

The State of CEDA, 1986

Walter Ulrich
Vanderbilt University

The CEDA organization has made great strides in the past fifteen years, growing from a small regional debate organization to the largest collegiate debate organization in the country. At the same time, this growth has posed problems for the organization as CEDA has attracted a wide variety of individuals with a variety of views on the nature of debate. In addition, as the size of CEDA has increased, small problems have become magnified and new ones created.

This paper will outline what I consider to be some of the major issues facing CEDA in the mid-1980's. These views are tentative; my guess is that many of these will be altered in the course of the discussions, and in a few instances I have attempted to play the role of devil's advocate by outlining the possible approaches we might take to a problem.

I. Factors affecting participation in CEDA

I once had a teacher who observed that the primary purpose of any organization was its own self-preservation. To a degree, this is true in debate. Unless we continue to ensure that participation in debate remains high, questions concerning the quality of debate may become academic. While, at least for CEDA, the risk of a significant loss of participants is unlikely, it is still desirable to consider ways that we can expand participation in CEDA.

A. Institutional Support. Participation in CEDA, for many programs, depends on the support of their academic institutions. One of the reasons for the decline in debate in the 1970's was the increasing strain placed on institutions of higher education. In times of tight money, debate was often sacrificed. As an organization, we need to publicize the benefits of

debate/forensics in general, and CEDA in particular. This is especially true given the current interest in the quality of education. Debate has a proven record for educating this country's leaders. A large number of the Congressional members and those listed in Who's Who have debate backgrounds. We need to publicize CEDA nationally, through articles in popular and/or education journals, and through publicity releases of the CEDA rankings to publications such as USA Today and the wire services.

B. Departmental Support. CEDA also needs to become more visible and encourage support from the individual departments. Unfortunately, debate in general is often not seen as prestigious by many in the speech profession. Part of problem may lie in the fact that debate coaches are not active researchers, and many administrators and speech colleagues view research as an important academic function. Professional jealousy may also play a part; most in the academic world do not receive such tangible recognition as their students winning trophies and awards. While efforts such as the CEDA Yearbook provide some incentive for individuals to publish, the research productivity of a coaches has been uneven, both in quantity and quality. It is important that we encourage coaches to publish both in the area of argumentation/debate and in other ways. In the past, debate has provided many leaders in the field of speech; CEDA has yet to do this, partly because it is relatively new and partly because many of the CEDA leadership are from non-research institutions. We need to encourage CEDA coaches to participate in research, perhaps through a research award.

C. Directors of Forensics. The future of CEDA depends on the willingness of individual coaches to maintain their programs. Coaches are under many competing pressures from classroom responsibilities to family obligations. When programs come under attack, it is sometimes tempting to give in with only a minor fight to the cuts that decrease the demands

placed on a coach. Debate needs to be enjoyable to the coach. CEDA's decision to shorten the debate season and to encourage two day tournaments are decisions that do much to ease the burdens on coaches. We also need to develop methods for increasing the involvement of all coaches in the activity.

D. Increasing Participation. Participation in many extracurricular activities has declined in the past decade, and debate is no way to this trend. Increased entry barriers have contributed to the declining participation in high school and NDT debate. To be competitive in policy debate, a team must be prepared for a host of counterplans (anarchy, socialism, world government, negotiations, study, states, etc.), generic arguments (growth, Malthus, symbolism, etc.), theoretical arguments (topicality, counterwarrants, etc.) and, if possible, something about the specific topic. One strength of CEDA is that it has lower entry barriers than any other form of debate. NDT programs often have huge backfiles that give established programs a significant advantage over beginning programs. In considering the future directions which CEDA should take, this important area should be kept in mind.

II. The CEDA Organization

A. The Problem of Centralization. CEDA has traditionally been a very informal organization, with many details left up to individual coaches and tournament directors. Today, we are forced to deal with the trade offs between a centralized and a decentralized organization.

1. The case for decentralization. Decentralization has a number of strengths. It appeals to the individuality in many coaches. Although the national organization compiles a list of topics from which to chose, each CEDA member has a vote in deciding the final topic. Tournaments can

experiment with any format. Judges are unregulated. Rules for debate are kept at a minimum. Decentralization leaves the future of the activity to the marketplace.

