in Cowperthwaite and Baird, p. 218.

⁴Jack H. Howe, Report of the Executive Secretary of CEDA, May, 1982, p. 1.

⁵Howe, p. 1.

⁶See the Fall 1979 issue of Speaker and Gavel, "Forensics in the Seventies: A Retrospective". The entire issue is a discussion of trends in the last decade.

⁷One concern often expressed by those working primarily with CEDA is that NDT fails to reflect the communication curriculum and ignores important communication skills. It is accurate to observe that delivery skills associated with public speaking have declined but inaccurate to assume that all communication skills are ignored by NDT. Faules, Rieke and Rhodes observe that "Although a great proportion of the speaking that people do is not public, it does not necessarily follow that public speaking is less important than it once was, even though values have changed in terms of oratorical delivery. But there is a need for a re-evaluation of priorities. It can no longer be assumed that public speaking is unequivocally the most important goal of forensics programs. Student behavior which results in increased capacity to communicate, persuade, solve problems and make decisions in the less publicized (but no less important) small conferences, negotiations and interviews are equally important to education." Don Faules, Richard Rieke and Jack Rhodes, Directing Forensics: Contest and Debate Speaking, (Denver, Colo.: Norton Publishing Co., 1976), p. 48.

⁸Many coaches are sincere in their concern with trends in debate and undoubtedly the move to "save debate from itself" is founded on legitimate reservation. It is often helpful, however, to bring some perspective to the

predictions of the eternal pessimists. In the first and second decades of intercollegiate debate in America concerns were raised that sound suspiciously close to present day explanations of "cause-effect" in forensics' demise.

In the first decade of this century a "block system" was introduced to enhance clash in debates. According to Cowperthwaite and Baird (p. 267), "with this method, all debaters, except the first affirmative speakers, were directed to prepare paragraphs or 'blocks' of arguments on all the conceivably important issues that might arise during a debate. By committing these 'blocks' to memory, the debater could, during the course of the debate, select and assemble such 'blocks' as would result in a direct challenge to the opponents' case. Blocked rebuttal answers were likewise prepared in advance."

Criticism as early as 1913 "led by persons no less prominent than Theodore Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryan, questioned the moral soundness of coaching methods, then prevalent, of requiring college debaters to argue on both sides of a question . . ." (p. 270). Cowperthwaite and Baird go on to note that "educators centered on what many of them thought to be an unhealthy stress upon winning the judges' decisions. Widespread dissatisfaction was expressed over the choice of judges and judging methods." (p. 270)

Concerns for the future of the activity are best directed toward positive suggestions rather than finding satisfaction in defining and celebrating current practices only as negative.

⁹Increased availability of information alone has made debate a different activity. It will not be long until computer storage and computer information searches will be a tool of every debater. Already many squads are employing the computer for evidence storage and block composition. A couple of squads are even experimenting with portable terminals, carried to tournaments, to enable immediate data access.

¹⁰NDT and CEDA have encouraged publications in national forensics journals and numerous convention programs which have contributed to our understanding of debate and argument. Often these efforts are preceeded and stimulated by practices in actual debates. The gamesmanship of "paradigms" in NDT debate has, for example, enabled the examination of the various conditions necessary for assent to an argument. Considerations of burdens of proof, presumption and the functions of propositions within various "argument fields" has been instructive.

¹¹Minutes, "National Debate Tournament Committee Open Meeting," February 12, 1982, Northwestern University, p. 8.