2. The case for centralization. Opponents of this perspective suggest that the marketplace has failed to promote the goals of CEDA. From this perspective, the only way to ensure the goals of CEDA are met is to impose some standards on all those who compete in CEDA. These standards should be imposed on tournaments, coaches, judges, and participants. It is argued that the marketplace will fail CEDA as it arguably failed NDT.

Both perspectives have advantages and disadvantages; my guess is that most coaches would support a centralized imposition of standards, as long as the standards are their own. The problem is how we determine what standards are minimums, and which should be left to the marketplace.

The second approach has implications for a number of CEDA practices. National CEDA policies can only be promoted if there is some method of enforcing regulations. There are five ways we can promote these guidelines:

a. The CEDA point system. The point system can influence a number of schools. To eliminate the system might decrease any control the national organization has over participants.

b. The Final Tournament. Like NDT, CEDA can influence other tournaments by altering the rules of the tournament and by placing conditions on eligibility.

c. Statements of principle. Presumably the final tournament committee will develop some standards for conduct and/or expectations for CEDA participants that might influence others.

d. Letters of censure.

e. Recognition of tournaments. This is effectively only if the point system is intact.

To have any control over the activity, the national CEDA organization must have some ways to influence behavior at the local level, otherwise there is no way to ensure that the goals of the organization are realized.

B. The District System. One criticism of a centralized system is that it neglects the needs of the local schools. Any organization tends to emphasize the nationally visible members of that organization. Individuals from small schools or schools located at a distance from national meetings do not have the opportunity to voice their opinions. Schools represented at national meetings are most often the ones interested in the point system or the national tournament, and have the money to travel to these meetings. It is important to note that the majority of schools have no hope of a high national ranking; they have different motivations for participating. The national orientation may cause some to view CEDA simply as an organization designed to produce a national champion, and this focus might detract from other purposes of the activity.

The best way to represent the smaller programs which are not nationally oriented is to develop strong regional organizations. These organizations should represent the views of the smaller, less active programs to the national organization. It is less traveled teams that form the foundation upon which CEDA stands. If the base is lost, travel becomes expensive and more and more schools drop out. It is vital that these schools that travel locally be encouraged to participate.

Each region should have its own organization. The national organization might help by coordinating elections, or by providing limited funds to cover mailing costs for the regional organization. The regional organization might coordinate tournaments in the area, sponsor workshops, and hold meetings at designated local tournaments. Several districts have

been very successful in building up membership through strong local organizations; the national organization should promote, these local efforts. A model constitution, for example, might help the organizing process in some regions.

C. Ethics. Russell Church has argued that one of the highest priorities for CEDA is to develop a formal code of ethics. While CEDA has adopted the AFA code of ethics, this may not be adequate for a number of reasons. First, the AFA code is enforced through the PRC committee of AFA, and it may be wise if CEDA develops its own enforcement. Additionally, CEDA may wish to adopt more stringent standards (or different standards) or to enforce some rules in other ways (loss of points, etc.).

III. Relations with Other Forensic Organizations

Interorganizational relations may play an important role in the future of CEDA. At least two organizations may play a critical role in CEDA's future:

A. NDT. Ten years ago, NDT was viewed by many CEDA coaches as the enemy. I sense that in the past few years this animosity, while still present, has declined in intensity. As CEDA emerges as the largest college debate organization, it can divert more attention to setting priorities for itself instead of simply being anti-NDT. In addition, I think CEDA has forced some modest changes in NDT, and NDT debate is likely to continue to move slowly closer to CEDA in the future. I do think that this animosity must be eliminated. Initially, this is a time when unity is desirable. Debate is beginning to grow across the nation, and a united front on such issues as ethics, research, and tournament coordination will be beneficial for all involved.

In addition, even if one views NDT as evil, its survival is in the interest of CEDA. The erosion of NDT strength resulting in NDT schools

shifting to CEDA could result in an erosion of the unique values of CEDA. Louden and Austin note that both organizations have value; [1] the best course is to work on limited cooperation between the two organizations. As long as there are options for debaters, it is easier to justify restrictions; after all, as long as there are alternative debate forums, restrictions in one organization are less dangerous, since those who oppose controls can participate elsewhere. If there is only one debate association, then restrictions should be minimal in order to permit diversity of viewpoints.

B. High Schools. CEDA has not interacted much with the national high school debate organizations. Since most of the major high school institutes are at NDT-oriented schools, many high school debaters have a skewed view of CEDA. Lincoln-Douglas debate, which shares with CEDA an interest in value topics, has been relatively uninfluenced by CEDA. High school Lincoln-Douglas focuses more on "pure" value topics (Is violence ever justified? Is there a just war?). It might be worth seeking cooperation with these high school programs: topic and format ideas could be shared, students recruited, and workshops held.

V. Improving the Quality of CEDA Debate

In his September 13, 1971 "Statement of Principles," Jack Howe outlined four major objectives for CEDA [2]: 1) to seek a method of restoring a better balance among evidentiary support, sound analysis, and effective delivery in debate; 2) to provide the opportunity for diversifying a student's collegiate debate experience by making available the cross examination format and [other topics]; 3) to try and arouse interest in debate . . . by furnishing an alternative [topic] which may be more timely and interesting; 4) to create a healthy rivalry among debate

squads, as opposed to that between individual teams, by providing sweepstakes awards at the end of the season.

There has been a great deal of discussion in the past ten years about the appropriate goals of CEDA. CEDA is sometimes viewed as the solution to all of the evils of forensics, yet different people have different views of the ideal form of debate. Despite the amount of literature on the problems of CEDA, the number of areas where the quality of the actual debates are held to be inadequate is relatively small: most individuals focus on delivery, unusual cases/arguments, and the use of evidence.

A. Delivery. Many individuals see the issue of delivery as an important one in CEDA. CEDA's formation was partly out of a dissatisfaction by many with the delivery of NDT debaters. In recent years, however, this distinction has been less clear, as CEDA debaters became faster and as NDT coaches became more concerned with the delivery issue (see, for example, the rules of the Intercollegiate Policy Debate Series/American Debate Association).

Part of the problem of delivery concerns two divergent views of the role of delivery in debate. The first view sees delivery as a threshold issue; debaters below a certain threshold of comprehensibility are to be ignored, but, once the threshold is crossed, debaters are only rewarded with points; the actual decision is based solely on the content issues in the round. The exact level of this threshold might vary from judge to judge, and for some judges the threshold might include a large grey area, where the delivery might influence the amount of credence given to an argument. The other camp, supported by Cirlin [3], views delivery as a linear issue, equal in importance to substance. Debate judges would evaluate delivery in all rounds, and a polished speaker should defeat an average speaker with better arguments. The second view would tend to lead

towards a decreased emphasis on the substance of the debate.

B. Unusual Cases. A second area of concern is the unusual case. Many critics view the squirrel case as being undesirable, substituting surprise for clash. In addition, some have extended this criticism to include non-intuitive arguments. Thus teams are to be penalized for arguing growth is bad, or inflation is beneficial. This criticism is not as common as the delivery criticisms, but it does come up frequently.

In evaluating this attack, we need to be cautious in condemning originality. It sometimes is beneficial to view a problem from unique perspectives and to test accepted views. If these arguments are weak, debaters can expose the weakness through analysis, topicality (or counterwarrant) argumentation, and other means.

C. Evidence/Analysis. The nature of evidence in debate has been a concern for many. In the early years of CEDA, teams often took extreme positions, with some thinking that reading evidence in CEDA was unethical, and others adopting the "NDT" view of evidence. My concern with evidence is two fold:

1. CEDA needs to focus on a narrow range of issues. One problem inherent in NDT involved the high entry barriers. The use of evidence should not distinguish CEDA and NDT, but rather the issue of depth versus breadth. NDT requires researching a wide range of issues; ideally CEDA permits the analysis of a narrow topic in greater detail. Ideally, there will be fewer major issues to examine, but these issues will be researched in greater depth. This comparison between CEDA and NDT does not argue that either approach is superior; the CEDA approach does, however, lower entry barriers and makes coaching easier.

2. CEDA needs to develop a philosophy of evidence. This issue is not

unique to CEDA; debaters in general have a poor understanding of the nature of evidence. Debaters need to be able to understand the importance of evaluating the strength of evidence, and to avoid over-reliance on conclusionary evidence.[4] Some have attempted to distinguish between CEDA and NDT by arguing NDT emphasized evidence, while CEDA emphasized reasoning. This distinction is not adequate; reasoning needs to be based upon an understanding of the nature of the world, and that requires research. Nor is there an inherent trade-off between the quantity of evidence read and the quality of the evidence; a team can read lots of high quality evidence, or a few lousy cards. The guidelines for evidence developed for CEDA ideally can be used by all debaters and judges to evaluate evidence.

D. Topics. The debate topic does influence both the participation in debate and the quality of debate. CEDA topics need to be relatively narrow (or at least focus on relatively few major issues). If we ever adopt a broad topic, I think a narrower novice topic might be worth considering.

CEDA has tended to focus on value topics, even though it has in the past used policy topics and a Constitutional Amendment requiring value topics to be debated was rejected. Policy (and even fact) topics should occasionally be debated in CEDA. A variety of topics might provide a wider educational experience for debaters.

It might also be desirable to include parameters with a few CEDA topics. Parameters has been rejected by NDT, partly because past parameters have been poorly worded. But for CEDA, parameters might serve to limit negative options (e.g., "for the purpose of this topic, both teams should assume growth is good"), or to limit the affirmative ("this resolution requires an examination of whether, on balance, the war on poverty is desirable"). Parameters might certainly help focus the debate.

E. The Desire for Standards. One problem with debating value topics is that, unlike policy topics, there is little agreement, either on how to debate value topics, or even what the major approaches to debating value topics should be. Judges often impose idiosyncratic standards on debaters. The publication of the CEDA yearbooks has helped this, but it might be useful to develop a systemic overview for new debaters. I do think that any such guidelines should be merely advisory (except perhaps for novice debaters); our knowledge of value debate is too sketchy to impose a single view on the entire community.

F. Debate Format. One of the initial reasons for forming CEDA was to encourage experimentation with new formats. CEDA initiated the use of cross examination, hoping in part that it might improve the debate practices. It is possible that changes in debate formats might improve the quality of debate.[5] For example, a floating cross-examination period might decrease some undesirable practices. [6] Altering the debate rules to permit the judge to assess time penalties may also address some of the problems with delivery/rudeness.[7] I have also toyed with (but have not worked out the details, nor am I sure I would support the final version) the possibility of developing rules limiting the use of evidence in a round; perhaps a rule saying teams can only read twelve cards per constructive, and four per rebuttal (six for 1AR). This might force teams to be more selective in using evidence. At the same time, unless tied with additional rules (for example, a rule limiting the number of major positions a team could argue), it might encourage mindless presses on evidence. A rule limiting a team to three major advantages/disadvantages, and/or three responses to any position, might force teams to be more selective with their positions. As rules become more complicated, the

activity becomes more complex for both debaters and judges.

G. Ethos. One aspect of debate, often overlooked, is debate's importance in shaping the character of debaters. Debate is a competitive activity, and a student's view of competition is often learned indirectly from the coach and those in the activity. It is important that we stress the positive nature of competition; debaters should learn not only how to think and to be persuasive, but they should also learn how to behave as considerate human beings. A debater who wins every debate round, but treats others rudely, is a failure. Much of our discussion over ethics and the point system reflects the fact that many coaches and debaters have poorly developed conceptions of the nature of competition.

Conclusion

CEDA's growth in the past few years has been remarkable, but that growth has highlighted the fact that CEDA has not yet developed a unified philosophy of what debate should be like. This statement might focus on the nature of argumentation in society, an emphasis on reasoning, yet a recognition that delivery is also important. CEDA should emphasize the positive features of debate, instead of being negative about other organizations.

Notes

[1] Allan D. Loudon and Curtis C. Austin, "CEDA vs. NDT: A Dysfunctional Myth," CEDA Yearbook, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1983), pp. 6-12.

[2] Cited in James E. Tomlinson, "Coaching Philosophy and Current Issues in the Cross Examination Debate Association," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Chicago, 1984, pp. 3-4.

[3] See Alan Cirlin, "Improving the Quality of CEDA Debate through Judging and Evaluation," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Chicago, 1984.

[4] See Walter Ulrich, "The Use and Abuse of Evidence in Debate," Debate Issues, 16 (January, 1983), pp. 10-16.

[5] Ross Smith makes a similar argument in the current Wake Forensic Handbook.

[6] Walter Ulrich, "Vitalizing Cross-Examination: A Proposal," Journal of the American Forensic Association, 18 (Spring, 1982), pp. 265-266.

[7] Walter Ulrich, "The Debate Judge as Referee," CEDA Yearbook, ed. Don Brownlee (Cross Examination Debate Association, 1985) pp. 39-42.